



Outcome Report

Conference on Supporting local actors across the Humanitarian- Development-Peace-nexus 5-6 October 2023 - UN City, Copenhagen

Co-organised and co-hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark, the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)¹

Introduction

There continues to be greater emphasis on the need for locally led action and leadership that can deliver coherent and integrated programming through humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus approaches, including connections with climate change action. Local actors have a better understanding of the context and are better placed to address both shorter and longer-term needs and objectives across the HDP nexus.

In the context of increasingly complex and compounding crises facing the world today, and the slow progress on global commitments in support of local actors, this conference was organized to answer the question: *What can different actors do to create the best possible conditions for locally led action across the HDP nexus?* Specifically, the conference was aimed at setting out a clear common agenda, including concrete, actionable recommendations on: 1) improving coordination and collaboration with specific emphasis on local actor participation and leadership; 2) strengthening local actors' institutional capacities and collective resilience and; 3) maximizing effectiveness of funding streams and identifying opportunities for higher quality nexus funding for local actors.

The conference gathered 122 participants representing various constituencies – local civil society actors, bilateral and multilateral funding partners, and international organizations – working across the HDP nexus (see Annex 1 for full list of participants). The conference was structured around a series of thematic breakout group sessions introduced by lightning talks by local actors to inspire and set the scene for the discussions. The breakout sessions provided a space for active participation and more in-depth discussion among the diverse participants, culminating in a set of recommendations that were synthesized and discussed in a closing plenary session.

Recommendations

While it is impossible to capture the depth and nuance of the breakout group discussions in this Summary Report, additional context and potential approaches are provided for each high-level recommendation that was identified in the closing session of the conference.

1. Increase and improve the quality, accessibility, and flexibility of funding for local actors across the nexus

Local actors consider access to resources and decision-making as a key determinant to how power can be shifted and balanced across the nexus. However, the programmatic, structural, and budgetary silos of funders and international intermediary organizations continue to hamper

¹ This report and all the recommendations contained therein emerged from the conference participants and are not a statement of policy for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark, IFRC, or USAID.



both local leadership and more integrated programming across the nexus. Some options for addressing these challenges could include:

- longer-term or multi-year planning and funding,
- reinforcing good practices for advancing local leadership across all partnership types (i.e., whether through a direct award or a sub-awardee relationship)
- dedicated capacity strengthening funding,
- a mixed grant approach or nexus cooperation fund for local organizations
- locally led country-based pooled funds supporting HDP nexus approaches,
- more funding set aside for core and overhead costs of local organizations,
- simplified reporting requirements,
- supporting locally led design processes, and
- including language in awards about the importance of integrated programming and the interconnectedness of humanitarian, development, and peace issues in that specific context.

Funding through local actor networks, coalitions, or locally led consortia can also improve accessibility and flexibility, as well as foster more systems-based and complexity-aware approaches. In all of the options above, it is important to leverage existing, proven funding mechanisms, rather than initiating new ones from scratch.

2. Engage governments at all levels

Local governments – at all levels, including national and sub-national – are key stakeholders and critical for ensuring the sustainability of locally led programs. They are particularly strategic partners for mobilizing communities, civil society, the private sector, and other local stakeholders, and bringing them together for a more multi-stakeholder approach. Engaging with governments is equally necessary for HDP approaches to avoid creating parallel social protection systems that undermine longer term development goals. Engaging governments through an HDP lens as early as possible – when it is feasible given the local context – can help bolster those local systems rather than creating duplicate or redundant systems. Successful longer-term engagement also has the benefit and potential of balancing out other challenges. Assuming longer-term commitments and deploying strategic coordination between the different spheres of local government is also key in establishing a space for dialogue between other relevant actors. There are various degrees of formality with which funders and other actors can engage governments – whether through informal consultations and coordination or more formalized direct assistance. The nature of engagement will also depend on the degree of alignment between donors, local civil society, and the local government. Engagement should be adjusted in contexts where there is no recognized government or other non-state actors are in control, or where the government is exacerbating humanitarian crises or conflicts. It can also be helpful for funders—or a neutral intermediary—to conduct a conflict analysis or assessment, in consultation with local actors, to map the appropriate actors to engage so that Do No Harm principles are upheld.

3. Reinforce mutual accountability on existing engagements and commitments

Recognizing that many commitments have already been made to advance local leadership and the nexus – such as the Grand Bargain, the Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development, and the Pledge for Change 2030 – this outcome report is a call for new forms of engagement and more concrete efforts that can demonstrate tangible progress towards those commitments. Mutual accountability is a process by which partners agree to be held responsible for the commitments that they have voluntarily made to each other and entails closing both upward and downward feedback loops. Specific actions that can advance this recommendation include:



- creating spaces and opportunities for more direct communication between funders and local actors,
- conducting local partner assessments of the quality of performance of intermediaries,
- establishing joint platforms for collaborative learning and unlearning, and
- funders transparently sharing their action plans for shifting more resources and decision making power to local actors.

4. Harmonize and simplify compliance systems

Local actors have consistently called for funders' and intermediaries' compliance processes to be simpler and more proportional to the volume of funding managed. Shifts in compliance systems may include:

- increased coordination between funders potentially leading to aligning due diligence tools, sometimes referred to as “passporting,”² or
- clarity on what constitutes a “good enough” or “fit-for-purpose” approach for pre-award assessments.

