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Communique from the National Conference on Localisation, March 2023

“When the war started, decisions were made quickly. International organisations were on the ground and asking us how they could help. There wasn’t bureaucracy, just what do you need now? One year later we are seeing a decline in that direct communication and an increasingly complex bureaucracy. The volume of reporting is overwhelming. The logical thing would be to simplify what is expected and target support to local organizations and what they are doing. That is the kind of partnership and support we are hoping for.”

Valentyn Bordun, Kryla Nadii

A National Conference on Localisation of the humanitarian response was held in Kyiv (17th February 2023).ⁱ Representatives from over 200 local and national civil society actors (LNAs), volunteer networks, international non-governmental (INGOs), UN agencies, donor governments and Ukrainian authorities participated. The Conference launched a joint statement and recommendations on empowering local organisations in humanitarian action, which had been developed through five sub-national workshops exploring the issues these groups face in Odesa, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Lviv, and Chernihiv Oblasts from November 2022 to January 2023. The Conference agenda and full Joint Statement and Recommendations on Locally-Led Humanitarian Action in Ukraine can be accessed at:

- English: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MA1y9GjaU2g3DGkjaaYyoar1hl9nnVeU/view?usp=sharing>
- Ukrainian: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FvSsPocWcuQDt3yrQxwQLmAhGjkW0ps5/view?usp=sharing>

At the Conference, strong statements of support for the Joint Recommendations were made by all stakeholders. Looking forward, we highlight the following six urgent priorities for follow-up action by donor governments, donor coordination groups, the UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), UN agencies, INGOs and the NGO Platform:

1. *Establish a structured approach to their direct dialogue with LNAs on quality of partnership and support to local leadership.* In particular, as highlighted in the joint statement, both the HCT and the in-country donor coordination groups should establish quarterly opportunities for frank and open dialogue with a more diverse range of LNAs so they can raise their critical insights and suggestions on ways forward (which is frequently not possible in the context of the bilateral donor-intermediary-local NGO relationship). On at least an annual or biannual basis, a National Localisation Conference should be convened at which a wider range of LNAs can raise their priorities and international actors outline their progress and commitments to act on localisation.
2. *Establish a UN Humanitarian Country Team Localization Strategy outlining clear objectives, milestones and indicators to measure and track progress on equitable partnership and support to local leadership.* Efforts to adopt more flexible,

“It’s been a year and now there’s increasing bureaucraticisation, which builds walls between local women’s rights organisations and their international donor partners. It is ironic that as the war becomes ever more intensive so do the reporting requirements of donors. Analytical tables and certificates we should provide; many of which are duplicative and take up lots of time. Many women’s organisations do not have sufficient legal or administrative staff, yet international funding operates on the assumption that they do. So we ask donors: Simplify your procedures. Listen to your local partners who come from and understand the communities affected by this war.”

Halyna Kravets, Revival of the Nation

enabling approaches by the UHF are welcome, but the HCT should hold all international agencies and funding mechanisms accountable for this. As the decision-making structure with oversight of the international response, the HCT should adopt a localization strategy to ensure this.

3. *Ensure that forthcoming Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF) allocations represent an ambitious scale-up of efforts to increase more flexible, decentralized support to LNAs* both in terms of the quantity and quality (longer-term, flexible) of funding reaching smaller LNAs, and in the provision of accompaniment and capacity-strengthening support to them. Depending on the parameters of what is possible through the UHF, donors should also consider scaling up support to other country-level NGO consortia and funding mechanisms that can get micro-grants and accompaniment support to smaller and more informal LNAs that are not able to meet due diligence requirements of the UHF or other existing international funding channels.

“Our association supports volunteers across the country. Beyond short-term funds for the delivery of aid by volunteers, we need increased support to help them understand and manage the risks they face. Some have died, others are injured and others are held captive in Russia. Volunteers need training on safety and security, knowledge of first aid medical procedures, and how to avoid burnout and cope with the trauma they face. Our organisation is small drops in the ocean of need here. Longer-term funding is needed to strengthen these efforts”

Anna Bondarenko, Ukrainian Volunteer Service

4. *Prioritise practical actions to support volunteer networks and organisations working in high risk parts of Ukraine;* notably in terms of their own safety and security/risk analysis and management capacities; first aid knowledge, supplies and medical care; and flexible funding and support for overheads costs to keep their equipment and staff safe and effective.

5. *Act on calls for a fair and consistent approach to overheads cost support to LNAs.* As outlined in our Joint Recommendations, overheads should be unrestricted, unaudited and without time restrictions rather than being squeezed within direct project costs. In line with IASC and Grand Bargain process, donors should work towards a common approach, and oblige their international partners to transparently communicate to their local partners what they are entitled to and to report on this.

“Our volunteers are risking their lives driving old vehicles into areas under bombardment to deliver aid and help people flee to a place of safety. Yet whilst our international partners will pay for the fuel, it is a struggle to fund the replacement of broken wheels or other spare parts for that transport. Likewise volunteers are themselves displaced by the war and must find somewhere as a base, and yet the rents are being driven up. We need flexible funds to support this. Donors and international agencies should be allowing for at least a 10% or 15% contribution to overheads, not just providing these short-term, projectized grants.”

Oleksiy Palchenko, Angles of Salvation

6. *Act on transparency to catalyse change and accountability.* Donors, UN agencies, INGOs should all publish clear information about their policies and practices on the above recommendations and other issues highlighted in the joint recommendations. Every international agency should publicly state what its policies are and quantify where relevant what support it provides to LNAs; both in terms of overall funding to them, flexibility and multi-year funding, support to overheads, and support to LNA partners taking on lead or co-lead roles. Inter-agency platforms and systems to promote transparency and accountability regarding funding flows to LNAs should also be supported.

ⁱ The Conference was co-organised by Caritas Ukraine, People In Need, Helping To Leave, CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development), NGO Resource Center, Oxfam, Vostok-SOS and Refugees International; facilitated through a working-group on localization linked to the Ukraine NGO Advocacy Working-Group (soon to become part of the nascent NGO Platform).