



SHIFTING MINDS & SETTING THE COURSE

*Looking back and looking forward on the
Dutch Relief Alliance localisation strategic priority*

Peter Heintze, Marieke Gommans & Iana Hilhorst



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More info: www.kuno-platform.nl

Contact: kuno@kuno-platform.nl

Peter Heintze, Marieke Gommans & Iana Hilhorst

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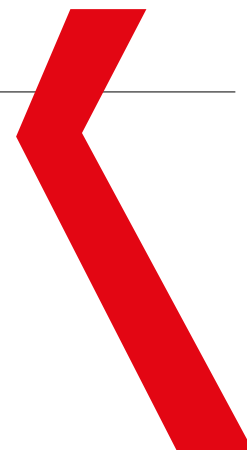
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Introduction

Since the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the role of local actors received renewed attention as an important way to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) included *Localisation* as a key strategic priority in their 2018-2021 policy plan. They aim to 'more effectively support and enable locally led responses' by setting a target in funding to local actors, investing in capacity development, exploring partnerships and supporting the voice of local actors (DRA Strategic plan 2018-2020).

At the request of the DRA Localisation Working Group, KUNO has been conducting localisation scans of proposals and reports of DRAs joint humanitarian responses since 2018, to measure the progress on the localisation priority of the DRA. The DRA formulated clear targets, especially on the direct funding to local actors and investments in capacity development.

6 The DRA is developing a new strategy and will, most likely, uphold localisation as a key priority. To gain a better understanding of how the DRA-priority on localisation contributed to progress on localisation, and to identify possible barriers for further progress on localisation and relevant next steps, KUNO initiated this localisation study. KUNO hopes this study will inspire the DRA and their key stakeholders developing new steps to put local in the heart of humanitarian responses. The main question of the study is: How can the DRA, the consortium partners of the DRA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and the local partners strengthen their efforts for localisation within the context of DRA Joint Responses?

Methodology

This study is based on semi structured interviews with 24 key stakeholders and on previous localisation scans performed by KUNO in 2018, 2019 and 2020. For these interviews KUNO focused on stakeholders from 2019 from the DRA-consortium (at DRA CEO-level, DRA Committee-level, members from the Localisation Working Group and Localisation Advisory Group), from the donor (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from the Humanitarian Aid unit, from Embassy-level and a former humanitarian advisor of the ministry), and key players from several Joint Responses (ensuring input from the local partners and from DRA

members). From the 2019 JRs KUNO selected three different types of responses (in DRC, Nigeria, Syria) and invited representatives of the leading DRA-member and one of its local partners, as well as a cooperating INGO-member in the response, and one of its partners.

Research questions

The main questions that were asked are:

1. How do different actors involved in the partnership between international NGO and local partner of the DRA Joint Response Protracted Crisis of Syria, Nigeria and DRC experience the advancement of localisation in their collaboration?
 - a. How are decisions relevant to the partnerships taken?
 - b. How is the advancement of localisation influenced by factors beyond the partnership, such as risk aversion of donors?
 - c. How is the agenda of training and capacity development established and how does this work out in practice?
 - d. How do stakeholders perceive of the relationship in the partnership and how does this affect the localisation agenda?
2. What was the impact of the strategic approach of localisation of the DRA on the process of localisation?
 - a. What were the goals for localisation for the DRA?
 - b. Were they feasible? Were important aspects missed?

Structure of the report

In the first chapter *Looking Back*, the report gives an overview of how interviewees perceived the impact of the DRA-priority on localisation. In the second – and biggest – chapter *Looking Forward*, the feedback of respondents is categorized under three different levels. First, at a general level, opinions on whether localisation should remain a priority for the DRA, are summarized. In this section the definition of localisation used by DRA, is explained. Second, necessary steps needed for further localisation are addressed at the level of DRA-structures. This will highlight for instance decision making processes. The third section focuses on possible steps at the level of DRA Joint Responses, for instance the quality of funding and capacity building. Finally, in the third chapter, the main recommendations are briefly summarized.

This report presents an overview of the opinions shared by the 24 interviewees (interviewed in 20 sessions). The researchers promised to anonymize the reflections of the interviewees, to ensure all respondents felt confident to share their reflections. Please note that all interviewees spoke on a personal capacity. For an overview of the main results on localisation of the JRs we refer to the previous localisation scans done by KUNO¹. The general conclusion of these localisation scans is that percentages of 'funding as directly as possible' to local partners grew over the years, but also that there is great diversity between the different responses. Annex 1 offers an overview of the quantitative results of the previous scans.

The authors would like to thank Isabelle Desportes, Femke Mulder, the DRA Localisation Advisory Group, the DRA Localisation Working Group, and all the interviewees, for their generous support and time.

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¹) Previous localisation reports of KUNO, drafted at the request of the DRA Localisation Working Group:

- Renate de Waard, Report on localisation in the DRA Joint Response proposals 2018-2021 (KUNO, July 2018).
- Renée van Abswoude, Report on Lead interviews concerning localisation in the DRA Joint Response (KUNO, August 2018).
- Loïs Ausma, An analysis of the Joint Response 2019 protracted crisis proposals (KUNO, June 2019).
- Eliza Snel, Scan of the progress on localisation objectives in the different Joint Responses of the Dutch Relief Alliance in 2018 based on evaluations and narrative reports of the DRA (KUNO, November 2019).
- Marieke Gommans, Localisation scan DRA acute Joint Response budgets 2018-2020 (KUNO, November 2020).



CHAPTER 1: LOOKING BACK

Chapter 1: Looking back

DRA made a difference

All interviewees expressed that the DRA priority on localisation did make a difference. Some examples of the positive impact of making localisation a priority are: better responses, better positioning of the JR partners and better investments in capacity strengthening. Local partners experienced that their input was taken seriously (although some have also indicated that they do not really have a 'say') and the DRA set a standard and inspired other international NGOs.

Local partners often mention that they feel responses were more accurate, because local partners had an influence on decision making processes:

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- “For us, it is in the area of having a voice as a local partner, being able to contribute to the intervention as well, and also in the area of capacity strengthening. The coordination meetings have been very helpful in ensuring that the capacity of local partners is there.” *[Local partner]*
 - “I think it has been good to really listen to the voices of local partners and involve them in decision-making. This has been really beneficial. Before we received requests and sometimes the decisions were not discussed. For instance, we would receive a fund that says you have to work in two or three areas only and in one or two sectors only. However, when we have our own team on the ground to assess needs, we sometimes found that those needs are secondary needs and not really major needs or there are duplications of efforts because many partners are working there whereas other areas are left out. This is where we felt that we cannot influence the decisions to the benefit of the people.” *[Local partner]*

Also, a greater visibility for local partners was mentioned:

- “Working together in the consortium has given us, also as local partner, more visibility and access. So we are able to access government agencies, ministries here in Nigeria, sector groups, thematic sector groups that coordinate the humanitarian response. By the time they see Save the Children, Christian Aid, and Terre Des Hommes, they know it is a strong working force and it is easier for you to get the attention.” *[Local partner]*

Local partners described the DRA-culture of cooperation as positive:

- “Interesting is that the culture of cooperation between organisations is highlighted. This is a good thing. This also reflects at the local level, this culture we like.” *[Local partner]*

And local partners find the DRA-approach unique:

- “The localisation priority is something very unique, which other donors do not have. It needs some improvement, from my opinion, but there is room for development and I think we can do it.” *[Local partner]*

Employees of international NGOs also referred to the benefits of cooperation:

- “In a DRA response, you are really a joint response. You can learn from each other within the JR. You can coordinate better who does what and where. I think it is a very good platform to avoid duplication. And to search for complementarity. It sounds a bit abstract, but because of it the beneficiaries are served better. (...) A beneficiary is really helped. Because sometimes you are working on your own little island and then someone has multiple problems. Beneficiaries can be helped better if NGOs work complementary. And it helps our efficiency in the end, because you complement each other and spend your money better.” *[INGO employee, NL]*

Others pointed at the greater role of local partners in JRs:

- “I can say that there is a change. In the past I would not even know myself as a humanitarian worker talking about funds going directly to local NGOs. And local NGOs being involved and getting 25% or 30% of the funding, them taking control of the humanitarian aid. But we are going there, you can see local NGOs are feeling more comfortable to stick up for themselves.” *[INGO employee, NL]*
- “I think it is an achievement that all Nigeria JR partners will work with local partners in 2021 and that they recognize the importance of it. I think that the way of working in the Nigeria JR in the whole governments is more transparent about the decision-making and that there is more involvement of local partners in that decision-making. And we have a structured, long-term vision for capacity strengthening for local partners.” *[INGO employee, NL]*

Finally, several interviewees indicated the DRA set a new standard:
📍 “In Syria the localisation approach is unique.” *[INGO employee, NL]*
And it did take courage to do so:
📍 “I learned that the CEOs of Dutch humanitarian NGOs are ambitious and dare to go beyond their direct interests for the greater good. Sometimes proceedings might not go as fast as you would like, but I was happy with the discussions that took place. In all these conversations there was always at least one CEO that said: ‘Let’s do it, for these ambitions we need to make it less easy for ourselves.’ They wanted to meet this high standard.”
[DRA representative]



