

## **Positioning Paper on Localisation and Intermediary role by Myanmar Civil Society**

### **A. Humanitarian Actors in Myanmar in the Current Context**

Since the opening of the democratic space in Myanmar with the general elections of 2010, many international humanitarian actors landed in Myanmar as well as the emergence of several INGOs and new forms of partnership with CSOs and Local/National NGOs (LNNGO).

The new political, armed and COVID context, that since 1st February 2021 has radically transformed the country, has put all International Humanitarian actors in stand by and/or off the country, leaving LNNGOs alone on the efforts of providing humanitarian protection and assistance in a very uncertain and unsecure context. LNNGOs has been adapting to this and have been delivering the most needed services for the past two years despite the scarce resources and multiple restrictions ranging from humanitarian access; to the availability of goods and services; to communication.

According to UNDP's<sup>1</sup> projection, about half (25 million) of Myanmar's population will be under the poverty line in 2022. The United Nations<sup>2</sup> estimated that over 14 million people will need humanitarian assistance across Myanmar. The United Nations also has made a global pledge for 826 million USD for Myanmar for the year 2022. Moreover, the COVID-19 Omicron variant is increasingly proliferating under limited health infrastructure and services.

Despite increased restrictions on humanitarian access, including targeted arrests and movement blocks, local humanitarian actors and CSOs are responding with humanitarian assistance, even risking their safety and security. The current context is evident that there is an absolute dependency on local and national humanitarian actors who are front-liners and immediate responders with sufficient local knowledge and established relationships and trust.

Many local and national humanitarian actors have reinforced their links by sharing knowledge, experience, and analytics. Several networks have been created across the country, following the pioneering example of Joint Strategy Team (JST) in Kachin and Northern Shan States, the other networks such as Humanitarian Strategy Team (HST) in Northern Shan, Hand in Hand in Southern Shan, Chin Local Actor Network in Chin State, Karenni Humanitarian Response Team and Kayah Rescue Committee in Kayah State, