

Guidance

STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATION, REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL ACTORS IN IASC HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION MECHANISMS

IASC Results Group 1 on Operational Response

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1. This guidance note has been developed to support efforts to strengthen the meaningful participation, representation, and leadership of local and national humanitarian actors (L/NAs)¹ within IASC humanitarian coordination structures². It draws on over 100 pieces of research and good practice to provide recommendations on how L/NAs can be an integral part of humanitarian coordination structures. It provides guidance for Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams, Cluster and Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups, and other related Task Forces and Working Groups.

2. The guidance contained in this note should be considered with due regard to existing national structures and contextual dynamics. International actors must be sensitive about the potential risks that representatives of local and national organizations might face in taking part in international coordination structures. International actors should seek to accompany and support national and local efforts, rather than impose structures. In line with the [UN Guidance note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space](#), international actors should focus on the participation of L/NAs in IASC processes, the promotion of civic space and most importantly, the protection of civil society actors. Finally, international actors must be cognizant of existing contextual dynamics and the varied levels of engagement from L/NAs who may have different expectations and motives in joining coordination mechanisms. Equally, it must be made clear that participation in humanitarian coordination by all actors is contingent on respect for humanitarian principles.

PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

3. Engaging L/NAs is critical to the success of humanitarian action. L/NAs are often the first responders and are at the heart of humanitarian response. They provide an invaluable understanding of local challenges and potential solutions, are able to mobilize local networks and offer greater access to affected populations, hence contributing to a more effective, efficient, and sustainable humanitarian response with an enhanced accountability to affected populations. They are also often adept at working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to support affected communities in preparedness, response, recovery and after international actors withdraw. Yet the international humanitarian system has made limited progress in increasing funding, capacity development, equitable and meaningful partnerships and the participation of L/NAs in their coordination structures, which has overall remained relatively limited over the past years³ – particularly in terms of risk-sharing, leadership and decision-making.

4. An explicit priority for the humanitarian sector since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the establishment of the Grand Bargain⁴ has been to increase support to local actors and communities, including through a specific commitment to strengthen leadership and decision-

¹ Please refer to paragraph 5 for a definition of who is considered to be a local and national humanitarian actor for the purposes of this guidance.

² In situations involving refugees, UNHCR leads and coordinates the refugee response. The [Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice](#) clarifies leadership and coordination arrangements in situations where a Humanitarian Coordinator has been appointed, and a UNHCR-led refugee operation is also underway. Complementary mapping of best practices to strengthen participation of Refugee-led organizations (RLOs) is being compiled by UNHCR and will be made available to all IASC members.

³ At the time of writing (2021), N/LAs constituted about 8% of cluster/sector leadership at subnational level, and about 45% of cluster/sector membership on average.

⁴ The [Grand Bargain](#), launched during the WHS in 2016, is a unique agreement between 63 of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who committed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.

making by local actors⁵. The COVID-19 pandemic further accentuated the need to strengthen the role of L/NAs within humanitarian coordination structures⁶.

5. With regard to refugee response contexts, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)⁷ recognizes the leadership of the host government and the work of local authorities, community leaders and traditional community governance institutions, who are often the first responders to large-scale refugee situations, with UNHCR playing a supportive and catalytic role. The GCR also recognizes the critical role of civil society organizations, including those that are led by refugees, women, youth or persons with disabilities, in assessing community strengths and needs, inclusive and accessible planning and programme implementation, and capacity development, as applicable.

6. This guidance note identifies practical steps to enhance the participation, representation, and leadership role of L/NAs within IASC humanitarian coordination structures. It is envisaged that relevant coordination forums should use the guidance to spur discussion, identify priority actions and agree on indicators for monitoring progress. It is primarily focused on local and national non-governmental humanitarian actors including local civil society organizations (CSOs), such as: national non-governmental organizations (NNGOs) Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies; human rights groups; women rights organizations (WROs); women-led organizations (WLOs)⁸ and girl-led initiatives; youth-led organizations; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI+) groups; faith-based organizations; organizations of persons with disabilities (OPD) as well as older persons' organizations. Women, WLOs, persons with disabilities and OPDs have tended to be sidelined within humanitarian coordination and decision-making platforms, reinforcing underlying inequalities that obstruct access to humanitarian services by women, girls and others excluded on the basis of their gender and disability. Greater emphasis must be placed on combating gender inequality by supporting and promoting the engagement and leadership of women leaders and other marginalized groups, as emphasized throughout this guidance⁹. Further, for the purposes of this guidance, regional or sub-regional networks of L/NAs would also be considered L/NAs. The term L/NAs may also pertain to other L/NAs according to context: such as national and local authorities¹⁰, the local private sector and development-focused organizations, who may not define themselves as humanitarian actors *per se* but who may be contributing to humanitarian efforts due to their location and/or community connections.

⁵ "Support and complement national coordination mechanisms where they exist and include national responders in international coordination mechanisms as appropriate and in keeping with humanitarian principles," Grand Bargain Workstream 2 (Localisation), commitment 3.

⁶ See IASC [Interim Guidance: Localisation and the Covid-19 Response](#), May 2020.