ABBREVIATIONS & TERMS

DRA	: Dutch Relief Alliance
JR	: Joint Response of the DRA
NGO	: non-governmental organisation
MFA	: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the only DRA donor
DRA partners	: consortium partners (the Dutch international NGO ‘member’) of the DRA
Field Coordinator	: Coordinator of DRA-financed activities country where a JT takes place
Lead	: Leading DRA consortium member of a JR; also the employee of the leading DRA consortium member that coordinates the response
Local partners	: Local NGOs, partners of the Dutch international NGO in a DRA JR
Localisation Advisory Group (LAG)	: Advisory group for the DRA, consisting of representatives of local partners (all countries with JR on protracted crises are represented)
Localisation Working Group	: DRA working group on one of the four DRA priorities



CHAPTER 2: LOOKING FORWARD



Chapter 2: Looking forward

- 📍 'Too often we think local partners are not capable. I think we will have to push a bit on this power transfers thing. Ticking the box 25–35% to local NGOs will not do. We need a mind shift'. *[MFA representative]*
- 📍 'We are local, but it's not true that we cannot deliver humanitarian aid. I have been working in humanitarian activities since 1997; I know what I am doing'. *[Local partner]*

This section addresses three levels:

1. The general context: Should the DRA continue to prioritise localisation?
2. The DRA consortium level: What fundamental issues block localisation progress at the consortium level and in relation to the donor?
3. The JR level: What issues block progress on localisation at the JR level?

1. Looking forward: in general

Localisation should remain a DRA priority

The interviewees unanimously indicated that localisation should remain a DRA priority. Most respondents also indicated that new steps can be taken and new aspirations defined for the upcoming DRA strategy (2022–2025). The MFA indicated that it expects the DRA to take new, firm steps towards localisation in its next strategy phase.

Local partners stressed that localisation ensures higher value for humanitarian money:

- 📍 'Especially if there is good capacity building and good monitoring and evaluation systems being put in place, we can ensure there is good quality at the same time. The amount of investment is much less, so there is a higher return on investment. So, we think that it should be kept and enhanced, because this is the right direction, in terms of the impact on beneficiaries and return on investment of the project'. *[Local partner]*

Or they indicated that localisation leads to more effective responses:

- 📍 'For me, even the beneficiaries feel the impact of localisation, because they actually give feedback and this feedback translates into programs that have

been brought up. Internationally I see that the DRA is one donor and agency that not only was interested in localisation, but actually did put more efforts and resources into it'. *[Local partner]*

Furthermore, local partners indicated that investing in localisation is investing in local communities:

- 📍 'It would be a pity to stop here. It has been moving forward in a good way and it should keep going. With time, as happens with most of the countries where crisis hits, the international community leaves the country and then the local community stays. So, if you strengthen local communities today, you can guarantee that in the future the impact will still go on'. *[Local partner]*

International NGO employees stated that international trends require further steps towards localisation:

- 📍 'We did an evaluation in July and did a revision of the strategy. Localisation was top priority. We want to continue with it. If you see how humanitarian work is moving now, the donor is going through the localisation strategy. It is required, for each international NGO if you want to continue your work, you need to work with a local actor.' *[INGO employee, field]*

They also state that these further steps are necessary, even though these steps may eventually make their jobs redundant:

- 📍 'Recently someone said, "We are advocating for something we will regret in the future, once we do not have a job anymore". That is the truth. But I do not have a problem with that. I think eventually international NGOs will play a different role than we play now, and the role of the international NGOs could become less important'. *[INGO employee]*

Another international NGO employee indicated that making localisation a DRA priority would ensure funding and attention to structural changes within the DRA:

- 📍 'High ambitions on localisation ensure we will have the talks within the DRA that are needed. If we do not discuss this structurally, nothing will happen. Furthermore, there will be budget available. Often we have good ideas, but no budget. The mentorship programme is a good example of a project international NGOs might not have a budget for, but the DRA does'. *[INGO employee, NL]*

Yet another employee shared that the localisation efforts are not finalised:

- 📍 'This priority should certainly be continued. There is a lot to win, for example flexible funding'. *[INGO employee, NL]*

This sentiment was affirmed:

- 📍 'I think the localisation priority needs to be strategic and ambitious. And it needs to touch upon different areas as well. How do we support the organisational structures of the local organisation that we work with within the DRA project? How can we contribute to, what are the possibilities for us to contribute to core costs of local partners? How do we ensure that we really engage with those local voices? There are many different opportunities to look at which go beyond those funding percentages'. *[INGO employee, NL]*

The MFA also expects the DRA to show new ambitions towards localisation:

- 📍 'The MFA expects the DRA to be more ambitious on localisation in the new strategy. I do not expect a strategy that only sets a new target for direct funding on 37% in 2022 and 40% in 2023. It has to go beyond that. I think targets for funding found a foundation on which to build further components focused on the quality of partnerships. How will the DRA shape quality partnerships? They need to set goals for that. With a shift in power comes a shift in resources'. *[MFA representative]*

And these new ambitions would require a new perspective:

- 📍 'I look at it from the ministry's point of view. I do think it's important we push a little. On the power shift. Otherwise it will become more of a tick-boxing exercise. Like "We now give 25–35% to local organizations—we've made it". That's not it; there has to be some kind of mind shift'. *[MFA representative]*

All interviewees indicated that localisation should remain a DRA priority

Local actors and impartial and neutral humanitarian aid

Several interviewees touched upon discussions related to the impartiality and neutrality of local partners.

The former ministry representative warned that it could be a challenge to find local actors that can deliver principled aid, especially in complex conflict settings. Examples of settings where delivering impartial and neutral aid by

local actors was nearly impossible include North Iraq and Myanmar.

- 📍 'In 2014 North Iraq suffered a huge refugee and IDP crisis. A Kurdish NGO based in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan was asked by an international NGO to start providing aid to IDPs in Diyala province in 2014. The NGO answered that they had the capacity to do so, but that they wouldn't do it, because they feared that they would not be seen by the majority Arab population as impartial. They feared that they would be regarded as instrument of Kurdish politics to reclaim parts of Diyala and integrate these parts in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq'. *[Ex-MFA]*

Another example relates to aid provision to the Rohingya population in Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2012.

- 📍 'At that time, I worked for an international NGO and we had a long-standing working relationship with local NGOs in Myanmar. We wanted to develop a humanitarian programme in the coastal region of Myanmar, for the Islamic minority (the Rohingya), and we asked our national partners if they were willing to develop a joint programme. The answer of the NGOs was that they saw the humanitarian need to provide aid to the Rohingya communities, but that it would be impossible for them since they would lose all support and credits from their own constituency and from government institutions'. *[Ex-MFA]*

DRA representatives underscored that impartiality is a concern in conflict settings:

- 📍 'In Syria – everywhere – we want to uphold humanitarian principles: impartiality, neutrality, and independence. That is not always easy for international NGOs. But local actors face other challenges: they can be put under pressure in a different, more direct way. This is a point of concern for us'. (...) 'For Syria, several reports indicate that humanitarian space in Syria is shrinking and that humanitarian actors should defend humanitarian principles firmly. If you do not, you will be walked over. You need to be very clear on this. But then you must know yourself what exactly is covered by those humanitarian principles and when you need to speak out. Local actors, but international NGOs as well, need to be very firm on upholding the humanitarian principles in conflict and post-conflict contexts'. *[DRA representative]*

Working with local partners in these highly politicised contexts does bring extra risks, according to these interviewees.