5. Institute a culture shift toward local leadership across the system

Creating the best possible conditions for locally led action across the nexus means shifting the collective mindset and culture to one of equitable partnership and shared accountability and responsibility, working with diverse networks and partners at different levels, and prioritizing long-term partnerships and visions. Specific actions to achieve this can include:

- creating spaces for frank conversations on localization and locally led development and humanitarian assistance, both internally and between different actors in a country or region,
- sharing resources, tools, and examples of effective power shifting approaches, especially those that overcome assumptions about perceived contradictions between humanitarian standards and local leadership,
- (re)defining capacity and capacity strengthening as a process of investment for sustainability and the delivery of more impactful and accountable services,
- addressing salary disparities between local and international organizations, which can make it difficult for local institutions to retain qualified staff, affecting local institutional capacities,
- shifting from standardized to more context-specific processes and approaches,
- increasing meaningful co-creation,
- sharing risks more equitably,
- making coordination and decision making processes in country more inclusive and accessible to local actors, and
- creating more non-project or non-funding-based partnerships and collaborations.

6. Drive internal culture and institutional changes to support local leadership

This broader culture shift across the system must also be internalized and institutionalized across all functional areas of an organization. While some barriers to greater local leadership across the HDP nexus are systemic or shared across funders, many barriers are specific to each actor's

² “Passporting” refers to the creation of a single, shared platform and process that would be used by multiple funders so that local partners would only have to complete and submit documentation for pre-award due diligence once.



operating model and context. Institutionalization of a focus on local leadership will look different in different places, but efforts to support these internal shifts can include:

- creating organizational policies and strategies for advancing local leadership and HDP approaches,
- setting outcome and process targets and transparently tracking and reporting progress towards those targets,
- considering opportunities for changing engagement options on strategic and policy planning,
- analyzing and understanding both drivers for change as well as the consequences thereof, investing in research if needed, and
- understanding institutional dynamics that guide choice and decision-making (i.e., changes in the practices, beliefs, and underlying values that shape behavior and actions).

Internal culture and institutional change require honest and creative conversations about each organization's constraints and targeted behavior change.

7. Transform the role of intermediaries based on genuine added value

Intermediaries³ play an important role in many funding relationships, and sometimes absorb a disproportionate amount of fiduciary and programmatic power (and risk) by default, rather than based on a careful consideration of their added value in a specific context. Often this default is based on deeply entrenched perceptions of what “capacity” is (and what capacities matter) and what capacity strengthening should look like, often assuming that intermediaries should be strengthening the capacity of local actors, rather than taking the form of mutual capacity sharing. Recognizing that local actors have historically been marginalized and under-resourced compared to many intermediaries, especially those from the Global North, new funding arrangements, partnership structures, and forms of dialogue and mutual capacity sharing are needed in order to demonstrate the global community's commitment to truly shifting and sharing power. Efforts to shift power within relationships between intermediaries and local institutions could include reframing accountability for capacity strengthening as a context- or partnership-specific, two-way process to understand changes in how both the local organization and the intermediary play their respective roles.

Three overarching principles guide each of the seven recommendations:

- **Decolonize the aid system and language**, recognizing that the current HDP agenda and narratives are dominated by and rooted in the Global North.
- **Seek to build mutual understanding across actor types and pursue more multi-stakeholder approaches**, acknowledging the diversity of roles and capacities of all the actors working across the HDP nexus, and the complex, interconnected, and often-geopolitical roots of conflict.
- **Adhere to the principle of “nothing about us, without us,”** reaffirming the agency, voice, and leadership of local actors.

³ According to the Grand Bargain, intermediaries are defined as organizations, networks, or mechanisms (such as pooled funds) that act as an intermediary between donors and local organizations through the provision of funding or other support.



Lessons Learned

In the post-conference evaluation, many participants noted that while the variety of constituents was appreciated, there should have been more local actors present and that those local actors should have been involved in planning the event itself. In particular, the absence of representatives from local governments and the local private sector was noted. The conference co-hosts acknowledged this shortcoming and included representatives from local organizations in the preparation of this report and the design and planning of the virtual follow-on event in January 2024. Shortly after the conference, the Movement for Community Led Development, Civicus, and Peace Direct also circulated an [open letter](#) on how to organize convenings on locally led development, which provides helpful recommendations to continuously improve future conversations.

Another challenge was that conference participation skewed slightly towards the humanitarian pillar of the HDP nexus (a challenge that is often highlighted when discussions are taking place on the HDP nexus). This undoubtedly impacted the nature of the conversations in Copenhagen and the final recommendations. To increase the value of convenings on the HDP nexus, it is important to ensure equal participation by development and peace organizations and experts, in addition to humanitarian actors. There are many methods, resources, and lessons learned from each pillar that should be better shared among all actors to further advance localization across the nexus.

Many of the participants expressed that the conference created a space for honest discussions and constructive exchange of different perspectives, especially in the breakout groups. It was challenging, however, to strike the balance between a focus on the HDP nexus and local leadership and ensure the conversation reflected the intersection of both rather than one or the other. In the end, the conversation primarily focused on local leadership, as reflected in the recommendations above. There was also some concern that the balance of time was spent diagnosing problems and barriers with less time spent identifying ways forward. In the end, some participants felt the recommendations were too vague or repetitive of previous commitments and that they lost some of the nuance of the breakout group conversations. It is the hope of the co-hosts that reiterating these recommendations here can help sustain momentum on this admittedly complex agenda.

Next steps

In terms of next steps, all conference participants reconvened virtually in January 2024 to discuss this Summary Report and how they have been putting the recommendations into practice since the conference. The virtual convening was also an opportunity for the participants to discuss how they can continue to advocate for these recommendations in other fora, such as the OECD-DAC, the Grand Bargain 3.0, and other internal and external initiatives.

Annex 1 : [Participants List](#)

Briefing papers

[Background-Note](#)

[Localisation across the nexus presentation](#)

[Innovative Funding Modalities](#)

Report prepared by the Conference Co-hosts Organising Team, February 2023