⁷ The resolution on the GCR was adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2018 ([A/RES/73/151](#)).

⁸ The definition of WLO is included in the glossary. For the purposes of this guidance and going forward, WLOs are taken to also include WROs.

⁹ See also Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream [Guidance Note on Gender-Responsive Localisation](#), May 2020.

¹⁰ For the purposes of this guidance, a wide approach is taken in defining local and national authorities, acknowledging that this varies greatly across different contexts. The main factors are: (i) governance set-up, including the relationship with the national government and the nature of legitimacy versus local communities (for example, elected or appointed positions); (ii) the level of delegation of authority received from central governments (for example, taxation or basic services) and (iii) the human and financial capacities to fulfil their functions.

EQUITABLE AND MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS

L/NAs are often treated as implementers/sub-contractors and not fully included in strategic and decision-making processes. However, the involvement and participation of L/NAs in all aspects of the humanitarian programme cycle (analysis, strategic planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) is essential for accountability to affected populations and ensuring that assistance and protection is relevant. Coordinators therefore have a responsibility to promote a culture of principled partnership, both in the ways they interact with the members of their coordination groups and in the ways in which members interact with each other. Relations among organizations involved in humanitarian action should be based on mutual respect, trust and the [Principles of Partnership](#). These are equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility, and complementarity.

Equitable partnerships between international actors and L/NAs also require a shift towards longer-term partnerships that are systematically built together - focusing on the strengths and strategic engagement of each party and not on the delivery of a specific project, allowing for broader social transformation and shifting uneven power dynamics and unconscious bias between L/NAs and international organisations. The overall objective in any partnership is that, over time, the need for humanitarian assistance should be reduced. Partnerships should be based on complementarity and should develop greater trust and promote mutual accountability (see 'Areas of Accountability and Monitoring,' below). Strategic partnerships should also be complemented by operational partnerships that are flexible, transparent, equitable, and allow for L/NAs to contribute throughout the programme cycle (see 'Preparedness, Response and Humanitarian-Development Collaboration' below) and help them to strengthen institutional capacity, as required.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO SUPPORT LOCALISATION IN COORDINATION

7. Experience from a wide range of humanitarian settings shows that active engagement by humanitarian L/NAs in coordination structures improves the quality and coverage of a response. However, L/NAs face barriers to participation, representation, and leadership, which disproportionately impact local WLOs, WROs and other marginalized groups. These can include language barriers, the heavy use of jargon, cultural or political differences, social structural discrimination (especially gender and race inequalities), logistical and technological obstacles (including challenges to accessing and sharing information in a timely manner), security challenges, as well as resource and capacity constraints due to limited access to funding. The following section provides recommendations for practical actions coordinators and members of coordination bodies can take to enhance the role of L/NAs.

PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

8. Keeping in mind that power imbalances and unconscious bias may influence the setup of coordination structures, members and those facilitating coordination groups should take steps to create an enabling environment for L/NA to participate and take part in decision-making in coordination structures and facilitate more systematic and active engagement¹¹. This includes forming alliances with smaller, local organizations (such as local women’s organizations), not only as local implementing partners but as humanitarian actors capable of setting their own agendas within the overarching humanitarian coordination structures. All actions should be undertaken in the spirit of the principles of partnership (see above box on ‘equitable partnerships’) to create an enabling environment for L/NAs, in particular WLOs, youth-led organizations, older persons’ organizations and OPDs, to participate and influence decision-making in coordination structures and facilitate more systematic and active engagement for the overall benefit of affected people.

9. However, it should be noted that not all L/NAs can or should be expected to participate in internationally led humanitarian coordination structures. IASC coordination structures, including

GOOD PRACTICE TIPS

- ❖ Promote continuity in representation by minimising turnover in staff attending meetings to foster relationships and trust among participants and to support informed decision-making.
- ❖ Ensure members of humanitarian coordination structures give account, take into account and are accountable to their respective constituency and commit to fairly and transparently represent their views (beyond individual organizations' mandates and priorities) by consulting them in advance of key decisions, as well as informing them of discussions and decisions.
- ❖ Share with L/NAs information about international coordination structures and bodies available to them and discuss their potential role and any leadership opportunities. Do this through information sessions with local and national partners and by arranging for all capacity-strengthening projects to include a session on international coordination structures.
- ❖ As much as possible, aim to operate in local and national languages.

¹¹ See also Global Cluster Coordination Group [Good Practices and Tips from the Field on Working with National and Local Actors](#), May 2017; and Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream [Guidance Note on the Participation of Local Actors in Humanitarian Coordination Groups](#), May 2020.

the cluster approach, are not the only humanitarian coordination mechanism, and may often coexist with other forms of national or local coordination. Applying the IASC coordination approach must take into account the specific needs and context of a country. Internationally led humanitarian coordination structures should always take existing national and local approaches and structures into account, and proactive efforts should be made to identify, link with and work through these coordination and leadership structures. This entails international organizations and structures having the appropriate resources to link and work with local coordination structures, including staff with the appropriate local/national language skills, not vice versa. To support meaningful engagement, it is important to collectively consult with key L/NAs to clarify existing coordination structures and partnership expectations, including meeting frequency, time and technical capacity required for participation. International actors must recognize that many organizations are fully equipped to participate in international coordination mechanisms and should only offer capacity support when/where it is requested.