- 📍 'A risk is that local actors underestimate the complexity of the situation (are too optimistic about their ability to be perceived as impartial and neutral), or perhaps do need the funds of a humanitarian project badly and engage in a situation where they cannot uphold the Core Humanitarian Standard. DRA is working in protracted crisis areas with complex conflicts: in these settings it can be complex to work with local NGOs that might not be perceived as neutral and impartial by all stakeholders. This doesn't mean it is impossible, but at least this tension needs to be analysed and discussed. And of course, the same tension also applies for international and multinational actors'. [Ex-MFA]

An MFA representative stressed that upholding humanitarian principles is both highly relevant and a concern for donors:

- 📍 'It has been mentioned many times and research indicates that local actors can improve on delivering principled humanitarian responses. Not that international NGOs and UN agencies always manage to deliver principled aid, but local actors could make steps. They could invest in it. If they would do, it would increase confidence in him'. [MFA representative]

A DRA representative warned about the prejudice amongst some international NGOs that local actors cannot deliver principled, impartial aid:

- 📍 'Interestingly in one of the most conflict-related areas (North West Syria) we work only with local partners. In Yemen, too, we manage to work with local actors and invest in localisation'. [DRA representative]

A recent study commissioned by DRA and other European humanitarian actors shows that local actors in South Sudan and Nigeria are well aware of the humanitarian principles: 'Principles are well known and relevant to local actors; however local actors shared that, like INGOs, they face dilemmas and challenges in applying principles in their context and there is hardly any opportunity to exchange and share experiences on how to contextualise and operationalise

²) Messages on Principles and Partnerships in Conflict Settings. Key messages of the study 'Towards Principled Humanitarian Action in Conflict Contexts. Understanding the Role of Partnerships. Commissioned by Caritas Norway, Danish Church Aid, Dutch Relief Alliance, Kindernothilfe, and Norwegian Church Aid, December 2020).

the principles in practice.' The study furthermore stresses that there is an urgent need for dialogue between international and local humanitarian actors, and that 'international NGOs and their local partners should collectively take responsibility for realising principled delivery of humanitarian aid'.²

The former MFA representative indicated that each DRA response should first analyse the context of the crisis in relation to localisation and to the relevant actors:

- 📍 'What is the humanitarian space of the local actors in this area? What is the strategy of the DRA related to this humanitarian space of local actors? How can DRA strengthen this humanitarian space and the dynamics to support impartial and neutral humanitarian action?' [Ex-MFA]

DRA representatives agree with this view. One DRA representative stated:

- 📍 'You need to analyse the context. And you need to know your partners, including their religious and ethnic affiliation and other elements that could be relevant for delivering principled humanitarian aid'. [DRA representative]

These responses illustrate how context-specific humanitarian responses should be.

Localisation and the Grand Bargain commitments to the participation revolution

Some interviewees linked localisation to the goal of accountability towards affected people and to the participation revolution. Several interviewees, mainly representatives of international NGOs, shared one participant's view that:

- 📍 'localisation is not a goal in itself. It is about getting those in need in the heart of a response'.

Other individuals share an ex-MFA perspective that:


- 📍 'this definition points more towards beneficiary accountability. Localisation is normally defined as humanitarian aid delivered by local actors'. [Ex-MFA]

Opinions on this topic differ within the DRA, however. The DRA Localisation Working Group, for example, did not want to include participation revolution in their tasks because they believe it is different from localisation.

Representatives of local actors closely involved in the Grand Bargain process and signatory to the Grand Bargain notice international NGOs reframing, and

perhaps repositioning, their localisation commitments to fit under the Grand Bargain participation revolution commitments. They are concerned about this, as they fear that international NGOs want to move away from defining localisation as shifting decision-making power towards local actors.

The former MFA representative noted a different issue, discussing the perceived link between localisation commitments and goals related to the participation revolution:



- 24  'The question whether accountability to affected populations is better done by local actors than by international actors, is an interesting issue. I haven't seen many studies on this. After the 2004/2005 tsunami, research was done under affected populations in Aceh, Sri Lanka, and India, and the outcome was mixed. In Aceh international NGOs' accountability towards affected populations was perceived much more positive than accountability of local NGOs and government institutions. In Sri Lanka the responses were rather mixed. And in India (Tamil Nadu) local actors were perceived more positively. The underlying questions are: Are local actors representing the affected populations? Do affected populations feel that their needs are better identified by local actors than by international NGOs?' [Ex MFA]

2. Looking forward: DRA structures


Definition

All respondents indicated that localisation is about gaining greater effectiveness in humanitarian responses and applying recipients' input towards the design and implementation of a response. The main goal of humanitarian action is to offer those in need the best aid possible, and the premise is that national and local actors are best positioned to know what kind of aid is most suitable and needed. It is essential that the international aid organisations become more accountable to affected populations and to local actors. National and local actors should become a key element in designing and implementing humanitarian responses.

Respondents indicated that international NGOs hold rather different opinions as to whether localisation requires more equal partnership or a shift in decision-making power in favour of local and national NGOs. Most interviewees in this study, however, indicated that local and national partners deserve a much stronger position in decision-making processes. Some interviewees stated that international NGOs should support and prepare for a total system overhaul of the international humanitarian infrastructure, allowing local and national actors to take control of humanitarian responses. One respondent said:

- 25  'You can either support this system change, or wait and become irrelevant'. [DRA representative]
-  'The humanitarian system is changing. It is not clear how much time we get to adapt. Look at the Indonesian government during the Sulawesi crises. Or developments around cash. The growing number of humanitarian actors. And I hope local actors will make themselves heard more often. That is difficult because they are financially dependent'. [DRA representative]

Other relevant opinions and suggestions:

- Local partners see direct funding from the MFA to these local partners as the ultimate goal of localisation:
 -  'That is the basic goal, I think. Almost for all local partners I think if you ask them, it is assisting in accessing direct funding'. [Local Partner]

- Local and national governments are local and national actors, just as much as NGOs.
- DRA members and their international families hold rather different positions on the goal of localisation, but these differences have not been made explicit within the DRA.
- DRA members and their international families hold rather different positions on what can be perceived as a local partner. For example, can the national branches of the international NGOs be considered local partners?
- Most DRA consortium partners work within an international family, and DRA funding is often channelled via these families to responses financed by a range of donors (and sometimes to substantially bigger donors). In these international contexts, the conditions the DRA can impose are limited:

📍 'I remember from my years working for an international NGO, we did receive DRA money for a response in Iraq. That was 400,000 euro in a response of 4 million British pounds. And the British branch was in the Lead. Then there are severe limits to the conditions you can make. Or the response manager will say: "Please, keep the money"'. [Ex-MFA]

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- At the same time, the DRA is setting a standard and has opened a discussion about localisation within its member organisations and their families. As one international NGO employee indicated:
- 📍 'For my international NGO we are still learning how to integrate localisation aspects in our activities. I said, "Guys, I'm working in the DRA and we are doing a lot of good things. And we still have good things to learn and reinforce". Now I am going to be localisation focal point, to help others in my organisation'. [INGO employee]
- The current localisation indicators that the DRA uses are interpreted differently. With the current indicators, a partnership between an international NGO and a local partner could still be characterised as subcontracting. There are no indicators related to decision-making power within responses.

HOW THE DRA DEFINED LOCALISATION

For 2018–2020 the DRA chose localisation as one of its four key priorities. The definition and objectives of localisation were not discussed at the DRA CEO level, but delegated to the DRA Localisation Working Group. The DRA's localisation objectives³ focused on quantitative norms based on commitments of the Grand Bargain workstream on localisation ('25% as directly as possible to local and national responders'⁴) and the Start Fund and Start Network (such as institutional capacity strengthening and visibility).

The different opinions on localisation amongst the DRA CEOs have always been visible to the DRA partners, but were not formally discussed as such. During DRA meetings, partners less positive about localisation did not speak out very strongly. It was not easy for them, because the donor was also present. Since the DRA had to consider a broad spectrum of opinions, it focused in the early days on the effectiveness aspects of localisation, which are certainly relevant. Even nowadays, the more power-related aspects of localisation are not well received by all DRA partners.

The most intensely monitored DRA indicators on localisation were quantitative:

- Increased funding as directly as possible to local actors: At least 25 per cent, with the aim to increase this sum to 35 per cent by the year 2021.
- Enhanced capacity strengthening: The DRA will aim for 5-8 per cent of joint response budgets to be related to strengthening the capacity of local actors by 2021.

The phrases 'local actor' and 'as directly as possible' were not defined extensively and remained open for interpretation.

³) DRA Guidance note on localisation: Putting local actors at the heart of humanitarian responses (August 2018)

⁴) Website IASC (consulted on 21 Jan 2021): <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders>

Several DRA representatives indicated that the DRA should be clear about how it perceives localisation and that the definition of localisation should also contain qualitative elements around decision-making processes. This could start by defining what a local actor is and is not:

- 📍 'There comes a time we will have to confront these questions with the DRA CEOs. What is a local NGO? Is CARE Ethiopia local? Is Caritas Venezuela local?' [DRA representative]

An adapted DRA structure?

Several DRA representatives indicated that the DRA's current structure and processes are barriers to achieving further progress towards both local access to the most direct funding and to shared JR decision-making and local leadership. Structures and processes therefore need adjustment if further progress is to be made. DRA representatives concluded:

- 📍 'Within the current DRA model we have reached more or less the max on localisation'. [DRA representatives]

28 DRA interviewees indicated that with the current indicators – focusing on quantitative elements of localisation which are open to various interpretations – no new structural steps can be made. This resonates with remarks shared by representatives of local partners and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A higher percentage of funding 'as directly as possible' to local actors will neither place affected populations more firmly in the heart of a response nor enhance local actors' influence on response design and implementation. Interviewees indicated that structural change would rely on more qualitative indicators related to the nature of the relationship between a DRA partner (international NGO) and a local partner. The bottom line is that this shift would require local actors to gain access to DRA JR decision-making processes. A DRA representative states:

- 📍 'The majority of our humanitarian funding goes directly to our local partners. But when I ask, 'Who designed the projects?', it remains silent. Then I ask, 'Who decides?' Again silence'. [DRA representative]

A more direct financial relationship between a response Lead and the local partner would also be desirable from a localisation perspective.

