



February 2019

As participants gather in Geneva for the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW), members of the Charter4Change wish to share their successes, challenges and proposed ways forward for improving our partnerships with local and national actors. [The Charter4Change](#), (C4C) started in 2015, brings together 36 international NGOs working to implement the 8 C4C commitments grouped around issues of equity, effectiveness, transparency, representation, funding and resource recognition, and support for local capacity. The C4C signatories are joined by 234 national and local NGO endorsers, keen to encourage their INGO partners to improve their partnership practices in order to deliver better outcomes of crisis-affected people.

Most international actors (donors, UN, and NGOs) have signed up to a variety of standards, codes and Frameworks aimed at improving humanitarian action. Many have also signed the Grand Bargain with its strong localisation commitments in Workstream 2 and committed through the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit's Agenda for Humanity 'to reinforce, not replace national and local systems'.

Making real progress against these commitments is challenging, but necessary if we are to achieve a more equitable and effective global humanitarian response. Coming out of the experiences of Charter4Change signatories progress as documented in the 2018 [C4C Annual Progress Report](#) and discussed at the 3rd [Annual Charter4Change meeting](#) in Oslo in December 2019, we share the following 4 lessons, to support broader change within our sector:

1. We must be actively promoting and recognising the critical role local actors play in effective humanitarian action (C4C Commitments 5, 6, 8)

In small scale emergencies, as well as Level 3 responses, the role of local and national actors is vital. For example, Bangladeshi organisations have increasingly played a key role in Rohingya response, working closely not just with the international community, but also their national government, and were able to meaningfully influence the government's revision of its Standing Order on Disaster (SOD). They are co-leading clusters and advocating to international donors to change the ways they work with and relate to national actors. In turn, international actors need to do more enable national actors to participate in coordination mechanisms and take leadership roles in humanitarian response.

Some C4C signatories and allies have been pushing for greater recognition of the role that local actors play – which we have observed, has a multiplying effect: the more we promote, the more awareness is raised, the higher the likelihood of local actors being further invested in and supported by donors and international peers. Unfortunately, we have also seen the opposite to be true: when international actors consistently underplay the role of national actors, particularly in their communications work to their own supporters and donors, funding and power stays with those who are visible.

Our endorsers report that international commitments, such as the localisation ones within the Grand Bargain are largely unknown amongst national actors. Without that information how can local actors work with their partners and donors to ensure they uphold those commitments? Across the sector international actors need to do far more to inform our partners and work together for positive change.

2. There are creative ways of partnering, which can support the growth of local actors, and meet the increasingly complex due diligence requirements in our system (Commitments 2,4, 7)

The ever-growing complexities of compliance and due diligence can be a deterrent to increasing the number of partnerships in response work. But one C4C signatory has elaborated an accompaniment partnership model wherein the organisation assists or handles certain aspects of the response, and provides capacity strengthening support until the local partner is ready to enter into full partner agreement. This approach can and should be replicated to increase access and complementarity, as well as navigate the challenging bureaucratic restrictions in funding contracts. A consistent and collective approach by C4C signatories and other international actors could reduce the administrative burden on local and national actors.

Many Charter4Change signatories are trying to embed their commitments into their partnership agreements, and specifically commit funds to capacity support. 8 signatories are working directly to address this, dedicating funds towards strengthening partner's systems (finance, HR and technical). This could then contribute to redressing imbalances in partnership dynamics by improving local actor capabilities, resulting in minimal need for INGOs to supplant local actors in the delivery of humanitarian aid. In large scale emergencies, the loss of skilled staff to INGOs and UN agencies challenges local and national partners' ability to sustain high-quality response work over time.

3. Increasing funding to local actors isn't easy – even for agencies who've made the commitment, especially as it's hard to track the flow of funding (Commitments 1 and 3)

Charter4Change signatories are leading the humanitarian sector in ensuring they pass funding to their local and national partners, with 90% of them reporting passing at least 20% of their funding to national actors, and some passing as much as 60 or 80% of their humanitarian spend to partners. But challenges remain as some signatories are not on target, whilst others are struggling with tracking and reporting their financial data. In order to be able to deliver on our commitments, many C4C signatories have had to build in new monitoring tools to track their financial data. Though the tools have not been complicated, rolling them out through organisations has been both challenging and time-consuming.

Our sector – and every agency – needs to be investing in greater transparency and more monitoring tools which will enable us to better track funding we receive to communities that need them. This means tracking from the first to all subsequent levels of the funding chain.

4. We must do more to communicate our commitments, *within* our own organisations

Charter4Change endorsers have called on international organisations to implement “the 3 C's”:

- *More and better **Capacity strengthening**,*
- *Stronger **Communications** at country level about organisational localisation commitments;*
- *Greater **Coherence** between INGO head office and country office, between organisational policies and practice on the ground.*

International actors need to do more to sensitize their own country programme staff about their international commitments, and to support them to implement these commitments in their programme work. They need to make more effort to reach out to local actors to inform them about these global commitments, as well as sensitize their own local staff. If they undertook these 3 steps humanitarian aid actors could begin to make significant progress towards meaningful localisation.