10. Implement a process for inclusion of national organizations in the IASC humanitarian response architecture at the national and subnational level with the following elements:

- a. Identify and map L/NAs of relevance to the response and the local context and provide information on humanitarian coordination mechanisms and how to engage. Insofar as possible, extend an invitation to all L/NAs working in affected areas to information exchanges to gather their perspectives, understand the different communities, norms and cultures, and importantly, identify the relevant response, the actors who are best placed (and interested) to contribute and their preference for engaging with international structures.
- b. Undertake courtesy calls and introductory visits to L/NAs to ensure that HCT/cluster responsibilities are understood and appropriate.
- c. Encourage induction sessions for any new member of a coordination group, whether L/NA or international, to ensure mutual responsibilities and accountabilities are agreed and understood, and appropriate support is provided to new members during the initial stages of their participation. Explain any limitations and challenges of an IASC coordination structure to help manage expectations. Explain acronyms, meeting protocols and group dynamics. Minimize and explain the use of jargon or technical language. Provide guidance that is tailored to a new member's needs or area of work and make key documents and information available in relevant local and national languages. Find common language around shared goals. Equally, invite L/NA representatives to participate in induction briefings and present on the local context and local coordination mechanisms.
- d. Promote coordination and active collaboration to strengthen existing partnerships between INGOs and L/NAs, especially in those cases where the L/NAs might be less or not familiar with the international coordination system. Work on institutionalising the information flow between existing local/national partnerships and international structures, to reinforce existing groups rather than undermine them.
- e. Ensure membership of L/NAs in international coordination structures is equitable, (for example, by aiming for equal levels of representation from international and national NGOs, when it comes to NGO seats) or ensuring minimum L/NA

representation overall. Recognize that equitable participation in coordination structures goes beyond membership numbers and also involves access to equipment, advice, security and financial support, among others. Work towards the establishment of baselines for L/NA participation in various coordination bodies in Q3 2021 and, after consultations with HCs and field operations, consider setting a minimum target for local/national representation in these coordination bodies.

- f. Promote an equitable system of representation of historically marginalized groups in international coordination structures with age, gender and diversity considerations in mind, including WLOs, WROs, LGBTI+ groups, OPDs, youth groups and older persons' organizations, as well as other priority and marginalized groups¹².
- g. To the extent possible, prioritize conducting meetings in local/national languages. Systematically provide translation and interpretation for internationals into local/national language(s) or for L/NAs into the language international actors use to enable all members to participate equally, including as part of relevant documentation. To the extent possible, take into account accessibility measures such as live captioning of online meetings and sign language translations.
- h. Consider organizing coordination meetings as close to operations as possible to minimize the logistical strain on L/NAs (e.g. cluster meetings in subnational locations whenever possible.). Also consider the level of meetings: the objective should not be to have all local and national actors at a pre-determined level present, rather, to have representatives present at the appropriate level where they can provide the most meaningful contribution.
- i. Ensure meeting locations are accessible and acceptable to L/NAs and provide transportation and logistical support, where required. Consider options and support to allow L/NAs to join meetings remotely (e.g. online, where feasible) or rotate meeting locations. Consider whether other arrangements are needed for persons with hearing or visual impairments. For virtual meetings, consider whether connectivity/bandwidth, (un)stable electricity supply and equipment availability might constrain the effective participation of L/NAs. Also consider using innovative tools or applications to increase engagement, such as live polling applications or crowd-sourcing tools to develop agendas. Be cognizant of protecting L/NAs from online threats and attacks.
- j. Pay particular attention to security conditions or other local circumstances that may affect the representation of L/NAs, especially women (e.g. nighttime curfews, cultural acceptability of women's mobility after certain times and childcare-related constraints). Consider mapping the specific and urgent protection needs of L/NAs and establishing referral mechanisms for cases of intimidation and reprisals against local civil society for cooperating with the international community, particularly for marginalized groups and the groups that work with them.

¹² See ICVA NGO [Fora Member Engagement Guide for good practice](#), 2019.

Tracking progress

This guidance proposes having an annual global report on localization, which would present an overview of globally tracked country-specific indicators included in this document for all IASC humanitarian contexts and would be derived from the annual mapping of IASC coordination structures undertaken by OCHA and the Global Clusters based on inputs from field operations. The overview of indicators will be aggregated by OCHA at global and levels and will be comparable across contexts. IASC humanitarian contexts are defined on an annual basis, based on a combination of criteria such as presence of a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), HCT/ICCG in place and active clusters. In addition, individual country contexts may decide to do more in-depth analysis around locally tracked indicators. Field operations may choose to - depending on their local contexts - to track additional indicators at country level (hereinafter referred to as locally tracked indicators) as decided by humanitarian actors on the ground (e.g. HCTs).

k. Consider the schedules of L/NAs along with international actors when setting regular meetings to minimize overlaps, and ensure the times are feasible for local partners. When considering schedules, be cognizant of the differentiated burden of care between genders and its implications.