Three key areas the interviewees mentioned in relation to this adapted DRA structure are:

- I **Decision-making**
- II **Finance**
- III **Risk management**

These three areas are described below at a DRA consortium level. In the next section, 'Looking forward: Implementing Joint Responses', some of these issues will be addressed at a JR level.

I Decision-making

For new localisation efforts, local partners should be given a much stronger position and more influence in the DRA decision-making processes related to humanitarian response design and implementation. This would lead to less subcontracting and more equality in the DRA partnerships.

Local partners said that they help draft budgets by identifying needs in the field, but they do not have a say over how the response is designed.

- 📍 'In the final budget, we get a budget that is not related to the need we see in the field'.

The impression of local partners is that with some additional funding for a response, local partners could substantially improve the response.

- 📍 'When it comes to money, we local actors don't have a real voice to say what we would like to do. They just give us what they want us to do'. [Local partner]
- 📍 'If you want to realise localisation ambitions, you need to adapt the structure of the DRA: direct contracts between Lead and local partner; equality for local partners in decision-making processes. This would require new processes: who decides over a JR and who will get what money? Now it is still top down. Local partners do not have a say in this'. [DRA representative]
- 📍 'The DRA pilots in Somalia and South Sudan are interesting. I cannot see whether the local partners are truly in the lead, but it seems to go well. Here the role of the DRA is building bridges, facilitating dialogue, and

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transferring design and decision-making processes. The DRA will then become a money transfer channel. The DRA “new style” could support the MFA in managing the financial channels and facilitating quality care and South-South learning’. [DRA representative]

To this end, several suggestions were made:

- Engage local partners earlier and more strongly: they should have influence in designing a JR at the stage where priorities are set and funds are divided. Local partners should have a say in the whole process, from start to finish.
- Initiate or support innovative funding mechanisms. The DRA pilot in Somalia, the Somalia Crisis Modifier, was mentioned by several interviewees as an interesting example of how local partners do gain decision-making power over responses. Also, the Somali platform Nexus, an initiative of nine local NGOs and two international NGOs, was mentioned as an inspiring initiative, as were the Start Network Bangladesh and the Start Network Hubs.
- Open membership for local partners to join the DRA (which has been explored recently).

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For most key stakeholders who were interviewed, the current DRA context was most prominent. Responses on innovative funding mechanisms or a reversed DRA structure (e.g. by inviting local NGOs into the DRA consortium) were rather limited. The following pages therefore focus on current DRA structures and how they might adapt.

Interviewees indicated that any further steps the DRA might take towards localisation would first require a common understanding about localisation's goals and, as previously mentioned, an adapted DRA or joint response management structure. Of course, this requires the commitment of the DRA's CEOs.

Other relevant opinions and suggestions:

- Develop qualitative indicators on localisation related to decision-making processes. The Power Awareness Tool (developed by Partos) was mentioned several times as an adequate instrument. Another tool which interviewees viewed favourably is the NEAR localisation performance monitoring framework.

- Not all international NGO ‘families’ of the Dutch DRA consortium partners would support firm co-decision power for local actors or have internal structures that could support this way of working.
- An MFA representative suggested considering the establishment of an extra localisation trajectory. Next to common localisation standards, which are generally high, the DRA or consortium partners could set even higher standards or initiate innovative localisation pilots for partners that are perhaps better positioned for this.

📍 ‘We stimulate that international NGOs work together and share a common narrative. But sometimes the result is a somewhat watered-down version of the original perspectives and opinions. I would welcome a small alliance of three of four partners to step forward, to reach out to the MFA, and indicate what they would like to do extra. Of course, the DRA alliance remains intact, but perhaps frontrunners could start a pilot. This could be interesting. Sometimes you need to acknowledge interests do not coincide. And there where interests clash, something new could emerge. Some new needs to be created’. [MFA representative]

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II Finance

Financial flows within the DRA are complex and multi-layered. Sometimes four different international NGO partners are involved before funds are transferred to a local partner. These four layers include the DRA contract holder, the DRA JR Lead, the DRA JR partner in the Netherlands (international NGO), and the international branch partner of this Dutch DRA member in the receiving country. This multi-layered system leads to extra management costs and increases the multiplicity of partners who might want to have a say in response design, implementation, and management. The multi-layered financial system also seems to contradict the aim of financing local actors ‘as directly as possible’.

Interviewees, especially representatives of the international NGO consortium member of the DRA, plead for a shortened, or preferably direct, funds transfer between the lead and the local partner. This implies a different role for the DRA's international NGO partners that are not the response lead and a different way of allocating funds to them. This would require clarification of the international NGO DRA partners' added value and specification of the costs

related to these activities, at least for the responses where the Dutch DRA members are not themselves implementing partners. (Complementarity and various partner roles within humanitarian responses will be addressed below in the paragraph 'Added value'.) The direct funds transfer would also make the lead accountable.

The current section focuses on the financial structures at a consortium level. The next section, 'Looking Forward – Implementing Joint Responses,' will address issues more related to the quality of funding of local partners.

III Risk management

Risk management and accountability requirements, which have increased over the past years, affect risk aversion and risk transfer in the aid chain from donor to international NGO to local NGO. New anti-terror legislation, such as that related to restrictions on travelling to terrorist-controlled countries, put additional pressure on this situation.

32 All interviewees agree that a different MFA and DRA partner approach to risk management could support further steps towards localisation.

- 📍 'When you want to transfer money straight to local partners, you'll need to adapt the structure. And that is where usually the risks and compliance discussions come in. As long as the donor tells that this brings an unacceptable risk, we cannot do much. And as long as the donor is not willing to co-bear this risk, the international networks/alliances of the DRA partners will not accept to take it for themselves'. *[DRA representative]*
- 📍 'In the MFA policies there is a disconnect between the political will to localize humanitarian aid and the subsidy regulations [subsidie beleidskader], the framework of contracts related to these policies. This creates huge tensions. It leads to risk aversion and risk mitigation following for the nature of the subsidy mechanism'. *[DRA representative]*
- 📍 'It all comes down to accountability and the contracts that hold the international NGO fully responsible. The MFA beholds zero tolerance on accountability, just as on integrity issues. The thing is, you cannot hold me responsible for all that is happening. There is always a chance that things

go wrong. You can hold me responsible to how I react to mistakes of misbehaviour (how I behave towards local actors). If you take localisation seriously, you have to accept the risk that local organisations do not act according to your standards. If you are not able or willing to take this risk, you should not want localisation. Then you should stop this discussion'. *[DRA representative]*

Interviewees believe that the MFA, the DRA, DRA consortium partners (and their international families), and local partners could create a context in which steps towards risk management more supportive of localisation are possible.

Risk management is being discussed within the Dutch MFA. There is a willingness to explore different forms of risk management not only within the Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid of the MFA, but also with the financial and juridical departments.

- 📍 'We know implementing humanitarian aid is not a project at the Veluwe. You have to accept risks to be able to operate in these contexts. As a donor you need to identify these risks, to check who needs to carry what risks'. *[MFA representative]*

At the moment, however, the risks in question are not clear to the MFA. There seems to be a willingness to reconsider 'zero tolerance' policies on a certain category of risks, but only after a thorough risk definition.

For risks related to poor management or underdeveloped organisational capacities, the MFA shows willingness to consider changing its position. Areas in which it might be willing to adjust its stance include the problems of poor ICT and other systems, a lack of enough qualified officers within the organisation, or insufficient funds (related to security measures). The MFA acknowledges that these factors are realities it must deal with. At the same time, the MFA expects a thorough risk assessment process, identifying potential risks, what partners can do to minimise these risks, the support required to deal with these risks responsibly, and the residual risks. The MFA seems to acknowledge that it will need to take a fair share of the responsibility for this residual risk, but international and local/national NGOs should also take responsibility.

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The MFA, however, has a 'red line' beyond which it is not willing to make any concession to the humanitarian principles.

- 📍 'Our humanitarian aid will not finance just one party in a conflict, armed non-state actors or terroristic groups. For this we expect the same from local NGOs as from international NGOs. Studies show a cultural interpretation of these principles. We are unconditional in the humanitarian principles'. *[MFA representative]*
- 📍 'If we hear that during a humanitarian response implemented by local NGOs, that certain groups did not receive aid while other groups did get aid, that is not in line with humanitarian principles. We would not support this'. *[MFA representative]*

In response to the DRA representative's comment that 'If you take localisation seriously, you have to accept the risk that local organisations do not act according to your standards', the former MFA representative replies,

- 📍 'What are the minimum standards DRA expects local actors will be able to be held accountable against? Why would the Dutch government allow that affected populations receive aid from local actors against lower standards than aid from international actors? What would the affected population say? Why can't the Core Humanitarian Standard not be used universally?' *[Ex-MFA]*

Other relevant opinions and suggestions:

- The DRA representatives and an international NGO representative indicated that the donor accountability and reporting requirements have increased substantially in recent years and have grown disproportionately. The accountability requirements are at odds with the wish to localise humanitarian action. Local partners indicate it is 'not really easy' to adhere to international standards.
- An international NGO representative indicates humanitarian reality is challenging:
 - 📍 'It is mostly about monitoring. We have to be able to show what we do exactly, even though that is impossible due to the complexity of the sector'. *[INGO employee]*
- The MFA stresses that for spending taxpayers' money, effectiveness and legality are the priorities. This requires transparency and openness.

International NGOs have a responsibility to show how they deal with risks, to report risk-related issues at an early stage, to show how they manage an issue at the first suspicion of a problem, and to demonstrate how they prevent the issue from arising again. There is also an important role for the local partner. Risk assessments and mitigation strategies could be created and implemented with the local partner, rather than the international NGOs imposing these roles on the local partner.

- The DRA has several options for dealing with residual risk. For instance, it can create a contingency fund, seek insurance (e.g. via Atradius), or find a reasonable 'split' between the MFA and the DRA.
 - Localisation requires local actors to take their responsibility as well.
 - 📍 'If we talk about a power shift, a stronger position for local actors, they need to take responsibility. They need to be concerned about issues that are relevant for the donors, on a European level, just as our international NGO partners are. Local actors need to underline the humanitarian principles. And we want information from them: which interventions did work, and which did not work'. *[MFA representatives]*
- Several local actors have mentioned this responsibility.

Added values: roles for local/national actors, international NGOs, and the DRA

Several interviewees stressed that it is important for the DRA to develop a perspective on the added value of the DRA, its members, and its international and local partners, particularly in the context of the localisation priority.

- 📍 'Localisation definitely must remain a DRA priority. What still is missing in the current (preliminary) version of the strategy is reflection on what localisation means for the role of international NGOs and the DRA. On what components could the DRA add value – also in the future – when you localise more? What is the identity of the DRA in 10 years? How will the DRA design quality partnership?' *[MFA representative]*
- 📍 'The added value of the Dutch expert is no longer at a technical level, but at the level of international advocacy. The technical expertise is over there. If you do not embrace that, you will be kicked out. Literally. (...) Quite rightfully, the Indonesian government said after the Sulawesi disaster, 'We can handle this ourselves'. *[DRA representative]*

In reaction to this remark, the former MFA representative states that:

- 📍 'In the end the affected populations in Sulawesi should determine if the Indonesian government really was able to handle the emergency. The fact that the government called for help of ASEAN (and not the EU or the UN) to assist points to another development: the role of regional actors at the cost of international and supranational (UN)'. *[Ex-MFA]*

Interviewees indicate that it is important to seek complementarity. Global trends show that national and local actors are gaining a stronger role in designing and implementing humanitarian responses – the Indonesian government's position during the Sulawesi response is a clear example – and local actors indicate they are ready for it. At the same time, all interviewees see value for the DRA and DRA partners, even as local actors take a bigger role in Joint Responses.

To get some idea of the unique value different actors could add, we summarise the various roles and activities within a DRA response as described by the interviewees (this is not a comprehensive list).

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Added value of the DRA Consortium, mentioned by interviewees:

- Managing and coordinating humanitarian responses:
 - 📍 'MFA does not have these capacities'. *[Ex-MFA and MFA representatives]*
- A platform for dialogue, learning, and coordination.
- Advocacy on the national and global level:
 - 📍 'Working together as a consortium has given us more visibility and access, also towards national government'. *[Local Partner]*
 - 📍 'The DRA could set an example. Furthermore, the DRA could push the UN and local governments: why are there only international NGOs and no local NGOs at the tables?' *[Ex-MFA and MFA representatives]*
- A single visible Dutch actor. The DRA is almost unique in this regard.
 - 📍 'When DRA presents itself as a group of 15 international NGOs, they stand really stronger'. *[MFA representative]*
- Stimulating innovations – not only technical innovations, but also systemic innovations with more direct funding of local actors (the Somalia pilot, for instance).

- Capacity strengthening: many interviewees from the entire spectrum (local partners, international NGO partners, DRA representatives, and MFA representatives) made a strong case for a greater focus on strengthening local partners at an organisational level.
- Facilitating South-South learning.
- Facilitating local actors' access to donors.
- Long-term support for the development of local/national infrastructures, in which local actors prepare to manage humanitarian responses locally. This also involves capacity strengthening and preparedness.
- And, of course, secure funding for humanitarian responses.

Added value mentioned for the partners of the DRA (Dutch branches of international NGOs, the consortium partners):

- Fundraising.
- Scouting and selecting relevant local actors for humanitarian responses.
- Awareness-raising with citizens and policy makers.
- Advocacy, together with local actors:
 - 📍 'Scan and scout relevant local actors and help them. Give them the exposure – on the shoulders of their international partners'. *[DRA Representative]*
- Co-designing humanitarian responses.
- The ability to scale up on very short notice.
 - 📍 'Only large, often international, NGOs can afford to keep large reserves of emergency capacities: assets, experts, procedures, values, money. For smaller, often national or local, actors, it is a challenge to uphold these reserves'. *[Ex MFA]*

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Added value of local partners as mentioned by interviewees:

- Co-designing humanitarian responses: local actors know the context and the needs of people suffering a crisis.
- Implementing responses.
- Access in areas where international NGOs have no access.
- Advocacy and awareness-raising.

Some potential activities for local partners were not mentioned in the interviews, including fundraising or managing and coordinating a response. Within the context of localisation, these potential activities could be explored.

If the DRA were to adapt its structure to ensure more direct funding of local partners, this could mean that only one DRA consortium member would be responsible for managing the response. With the current structures and regulations, this adaptation could mean that other consortium members would need to accept a smaller role, unless the DRA could clarify other roles for consortium members within a JR. Respondents suggested that potential roles for the international consortium partners within a DRA JR, above and beyond managing a humanitarian response, include:

- Scouting and selecting relevant local actors for humanitarian responses.
- Learning: facilitating South-South learning; coaching and capacity strengthening of local partners (focusing on organisational capacities).
- Advocacy on a national and global level and ensuring that local actors do get a platform, both at a national level and in humanitarian discussions at an international level.

In addition to these humanitarian actors that are part of the DRA structure (the DRA consortium, its members, and the local DRA partners), other actors are also relevant. These include multilateral, international, and regional organisations, national and local governments, civil society organisations, and others.

Based on the interviews, we conclude that further steps towards localisation require a more shared vision of the DRA regarding the consortium's goals. If the DRA manages to create a new and ambitious common ground, it could generate more impact within the DRA and beyond.

The next chapter focuses on the implementation of humanitarian responses. It shows that localisation is context specific – there is certainly no ‘one size fits all’ – and addresses the quality of funding, capacity strengthening, advocacy, and partnerships.

3. Looking forward: implementing Joint Responses

The DRA identified five objectives of localisation in the *DRA Guidance Note on Localisation* (2018): increased funding to local actors, more efficient funding, enhanced capacity strengthening, amplifying local voices, and partnerships with local actors in conflict settings.⁵ The increased funding to local actors was briefly discussed in the previous chapter. This appears to be a problematic objective, because consortium members use different definitions of a local partner. Furthermore, several interviewees suggested that the nature of the partnership between international NGOs and local partners (including the ways local partners are involved in decision-making processes) might be more relevant indicators for localisation than the percentage of funds that is transferred to local partners ‘as directly as possible’.

This section describes the feedback related to localisation efforts at a JR level, in four paragraphs:

- The quality of funding
- Capacity strengthening
- Visibility and advocacy
- Partnerships and decision-making

The quality of funding

Interviewees raised the issues of the recovery of support costs, short-term contracts, and risk management.

Support costs

The lack of budget for local partners' support costs in a JR is a major issue for the local partners. All other stakeholders (DRA, INGOs, donor) recognise this issue. Because both the international NGO and the local partner have overhead costs, these costs must be paid for twice. This can have two effects: either a relatively large part of the localisation budget is spent on overhead costs, or the budget given to local partners does not cover all of the overhead costs they incur. The latter situation occurs even when local partners indicate that specific costs should be covered by this budget.

⁵) DRA Guidance note on localisation: Putting local actors at the heart of humanitarian responses (August 2018), page 3.

📍 'We don't have insurance. We get money for activities, and they give us an amount for administration costs [...] which don't really cover the costs. It's a support for the office, but it cannot even pay my salary. It is a small amount just to support me and the office'. *[Local partner]*

Local partners in DRC pointed out that there were no support costs allocated in the budget during the first year of the JR. When they mentioned in the planning workshop that they could not implement their planned activities if they were not given any money for overhead expenses, support costs were allocated into the budget. This also included costs for insurance. In other JRs the insurance costs were not covered by the amount of money local organisations received from the DRA.

In the DRC JR, safety and security expenses can now be claimed as indirect cost recovery (ICR) and are included as a sort of lump sum in the proposal to their international NGO partner. Local partners appreciate this.