l. Develop meeting agendas with input from all participants, allocate time and a specific agenda item to address the priorities of L/NAs.

m. Ensure adequate visibility of L/NAs by having co-chairs, ensuring floor time is given to them and by highlighting where specific agenda items or perspectives originate from L/NAs.

n. Invite L/NAs to share locally relevant and effective methods for sharing information to ensure L/NAs have equitable access to the information required to effectively participate¹³. Give preference to participatory methodologies such as 'learning by doing'.

o. Support NGO coordination forums and encourage stronger coordination between L/NAs to facilitate stronger

collective power and representation. Encourage pre-meetings among L/NAs prior to key coordination meetings to develop collective analysis and positions, and to ensure that local representatives have sufficient information and time to consult with relevant local stakeholders and communities.

p. As appropriate, have HCT/cluster representation in L/NA coordination structures and mechanisms, enabling a two-way relationship.

Indicators – Participation and Representation¹⁴

		Globally tracked	Locally tracked
1	% members of a coordination body (HCTs, ICCGs, Clusters) who are L/NAs	✓	
2	% members of a coordination body (HCT, ICCGs, Clusters) who are WLO or OPDs and other diversity groups ¹⁵		✓

¹³ See [Humanitarian Coordination and Cluster Approach: A Quick Guide for Local and National Actors](#), developed by GEC, CP AoR and TWB to help L/NAs understand humanitarian cluster approach.

¹⁴ For indicators 1 and 2, this guidance proposes establishing baselines for L/NA participation in coordination bodies by Q3 2021 and, after consultations with HCs and field operations in 2021, to consider setting a minimum target for L/NA participation.

¹⁵ Including marginalized and excluded groups

3	% coordination meetings (HCTs, ICCG, clusters) held in local/national language(s) or offering translation and interpretation	✓	
4	% of coordination meetings (HCT, ICCG, cluster) with no L/NAs present		✓
5	% of satisfaction level recorded in locally administrated qualitative surveys per different coordination level/body		✓

LEADERSHIP

11. Humanitarian leadership should be inclusive, representative, gender-balanced, accountable and supportive of the entire humanitarian community. L/NAs should have equitable opportunities with international actors and among their own peers, e.g. for WLOs, to take on leadership and co-leadership roles at both national and sub-national levels, including as part of strategic advisory groups and coordination mechanisms. Ensuring the presence and meaningful participation of local WLOs and WROs in coordination bodies will be important for sustaining women’s leadership over time.

- a. Open membership of cluster Strategic Advisory Groups (at global and country level) to L/NAs, including WLOs, OPDs, youth-based groups and others as relevant, and provide funding (if available), coaching support and mentoring opportunities where needed for full and diverse contributions. Identify and support INGOs organizations with a mandate and interest in supporting L/NA leadership in humanitarian coordination so that they can mentor, accompany and support L/NAs to gradually fulfil leadership roles. In parallel, international actors should receive coaching on how to engage with L/NAs in leadership roles including on how to have constructive discussions.
- b. Make the promotion of strengthening L/NA leadership in coordination structures the responsibility of a senior humanitarian official, such as the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) or Deputy HC (DHC), reflecting such responsibilities within his/her performance objectives.
- c. Promote co-leadership and co-chairing of coordination structures with L/NAs¹⁶, including through the development of transition and handover plans that prioritize L/NA leadership from the outset of an emergency response. Keep in mind the [Placeholder for reference to upcoming IASC framework on engaging with local governments, developed by UN-Habitat] and the [2011 IASC Guidance on working with national authorities](#) which specifies that “Where appropriate and practical, government leads should be actively encouraged to co-chair cluster meetings with their Cluster Lead Agency counterparts. As with all co-chair arrangements, respective responsibilities should be clearly defined from the outset.”
- d. During any leadership transition from the international to national/local level, ensure relevant national/local authorities commit to capitalize upon the expertise of L/NAs in humanitarian response and integrate them into national disaster response mechanisms, while respecting their independent role. Provide guidance to government counterparts on good practice in coordinating with L/NAs and the role these organizations can play in preparedness and response actions at the national and subnational level.

¹⁶ See IASC [Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level](#), chapter on ‘Sharing Leadership’.

- e. Where possible, elevate national staff of UN agencies, INGOs or L/NAs to cluster leadership positions. This will help encourage participation by and inclusion of L/NAs, increase access by working through local networks, demystify coordination mechanisms and ensure local priorities are reflected in agendas and plans. Recognizing that L/NAs are often not as well-resourced as UN agencies or INGOs, consider providing funding to L/NAs specifically for leadership positions within the coordination mechanisms.
- f. Support transparent and inclusive processes, which are conflict-sensitive and attuned to contextual considerations, for the identification and selection of members and leaders of coordination structures that apply equally to national and international members¹⁷.
- g. Ensure that the Terms of Reference (TORs) for shared leadership positions are clear and equitable in terms of decision-making and responsibilities and are in alignment with IASC guidance on such roles¹⁸. Systematize good practices and lessons learned in the fulfilment of shared leadership.
- h. Within different coordination structures, encourage rotational seats for international actors and L/NAs (perhaps annually or every two years) to promote gender, race, age and disability diversities and afford opportunities to new members.
- i. Strengthen accountability mechanisms, including remedies for non-performing representatives (see 'Areas of Accountability and Monitoring,' below).

Indicators - Leadership

		Globally tracked	Locally tracked
1	% of national-level bodies (clusters) that have L/NAs as leads or co-leads	✓	
2	% of national-level bodies (clusters) that have L/NAs as co-chairs or co-facilitators	✓	
3	% of national-level bodies (technical working groups) that have L/NAs as leads or co-leads	✓	
4	% of subnational-level bodies (clusters) that have L/NAs as co-chairs or co-facilitators	✓	
5	% of subnational-level bodies (clusters) that have L/NAs as leads or co-leads	✓	
6	% of subnational-level bodies (clusters) that have L/NAs as co-chairs / co-facilitators	✓	
7	% clusters that have developed localisation action plans (relevant for their context)		✓

¹⁷ See ICVA [NGO For a Member Engagement Guide](#).

¹⁸ While the [IASC Guideline on Cluster Coordination at Country Level](#) provide some elements to better understand concepts and good practices on shared leadership, there is need for further clarification of leadership terminology to help distinguish between roles/responsibilities for leads, co-leads, co-chairs, etc.

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

12. Institutional and technical capacity strengthening is a critical approach to participation and leadership of L/NAs in coordination, as some report that they lack the knowledge and experience to engage effectively within coordination structures. However, capacity strengthening activities designed to address this gap are often poorly matched to individual or organizational needs and locally appropriate ways of learning. One-way capacity strengthening opportunities directed towards L/NAs may also miss opportunities for co-learning, two-way learning and capacity transfers. Institutional capacity strengthening for local partners should be considered as part of the response strategy - as a way to achieve coverage and quality - and not just considered a support cost. It should also be considered as a key aspect of working of humanitarian-development collaboration, as L/NAs (and the broader CSO constituency) are instrumental stakeholders in both humanitarian response and development work, and should be empowered to facilitate effective exit strategies and sustainable transfer of responsibility to L/NAs. Finally, capacity strengthening should be ongoing, taking place before, during and after a crisis.

13. In the spirit of partnership, establish two-way learning and capacity transfers to foster quality, locally appropriate humanitarian responses that also support long-term resilience:

- a. Conduct a learning needs assessment of all cluster partners. Based on this assessment, support two-way institutional and technical capacity strengthening between L/NAs and HCT/clusters around, but not limited to, coordination, advocacy, fundraising, programme planning, mutual accountability mechanisms, risk management, gender issues, diplomacy, influencing and negotiation skills and pathways to leadership, as relevant for the particular group of partners being addressed.
- b. Identify existing local, national and regional coordination platforms and coalitions, and leaders within these platforms/coalitions, through regular mapping. Try to learn more about their core strategies and business, in order to learn, exchange information, establish better connections and coordinate with the existing L/NA platforms. Proactively reach out to identified leaders and encourage them to join humanitarian coordination structures as appropriate. This should include reaching out to women, youth, persons with disabilities and other representatives of minority groups with leadership potential who may be hesitant or discouraged to join more formal IASC coordination fora due to prevailing social, cultural or contextual norms. Where appropriate, encourage government-led coordination bodies to welcome the participation of L/NAs and to view them as a critical resource and partner during humanitarian response.
- c. Encourage learning exchange through labs/applications/platforms for mutual learning among different actors and foster/create channels of informal communication between L/NAs and international actors in order to strengthen mutual trust and partnership.
- d. Undertake regular reciprocal capacity assessments involving local, national, and international actors and jointly develop two-way capacity strengthening plans,

ensuring activities are coordinated, complementary and ideally conducted through a common platform to minimize duplication and gaps. Activities should include training by L/NAs for INGOs and UN actors on local approaches, the local context and other relevant issues.

- e. Move beyond one-off capacity building workshops towards opportunities for two-way twinning, mentorship, coaching, shadowing and peer-to-peer support. Take advantage of existing partnerships to promote learning exchange between organizations and staff. Where possible, budget for these various capacity-building/knowledge-sharing opportunities such as twinning, mentorship, coaching, shadowing and peer-to-peer support.
- f. Prioritize leadership development and structured support for L/NAs to take on leadership roles, particularly for groups whose voice may be muted in a specific cultural context, or share leadership to enable a phased approach to coordination whereby L/NAs assume greater responsibility of for leading coordination over time.
- g. Develop multi-year plans to build local capacities among members of HCTs, clusters, and other related IASC coordination groups, including steps for L/NAs to assume co-ordination and coordination roles. Encourage for any partnership agreement to include that partners are mutually accountable for addressing capacity strengthening recommendations.
- h. Explicitly reference institutional capacity strengthening in HNOs and in HRP sector/cluster chapters to make connection with program outcomes and funding. Make it an eligible budget line in funding applications where it is linked to achieving greater coverage and quality. Reach out to development actors who typically fund institutional development and organizational strengthening of local and national actors as L/NAs often work across the humanitarian- development – peace nexus.
- i. Ensure Cluster Lead Agencies undertake and further provide ongoing training on gender awareness/equality programming and PSEA for all cluster members to actively identify and eliminate gender discrimination/sexual harassment and barriers to women’s meaningful participation within the working environment, as well as to raise awareness of any cultural barriers, gender bias and attitudes and beliefs that may perpetuate discrimination against women. Such trainings could include inputs from L/NAs on local context and culture. Cluster Lead Agencies must promote and respect a zero-tolerance culture for all kinds of gender discrimination and/or sexual harassment. Ensure Cluster Lead Agencies periodically monitor and evaluate compliance with PSEA guidelines and zero-tolerance for discrimination.