42 📍 'Local NGOs need funding to pay staff: a security officer, a financial officer. It is important not only to finance project activities, but also organisational costs of local NGOs. That is still an issue for the DRA: sharing the Indirect Cost Recovery with their local partners'. *[MFA representative]*

Short-term contracts, longer-term responses

Another funding-related issue is the short length of the JR contracts.

📍 'We asked, could we not have a three-year MoU? But for now, they said, it is annual renewal'. *[Local partner]*

Local partners indicate that this causes them unnecessary insecurity. The DRA holds a multi-year contract with the MFA, and within the DRA multi-year contracts with local partners should be possible. Furthermore, the DRA expects a longer-term presence in some protracted crises. Longer-term funding of local actors certainly seems like a possible way to strengthen local partners and could also strengthen local leadership.

Financial risk and financial management capacities

Currently, DRA partners often carry the financial risks, because local partners do not have the reserves to cover for possible mistakes. In some cases, local

partners do bear the financial risks with the money that is transferred into their account. They are responsible for reporting any possible fraud but will be supported by their international NGO partner in financial safeguarding. In other cases, local partners bear full responsibility – and they take pride in this:

📍 'We also have to be responsible to other donors. When I take money from the pooled fund mechanism, I am also 100% responsible. Why would this be different with an international NGO partner? Am I transferring risk to this international NGO partner? No, I need to do it well so that the international NGO partner is also convinced of partnering with us'. *[Local partner]*

International NGO representatives and local partners value training or mentorship programmes to strengthen financial capacities and to bring financial management up to the standards of the international NGOs. One international NGO employee also emphasised the importance of giving local partners a good financial foundation, since as soon as the partnership ends, the local organisation will most likely enter into a partnership with another international NGO. One local partner (a large NGO from Syria) stated that her organisation did meet high due-diligence standards and that each project was audited by a renowned independent accountancy bureau:

📍 'It is not really easy to be established or well established to adhere to international standards. But the more you do it – and this is my advice to other local NGOs – the more they actually build themselves up internally, the better chance they have to prove themselves credible on the ground'. *[Local partner]*

Security risk

An important issue interviewees addressed relates to security risk, or, more precisely, to financing the costs for mitigating these risks. Managing security risk is usually the local partner's responsibility. DRA partners will sometimes organise security trainings as a form of capacity strengthening and check if the local partner has a security plan. Both local partners and international NGO employees recognise that the security tolerance of local NGOs is higher than it is for international NGOs. While this has advantages for local partner access, accompanying risks need to be recognised:

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- 📍 ‘Even though in areas where security is threatened we don’t have any mitigation for us, knowing we go to a “more deeper” field, the risk will be higher. The security tolerance is not as high [for international NGOs], so they might not be able to go where we can go’. *[Local partner]*

An employee of an international NGO pointed to inequalities resulting from the different security standards local and international NGOs can uphold:

- 📍 ‘Security is primarily the responsibility of local organisations themselves, so there is inequality. If I go to Nigeria, everything will be managed well by my international NGO. For the local partner staff, because it is a different organisation, the security conditions of the local NGO apply. We make sure they have a security plan, but basically they have to manage it themselves. They are not under contract with us, but are our implementing partner. The people have a contract with the local NGO, so they are responsible for the security’. *[INGO partner, NL]*

The issue of managing financial and other risk should be discussed in the early stages of the partnership. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to link support costs to financial and security management, and security could certainly be part of a capacity strengthening trajectory.

Capacity strengthening

Capacity strengthening can be a localisation issue in several ways. Almost all interviewees underscored that capacity strengthening can be of great and strategic value, but it seems hard to do it right or to find time within a humanitarian response for any capacity strengthening at all:

- 📍 ‘You see, within JRs, implementing the activities is priority; capacity building is one of the first activities that fall’. *[DRA representative]*

INGOs and local partners can also hold rather different opinions about the right way to do capacity strengthening. Interviewees furthermore suggested that the topics of building institutional capacities and/or developing better preparedness for humanitarian crises seem to be neglected or undervalued.

Deciding upon the capacity-strengthening plan

Within the DRA JRs there is a firm budget for capacity strengthening (the DRA target was five to eight per cent of the JR budget⁶). This budget falls within the joint JR budget; local partners usually draft their own capacity-strengthening

plan, and the DRA partner can help choose priorities. The final decision on how the budget is spent lies with the JR Lead or DRA consortium partner. Several local partners expressed frustration and indicated that the priorities were not right:

- 📍 ‘Sometimes we don’t do what we want. We feel the capacity strengthening might not be very impactful’. *[Local partner]*

One international NGO employee noted the lack of flexibility in the capacity strengthening budget.

- 📍 ‘When my local partner indicates they do not want additional trainings because they already did quite some training, and they would rather use the money for food aid, then I must say “not possible”. How does this relate to localisation and local ownership of a response?’ *[INGO employee, NL]*

Another example of this inflexibility involves a local partner that wanted to hire someone to help with their fundraising as a form of capacity strengthening, but this was not possible due to budget constraints. Another local partner felt that if they wanted to strengthen the capacity of their entire organisation, they would need to do it themselves:

- 📍 ‘In the JR the focus is on capacity building that relates to the project, which is quite narrow. For us, if we want to do this capacity building at all levels across our organisation, we need to do it ourselves’. *[Local partner]*

Both the support with fundraising and the institutional capacity will be discussed below.

Some local partners mainly need assets. This is especially true for partners who believe their organisation does not need any more trainings. Their capacity strengthening plan involved buying assets to improve their work in the field (e.g. buying a motorcycle, buying a computer to analyse data, buying office supplies and furniture).

Of course, the need for capacity strengthening is highly context-specific. As an MFA representative indicated:

- 📍 ‘Not all local NGOs do need to strengthen their capacity. In Somalia there are five to six local NGOs that operate like international NGOs. They have

⁶) DRA Guidance note on localisation: Putting local actors at the heart of humanitarian responses (August 2018), page 3.

access to funds and have strong capacities and a lot of expertise'.
[MFA representative]

Training versus organisational support and organisational development

Training is mentioned as the main method of capacity strengthening, but not necessarily as the best method.

- 📍 'Usually within the DRA, we do a training. I have said "we should do less trainings". But [within the context of the DRA], capacity building is training'.
[INGO partner, NL]

Local partners also feel there are too many trainings and they might not be helpful in the long-term.

Several interviewees mentioned that the trainings should have some follow-up by either providing assessments or by conducting a follow-up meeting to see how lessons from the previous trainings have been implemented.

- 📍 'Local partners request a next phase: "What is the next phase of the training? The follow-up, the assessment, how to put the training into effect?" That kind of stuff'. *[INGO employee, field]*

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In some JRs, the international NGOs provide a broader programme to support both field staff and field management. The organisational support is facilitated by an international NGO employee or an external specialist. Examples include support for cash-based programming, HR, and gender and disability inclusion. Local partners greatly appreciate these types of programmes as long as they meet their stated needs, rather than being determined by the international NGO. Under these preconditions, the interviewees felt that this form of capacity strengthening has more impact on institutional capacity than do trainings.

Fundraising help

Some local partners indicated that they would like to receive fundraising support. This is often seen as a form of institutional capacity strengthening, done with the help of a mentor or with support from the international NGO. In the Nigeria JR, DRA partners have helped the local NGOs access funding from the Nigeria Pooled Fund by setting up meetings with the fund's managers and by supporting the bureaucratic process.

- 📍 'What my predecessor did in 2018: two local partners who wanted and had the capacity and level of expertise to receive money from the Nigeria Humanitarian Pooled Fund, they organised a meeting with the people from the pooled fund to find out why they did not receive any money, because they never got through the selection process. Because they did that, they were able to be accredited. This was mainly a long bureaucratic process, but by organising the meetings it eventually worked out. They can now directly claim money from the pooled fund'. *[INGO employee, NL]*

In the other JRs, local partners also stated that they would like to receive some kind of support in raising funds but had not received this support.

Institutional capacity strengthening

Several interviewees have expressed the need for institutional capacity strengthening:

- 📍 'I think that to be strategic and ambitious, the localisation aspect of the DRA strategy needs to touch on different areas as well. And then I'm also thinking about how to support organisational structures of local partners'.
[INGO employees, NL and field]

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The ideal picture would be that when a JR ends, the local partner has systems and procedures in place to get their own financing and to prolong the response on their own.

At the same time, interviewees indicated that institutional capacity strengthening appears to be difficult. It is hard to find money for it, and it is not an easy job.

- 📍 'Doing capacity strengthening seriously, developing a good vision on it, is a huge challenge. Often it is reduced to trainings and workshops for individuals. But that is only part of it. Training individuals alone does not help much if these people cannot work in an organisation that has a good structure — capable management, financial systems, a backup fund to rely upon in case a disaster occurs and money is needed fast, stocks (e.g. tents). These are all elements of capacity. If you only train individuals, it is wasted money. Building institutions is a long-time issue'. *[Ex-MFA]*

- 📍 'I get pain in the stomach now you mention the importance of institutional capacity building and preparedness. I plead for this within the DRA:

trainings are important, but you should also invest in organisational development. That takes time, it requires a vision, you have to organise it. Multi-year. This underlines the importance of multi-year contracts with local partners'. *[DRA representative]*

The good news, however, is that funds for organisational and institutional capacity strengthening are available, as are good practices.