Indicators – Capacity strengthening

		Globally tracked	Locally tracked
1	% of coordination bodies that have induction packages adapted to L/NAs needs (as defined by L/NAs)		✓
2	% of coordination bodies (HCTs, ICCGs, Clusters) providing twinning/mentoring programmes		✓

RESOURCING FOR COORDINATION

14. Resources are required to overcome many of the barriers L/NAs face when it comes to their participation and effective engagement. Pooled funds¹⁹ (including sub-grants from other recipients) can be particularly effective in allowing local actors to obtain flexible funding that supports operations, institutional capacity, and staffing – all of which facilitate greater engagement by L/NAs within coordination structures²⁰.

- a. Advocate for direct and flexible multi-year funding for L/NAs, where possible, including resources to support institutional capacity building for local partners as appropriate. Encourage donors to fulfil their commitments under the Grand Bargain. Coordinate among cluster partners to ensure that one single L/NA is not overwhelmed with funding/partnership offers and instead, support is equitably distributed. Take steps to address the added obstacles that L/NAs, in particular marginalized groups such as WLOs, youth groups and OPDs, face in accessing funds that enable participation in coordination – including by making funding applications available in local/national languages and, if required, providing technical support to L/NAs for the drafting and submission of funding proposals and where feasible, providing constructive feedback on unsuccessful proposals. Allocate specific funding within HRPs, pooled funds or other funding appeals for sub-national coordination structures, coordination and liaison positions within L/NAs, for NGO coordination forums as well as for accountability mechanisms. The elaboration of budgets for such dedicated funding must be done jointly with L/NAs.
- b. Dedicate funding for staffing position/s, who have the necessary local/national language skills, focused specifically on L/NA engagement and participation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms and the response more broadly.
- c. Ensure L/NAs, including WLOs, OPDs, older persons, youth-led and other specialized organizations, are adequately represented in pooled fund advisory boards and other donor governance mechanisms.
- d. Routinely track and report on disaggregated funding to highlight differences between the activities and funding of international and L/NAs and give visibility to good localisation practices.

Indicators – Resourcing for Coordination

		Globally tracked	Locally tracked
1	# of CBPF advisory boards and review committees with L/NA members	✓	
2	# of staff hours/ or equivalent dedicated to support localisation of coordination (RC/HC Office, OCHA)		✓

¹⁹ Pooled funds is used in the broadest sense, referring to CERF, CBPFs and NGO-managed pooled funds.

²⁰ See also IASC [Interim Guidance on Flexible Funding](#) and [IASC Results group 5 Humanitarian Financing](#).

VISIBILITY

15. L/NAs like other humanitarian actors have the right to be visible *inter alia* to, raise awareness of their contributions to humanitarian response (including their challenges, opportunities and views), mobilise funds as well as receive acknowledgement for their work. As with other humanitarian actors, L/NAs must also consider the security of their staff and the access of their programmes, when seeking visibility and recognition.

- a. In collaboration with L/NAs, ensure visibility and explicitly acknowledge and proactively support their role in reporting to donors, media and in all other public communications and foster engagement between L/NAs with donors, media and other relevant actors.
- b. Ensure visibility for L/NAs, including WLO, OPDs, and other groups, in all joint humanitarian assessment and response documents (e.g. contingency plans, HNOs and HRP) and respective reporting, for example by explicitly referencing the role of L/NAs.

Indicators - Visibility

	Globally tracked	Locally tracked
1 % of HRPs that achieve a medium to high quality score on localisation (through an annual multi-agency scoring exercise, dependent on the multi-agency group's approval on localisation scoring parameters)	✓	

PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE COLLABORATION

16. The quality, accountability and coherence of a humanitarian response is strengthened when L/NAs are involved in all stages of response planning and their views and perspectives are reflected in each stage of the response - emergency preparedness, response and the eventual withdrawal of international humanitarian actors. L/NAs can also effectively contribute to leveraging humanitarian-development collaboration and, where appropriate, peace collaboration – particularly social cohesion - to reduce needs, risks and vulnerabilities for affected populations. This also allows L/NAs to lead efforts for a more sustainable, locally owned response given their natural advantages in switching towards resilience and longer-term programming.

17. Efforts should be stepped up to strengthen partnerships with L/NAs and support a nationally and locally led response, especially when this response may relate to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and/or the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. There is also considerable scope to leverage response planning to influence the quality and nature of partnerships (see 'equitable and meaningful partnerships,' above), to strengthen both institutional and technical capacities, and to encourage equitable access to unrestricted funds for L/NAs. Localisation should therefore be integrated throughout the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC)²¹.

²¹ See also Child Protection AOI - Global Protection Cluster and Global Education Cluster, [Tips for Integrating Localization in the COVID-19 HNO and HRP](#), April 2020.

Overall

- a. Facilitate workshops specifically for L/NAs, in local/national languages, to gather inputs and integrate these in all joint plans, measures and reports related to the HPC, including HNOs and HRPs. Involve L/NAs in community engagement surveys to support strategy development, thereby ensuring that the voice of affected population is central to the design of operations.

Emergency Preparedness

- a. Paying due regard to commitments under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals, involve L/NAs in all activities related to emergency preparedness (and vice-versa, involve HCT/clusters in all local and national activities). These activities may include risk analysis and monitoring, capacity building on disaster risk management, taking care to identify and prioritize humanitarian interventions, including inter-sectoral interventions where appropriate, reviewing existing response capacities, and filling identified preparedness gaps through the use of the Minimum and Advanced Preparedness Actions (MPAs and APAs) and national standards. Encourage L/NAs to take the lead in emergency preparedness activities.
- b. Recognize that L/NAs are themselves often affected during and after emergencies and accordingly, establish risk reduction strategies in collaboration with them.
- c. Establish or strengthen, where needed, national and subnational structures and their preparedness activities before disasters or conflicts occur.

Needs assessment and analysis

- a. Involve L/NAs in joint intersectoral analysis, including the development of objectives and expected outcomes. Capitalize on L/NAs knowledge of local context and work with them to validate conclusions from analyses and assessments.
- b. Integrate L/NA data into analyses, including disaggregated data by sex, age and disability. Conversely, integrate relevant HCT/cluster data into locally or nationally led needs analysis.
- c. Identify and address analysis capacity needs of L/NAs.

Strategic response planning

- a. Explicitly reference localisation practices and strategies in key planning documents, especially the HRP, and develop sectoral and intersectoral institutional capacity building strategies, where needed. Whenever possible, response plans should be developed with an exit strategy in mind for international actors.
- b. Ensure L/NAs participate in all stages of the HPC, i.e. by strengthening their knowledge about these planning tools, supporting engagement in needs assessments and intersectoral needs analysis (see previous section), reviewing

planning and other documents, submitting projects, monitoring and evaluating the humanitarian response.

- c. Ensure L/NAs are supported to contribute to 3/4/5Ws matrix and HRP reporting requirements.
- d. As appropriate, ensure key members of the HCT/Cluster Lead Agencies contribute to local or national databases and to reporting requirements.

Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Collaboration

- a. Develop strategies to strengthen the role of L/NAs in the collaboration between humanitarian, development, and where appropriate, with peace actors²², using wherever relevant area-based approaches.
- b. Support L/NAs in contributing to the development of HDP strategies, including the development of collective outcomes ²³, in coordination with other forums, such as UNCTs. In parallel, key members of HCT / Cluster Lead Agencies could participate in locally or nationally led development and/or peace planning, monitoring and evaluation processes.
- c. Consider HDP collaboration particularly in environments where there are complex relationships between civil society and national authorities, and contribute to the strengthening of good governance practices and promoting civil society space.

Indicators – Preparedness, Response and Humanitarian-Development-Peace Collaboration

		Globally tracked	Locally tracked
1	% IAHE (Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation) in-country advisory group members that are L/NA		✓
2	% L/NAs that are organisations contributing to 3/4/5Ws matrix		✓
3	% members of Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework teams who are L/NAs		✓

AREAS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND MONITORING

18. While humanitarian actors recognize that their ultimate accountability is to affected populations, members of humanitarian coordination structures also commit to other areas of accountability that are needed to accelerate the humanitarian reform process in general and the localisation agenda in particular. Country-level accountability mechanisms should strengthen shared and mutual responsibilities of all humanitarian actors.

²² See [Engaging with States in Conflict and Armed Violence Settings – CP Area of Responsibility](#).

²³ See IASC [Light guidance on collective outcomes](#), 2020.

- a. Support L/NAs in their accountability to their constituencies and hence, their responsibility to involve them in advance of key decisions, to fairly and transparently represent their views, and to adequately inform them of discussions and decisions coming out of coordination processes.
- b. Ensure localisation is integrated into accountability mechanisms for HCT members (HC performance appraisals, HCT compacts and HCT annual workplans). At every performance review, include an assessment of HCT members performance against localisation indicators and, where failing, create a plan to take corrective measures in areas for improvement on localization. Establish regular consultation mechanisms and feedback loops (including hotlines to register concerns anonymously) to ensure HCT accountability to L/NAs as part of efforts to ensure accountability to affected populations. Support joint advocacy plans to promote transparency and accountability.
- c. Include monitoring and assessment of progress on localization and coordination in the annual coordination architecture review, cluster reviews, Peer 2 Peer support and any other related reviews and evaluations, in order to assess and monitor respective advancement and to take corrective measures, where needed. This requires, as much as possible, collecting and analyzing disaggregated data by gender, race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others.
- d. Use, where feasible, localisation self-assessments²⁴, localisation dashboards, perception surveys and partnership assessment tools²⁵ for monitoring progress at country-level (relying to the extent possible on existing global data collection processes, e.g. coordination mapping done by OCHA on an annual basis). Apply the indicators of this guidance for monitoring. Consider doing an annual, joint L/NAs and HCT/cluster ‘satisfaction review’ about the effectiveness of coordination structures, which differentiates the experience/responses of L/NAs to identify areas of improvement ²⁶.
- e. Leverage L/NA expertise and experiences to promote accountability to affected populations (AAP) and to inform the development and coordination of AAP practices and policies, including the design of collective feedback mechanisms. Ensure that L/NAs can share their best practices and lessons in relevant coordination structures. Link L/NAs to existing collective feedback mechanisms, thereby ensuring that L/NAs have access to and make use of common services.
- f. As needed, strengthen capacities and mechanisms for internal reporting of abuse, exploitation, harassment and corruption, among others, taking due regard to ensure that the administrative burden of upwards accountability is not overwhelming for L/NAs.