📍 'In "donorland" it is hard to find money to invest in institutional capacity. It is not sexy. The humanitarian policy of Minister Kaag, however, did reserve money for preparedness. There is a budget line: 4.5 million euros'. *[Ex-MFA]*

It seems a missed opportunity, however, that the DRA did not spend the budget it reserved for capacity strengthening. One good practice mentioned in the interviews is the Humanitarian Organisational Capacity Assessment Methodology (HUCAM).

📍 'A model for a cooperative process to analyse weaknesses and strengths related to humanitarian values relayed to the processes needed in an organisation'. *[Ex-MFA]*

48 Another tool is Humanitarian Country Capacity Analysis Methodology (HUCOCA). Both HUCAM and HUCOCA were commissioned by Oxfam Novib.

Many other international NGOs have similar tools.

📍 'Local DRA partners did ask whether international NGOs could not harmonise these tools, but each international NGO sticks to their own tool'. *[DRA Representative]*

Preparedness and strengthening a humanitarian infrastructure

Building institutional capacities, and perhaps even strengthening local and national infrastructures to support humanitarian responses, are fundamental to strengthening local leadership in JRs. Perhaps these are not 'hard core' humanitarian activities, but they are highly relevant for humanitarian action and closely related to the Grand Bargain Nexus initiative.

📍 'Equal partnerships remain problematic as long as local actors in the Global South depend on Northern funding. A study on the situation in Mozambique in 2019 shows that local NGOs depend for 93% on foreign funding. The 7% domestic funding comes mainly from churches. According to Mozambique law 1% of the government budget should be invested in

disaster-management capacity: this target is not met at all. (...) According to the humanitarian principles, governments are responsible for the protection of their citizens, should protect them for disasters and prevent disasters. Local actors are responsible as well. This responsibility is neglected at a large scale'. *[Ex-MFA]*

Developing an independent local infrastructure, including local or national funding to support this humanitarian base, could be a firm impulse for localisation.

At the same time, the reality is that DRA responses are in essence short-term projects, and the DRA's international NGO members depend on project-based financial support. Progress on multi-year financial support within the humanitarian sector is limited, despite the Grand Bargain commitments. Additionally, despite the fact that the DRA has the budget for capacity strengthening within the JRs, it appears to be difficult to invest this budget properly. Organisational development and institutional capacity strengthening remain particularly challenging. In this context, developing humanitarian infrastructures (preparedness) is not likely to happen, even though these infrastructures could be fundamental towards making progress on the localisation agenda. In collaboration with local partners, DRA could address this issue with the donors by developing a strategy to confront donors about this shortcoming.

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Visibility and advocacy


Local partners see room for improvement regarding their visibility within DRA JRs. Only one local partner felt that they were visible within the DRA, since their local international NGO partner used their logo on the reports. Several other local partners indicated that they did not know whether they were mentioned in their international NGO partner's reports at all. They did think that this acknowledgement would be important.

📍 'Sometimes I have been thinking and I am curious to know if the reporting of the programmes we do, if we are even mentioned as the partners who are doing it. We don't see the final reporting'. *[Local partner]*


This lack of visibility can be clearly seen on the DRA website – none of the local JR partners are mentioned there.

One local partner noted that when one donor came to visit the project, all visibility was placed on the international NGO partner. The visitors did not hear about what the local partners were doing in the JR. These mechanisms also became apparent during UN coordination meetings. In one instance, to save space on an overview matrix of local humanitarian response, the international NGO was mentioned but the local implementing partner was not. On the other hand, one local partner described the good practice by which the DRA ensured visibility for local partners in the cluster meetings with the UN and other organisations.

Several local partners stated that they would welcome a greater role for themselves, engaging advocacy on international, national, or JR levels. Only two local partners said they had such an opportunity. One local partner engaged with the other local JR partners to create a working group that would collectively determine their needs as local partners. Interviewees also felt that through the consortium they were able to access government agencies and others:


- 50  'This way we are able to access government agencies, ministries here in Nigeria, sector groups, thematic sector groups that coordinate the humanitarian response. By the time they see Save the Children, Christian Aid, and Terre Des Hommes, they know it is a strong working force and it is easier for you to get the attention'. [Local partner]

The other local partner engaged in advocacy in Geneva (at a donor conference), in Brussels (at the European institutions), and in several European capitals (with members of Parliament and Ministries of Foreign Affairs).

-  'These are opportunities that are both rare and very valuable for my NGO. To be able to discuss the context of our needs directly with members of parliaments'. [Local partner]

Partnerships and decision-making (at JR level)

As mentioned in the above section about DRA structures, local partners feel that they can influence the decision-making process but are aware that the DRA partners do make the final decisions.

-  'When it comes to money, then you feel like we as local actors don't have a real voice to say what we would like to. So, they just give us what they want us to do'. [Local partner]


Local partners can share input during the planning workshops. They feel like they have a voice regarding the local needs and the sectors on which the JR should focus. In the three JRs, local partners were either directly involved or were represented by a spokesperson, who was employed by one of the local JR partners. The local partners do mention that the DRA partners make the final decision about themes of focus and activities, and that the local partners then execute the activities. Some local partners feel that the international NGOs impose projects on them without adequately considering local input.

One good practice that came up in the interviews relates to the DRC JR (2020). The local partners were involved in the choice of joint activities and had a say in the localisation strategy by being able to vote. Furthermore, COVID-19 seems to have affected the amount of autonomy local partners have. In Nigeria, for example, the 2021 JR implementation was planned exclusively by local partners. In Syria, the partners had less input in the planning workshop, because it was conducted online and local partner participation was much less.

With regard to decision-making, most international NGO employees who were interviewed stated that giving local partners decision-making power is a goal of localisation. They believe that local partners could have a stronger say in the designing phase of a JR, including determining budgets.

Partnerships

Most interviewees say they are happy with the current partnerships within the DRA, especially when comparing DRA partnerships with other relationships local actors have with international NGOs. There does appear to be room for improvement, however. Examples they mentioned include the language barriers with English-speaking organisations in French-speaking countries, and involving local partners in discussions on financing (other than capacity strengthening).

-  'Our international DRA partner operates mostly in English. There are interpreters in the capacity buildings. More and more we communicate directly in French. That is important, because many of us do not speak English so well. Myself I understand it, can read it, but sometimes it is more difficult'. [Local partner]

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Interviewees stressed that the local partner's work should be recognised and that the local partner is not simply the implementing partner or subcontractor.

📍 'I think the equality is important. You are never totally equal because you are a donor, but that [local partner] has the room for making their own decisions. I hope they feel the same'. [INGO partner, NL]

This does, however, strongly relate to personal relationships and the individual competencies of DRA officers on key positions within a response.

📍 'It depends on the people. When you get a manager that understands what is localisation, they are the ones promoting localisation. And when you get a manager that for him localisation is not good, he will not be involved and they don't give you anything'. [Local partner]

One interviewee shared the example of a Field Coordinator who spoke out on behalf of the local partners, ensured access to national coordination meetings or pooled fund mechanisms, and created an atmosphere of equal partnership. The local partners highly value this, as do other international NGOs. This was a clear example of how DRA localisation efforts do inspire officers of other international NGOs. A quite different example related to a former Field Coordinator who seemed to have treated local partners as sub-contractors (or perhaps even less):

📍 'Now I think the table has turned. But before the new Field Coordinator came in, I use the word master-slave relationship. (...) There are persons, e.g. our [former] field coordinator, who feel the international NGO is up and the local partner is down: just giving the instruction and expecting the local partner to follow'. [Local partner]

What sets the DRA JRs apart from other humanitarian projects is the idea of collaboration. Not all humanitarian officers have equal competencies on partnership management and collaboration, however. If the DRA upholds collaboration and localisation as priorities, it could consider investing in these competencies for the officers in key positions (Field Coordinators and Leads), as necessary, via partnership coaching or partnership mentoring.

Feedback and accountability

All interviewees expressed that they were able to freely share feedback with their partner. Local partners receive feedback from international NGOs on how

they can improve their work, and they are able to give feedback on the JR and on the DRA through the LAG. International NGOs receive feedback from local partners on programming planning and content or on the partnership itself. Some JRs hold a joint feedback meeting, which gives all partners an opportunity to discuss how the JR is going, give each other feedback, ask questions, and clear the air. However, several local partners mentioned that they were not able to give feedback on budget-related decisions.

Both the local partner and the international NGO partner hold each other accountable. They ensure systems are in place that allow local partners to complete the activities, and the local partners make sure that the international NGOs hold up their end of the bargain (e.g. by paying funds on time).