²⁴ See for example: NEAR, [Localisation Performance Measurement Framework](#), 2019 and Humanitarian Advisory Group and PIANGO, [Measuring Localisation: Framework and Tools](#), 2019.

²⁵ See the [Principles of Partnership self-assessment tool and NEAR’s Localisation Performance Measurement System](#).

²⁶ Additional guidance may be developed to establish standard methodologies for perception-based surveys and/or satisfaction surveys.

Glossary

This list is not comprehensive, it includes the names of United Nations Secretariat departments and offices as well as United Nations agencies, funds and programmes featured in this guidance. For a full list of entities in the United Nations System, please refer to https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/un_system_chart.pdf. It also includes acronyms for common terminology used in this report as well as definitions or hyperlinks for certain terms used within the text of this guidance.

Organizations

- **DCO** United Nations Development Coordination Office
- **OCHA** United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- **OECD** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- **IASC** Inter-agency Standing Committee
- **UNHCR** Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Terminology

- **AAP** Accountability to affected people
- **CSO** Civil society organization
- **CBPF** [Country-Based Pooled Funds](#)
- **CERF** [Central Emergency Response Fund](#)
- **GBV** Gender-based violence
- **HC** Humanitarian Coordinator
- **HCT** Humanitarian Country Team – an HCT is set up at the outset of a humanitarian crisis to bring together operationally relevant actors in a humanitarian response. This will include country directors (or equivalent) of relevant UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. The HCT is chaired by the RC (or HC, if designated) and is the highest-level international humanitarian body in the country. It is primarily responsible for strategic decision-making, and to facilitate the centrality of protection and adequate, efficient and needs-based response and preparedness. (Source: [Leadership in Humanitarian Action: handbook for the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator](#))
- **HPC** [Humanitarian Programme Cycle](#) – the HPC is a coordinated series of actions undertaken to help prepare for, manage and deliver humanitarian response. It consists of five elements coordinated in a seamless manner, with one step logically building on the previous and leading to the next. The elements of the HPC are as follows: needs assessment and analysis; strategic response planning; resource mobilization; implementation and monitoring; and operational review and evaluation.
- **HRP** Humanitarian Response Plan
- **IDP** Internally displaced Persons
- **ICCG/ISCG** Inter-Cluster/Sector Coordination Group –the group of IASC-Cluster/Sector Coordinators (assigned by Cluster Lead/Co-lead Agencies) taking decisions together, with a representative of OCHA acting as the chair (Source: [HPC Step-by-Step Practical Guide for Humanitarian Needs Overviews, Humanitarian Response Plans and Updates](#))
- **IFI** International Financial Institution
- **INGOs** International non-governmental organizations
- **JIAF** [Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework](#)

- **Intersectoral** – approaches that highlight the importance of system thinking and consider issues as a whole, across sectors, and the range of factors that collectively influences humanitarian conditions or how situations in one sector influence or impact upon one or more other sectors. Focused on intersectoral interventions and coordination (SDGs 2030, health 2020). The objective is to build synergies across sectors so as to tackle complex issues using inter/cross sectors interventions and achieving inter-related humanitarian/development goals and targets (Source: [Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework Guidance](#))
- **L/NAs** Local and national actors (please see paragraph 5 of this guidance to see listing for this category).
- **MPAs** Minimum preparedness actions
- **NGO** Non-Governmental Organization
- **ODA** Overseas Development Assistance
- **OPD** Organization of persons with disabilities
- **PSEA** [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#)
- **SDG** [Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- **WLO** Women-led organization – an IASC definition currently does not exist, however, many women-led organizations accept that WLOs are any non-governmental, not for profit and non-political organization where two-thirds of its board (including the Chair) and management and staff/volunteers (including the Executive Director) are female, and it focuses on women and girls as a primary target of programming. The Grand Bargain defines a women-led organization is one whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50 per cent or more occupying senior leadership positions at both board and staff level, although this is being challenged.
- **WRO** Women’s rights organization – closely linked to WLO, there is no formal IASC definition for these. However, the [OECD defines WROs](#) as civil society organizations with an overt women's or girls' rights, gender equality or feminist purpose.