A context-specific localisation plan

The first general observation described in this report was that further steps towards localisation would require more of a shared vision about the DRA's localisation goal. Another general observation that came to light in the interviews is that localisation is context-specific. Each response would require its own localisation approach. Drafting a localisation plan for each JR seems to offer added value. The plan should include a mapping of relevant stakeholders, their specific capacities, and the humanitarian infrastructure they can rely on. Perhaps a good starting point for this localisation plan, as well as for each JR, might be 'Why not locally led?'

To do this, the humanitarian context of each response should be thoroughly considered, taking these questions into account:

- What is the humanitarian space of local actors?
- How can the DRA support impartial and neutral humanitarian action?
- Which local actors will the DRA choose to work with?
- What are their capacities (including values and governance structures)?
- How do the local actors relate to all other stakeholders (e.g. affected populations, other civil society organisations, local and national governments)?
- How does the response relate to international and multilateral activities?

This localisation vision should look at the complementarity of the different actors on all the required levels.



CHAPTER 3: MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS



Chapter 3: Main recommendations

Based on the interviews, we recommend the following.

For the DRA

Share decision-making power with local actors throughout the JR process, from designing a response to evaluation. The DRA's structures and procedures therefore need to be adapted. To this end, a **common vision** on localisation is needed, as are **qualitative localisation indicators** that clarify decision-making processes. Tools to value partnerships (such as the Power Awareness Tool of Partos or the localisation performance monitoring framework of NEAR) could be helpful.

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An adapted DRA structure could lead to a new form of financial management within the DRA, with direct financial relations between Lead and local partners. This should not mean that other consortium partners are left without DRA funding. Define and value specific roles and tasks for international NGOs that are not in the lead.

Each JR should draft a context-specific **localisation plan**. Key elements could include a mapping of relevant stakeholders, their specific capacities, and the existing humanitarian infrastructure. Other relevant elements related to localisation are decision-making processes, relationship management, and institutional capacity strengthening. A good starting point for this localisation plan, as well as for each JR, might be 'Why not locally led?'

Invest in **organisational capacities** of local actors and perhaps even in humanitarian managing structures (preparedness). Independent national or local humanitarian infrastructures and strong institutional capacities at a local level (including independent fundraising mechanisms) are important drivers for local leadership.

Building institutional capacities, and perhaps even strengthening local and national infrastructures to support humanitarian responses, are fundamental

elements to strengthening local leadership in responses. However, the current humanitarian system is not conducive to developing better **preparedness**. Together with local partners, the DRA could develop a strategy to address this issue with donors.

For local partners

Take the lead in developing organisational and institutional capacity, and develop stronger independent humanitarian infrastructures. As long as local partners are fully dependent on international donors, more fully equal partnerships remain a challenge. Local partners should also dare to take the initiative in their partnerships, clearly communicating what they want and need. A precondition for this is naturally a good working relationship with the international partner – a partnership in which local partners can speak out without risking the partnership's termination.

For MFA and DRA

The MFA's current risk management, as established in subsidy regulations with the DRA, blocks substantial DRA localisation steps. The MFA should acknowledge that locally led humanitarian responses do come with risks that international NGOs cannot be held accountable for. MFAs should make risk management 'localisation-proof'. We also recommend that the DRA share a risk definition with the MFA that identifies these risks and shows how the DRA minimises these risks. This risk definition should indicate the support is needed to deal with these risks in a responsible way and should identify the residual risk.

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Annex: Overview of the main results of the quantitative local targets set by the DRA

Figure 1 - 12: Numbers on localisation DRA JRs on protracted crises

Budget to local partners: Percentage of the budget that was transferred ‘as directly as possible’ to local partners to implement a Joint Response.

Capacity strengthening: Percentage of the budget that was spent on capacity strengthening of local partners.

Protracted crises 2018	Proposal	Spent
Budget to local partners		
Afghanistan	45,56%	46,61%
CAR	2,14%	1,82%
Iraq	21,24%	21,20%
Nigeria	20,16%	18,75%
South Sudan	11,87%	11,57%
Syria	26,15%	35,89%
Ukraine	3,92%	4,07%
Yemen	8,91%	8,81%
Total	18,07%	19,62%

Protracted crises 2018	Proposal	Spent
Capacity strengthening		
Afghanistan	0,74%	1,17%
CAR	4,81%	3,15%
Iraq	2,26%	2,22%
Nigeria	1,66%	1,14%
South Sudan	2,28%	1,80%
Syria	1,41%	0,81%
Ukraine	1,84%	1,31%
Yemen	0,43%	0,44%
Total	1,86%	1,44%

Protracted crises 2019	Proposal	Spent
Budget to local partners		
Afghanistan	43,59%	46,11%
CAR	6,68%	4,24%
DRC	14,05%	12,42%
Nigeria	24,72%	27,15%
Somalia	22,67%	22,81%
South Sudan	21,53%	16,69%
Sudan	17,38%	18,49%
Syria	41,04%	41,09%
Yemen	0,86%	1,31%
Total	22,13%	22,21%

Protracted crises 2020	Proposal	Spent
Budget to local partners		
CAR	6,32%	
DRC	15,09%	
Nigeria	28,19%	
Somalia	23,20%	
South Sudan	24,16%	
Sudan	26,19%	
Syria	14,03%	
Yemen	19,60%	
Total	20,52%	

Protracted crises 2019	Proposal	Spent
Capacity strengthening		
Afghanistan	2,08%	1,87%
CAR	9,28%	4,17%
DRC	1,79%	1,71%
Nigeria	3,45%	1,70%
Somalia	4,87%	4,74%
South Sudan	3,31%	2,45%
Sudan	1,57%	0,05%
Syria	2,23%	1,21%
Yemen	0,56%	0,33%
Total	3,24%	2,20%

Protracted crises 2020	Proposal	Spent
Capacity strengthening		
CAR	3,48%	
DRC	2,82%	
Nigeria	4,45%	
Somalia	2,14%	
South Sudan	3,20%	
Sudan	1,11%	
Syria	2,13%	
Yemen	1,92%	
Total	2,71%	

Acute crises 2018	Proposal	Spent
Budget to local partners		
Bangladesh 1	2,60%	40,78%
Bangladesh 2	34,65%	35,49%
DRC	6,51%	9,82%
Horn of Africa	21,90%	23,33%
Indonesia	22,50%	24,55%
Total	17,57%	19,22%

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Acute crises 2019	Proposal	Spent
Budget to local partners		
Burkina Faso	26,32%	n.a.
Cameroon	3,66%	4,79%
Idai	16,59%	19,41%
NW Syria	61,98%	63,57%
South Sudan	18,27%	18,64%
Venezuela	21,99%	21,91%
Total	25,78%	26,97%

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Acute crises 2018	Proposal	Spent
Capacity strengthening		
Bangladesh 1	0,00%	0,00%
Bangladesh 2	0,09%	0,12%
DRC	2,34%	2,24%
Horn of Africa	1,39%	0,30%
Indonesia	0,04%	0,02%
Total	0,83%	0,55%

Acute crises 2019	Proposal	Spent
Capacity strengthening		
Burkina Faso	0,58%	n.a.
Cameroon	2,73%	2,50%
Idai	0,87%	0,02%
NW Syria	0,34%	0,04%
South Sudan	0,00%	0,00%
Venezuela	1,05%	1,05%
Total	0,86%	0,62%

Acute crises 2020	Proposal	Spent
Budget to local partners		
COVID Ethiopia	21,47%	
Lebanon	30,10%	
Locust	37,56%	
NW Syria	66,24%	
COVID South Sudan	40,87%	
Zambia + Zimbabwe	24,02%	
Total	35,06%	

Acute crises 2020	Proposal	Spent
Capacity strengthening		
COVID Ethiopia	0,86%	
Lebanon	0,18%	
Locust	0,14%	
NW Syria	0,19%	
COVID South Sudan	0,11%	
Zambia + Zimbabwe	1,95%	
Total	0,66%	

KUNO facilitates learning, critical reflection and debate on urgent humanitarian issues to improve humanitarian aid.

What we do

KUNO is a platform in the Netherlands, supported by NGOs, academic institutes and governments for joint learning, reflection and debate. We organize expert meetings, working sessions for professionals, webinars, training and public debates. KUNO's thematic focus areas for 2021 will be: localization, the future humanitarianism, the nexus, and innovation.

Why

The Netherlands is one of the biggest global humanitarian players: the Dutch government is the 10th donor worldwide and the Dutch public is a big contributor to humanitarian action. The Dutch humanitarian field is broad and diverse; varied expertise is available coming from academics, policymakers and practitioners. Cross-sectoral exchange of knowledge, however, is modest in the Netherlands, and translating existing knowledge to new actions and policies remains a challenge. KUNO has been founded to facilitate this process of knowledge sharing and reflection. In this way, KUNO helps the Dutch humanitarian sector to further innovate and jointly meet the challenges of the future.

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NGO Members: *CARE, Cordaid, Dorcas, Kerk in Actie, Oxfam Novib, Plan International Netherlands, Save the Children, St. Vluchteling, Terre des Hommes, Unicef, Woord & Daad, ZOA.*

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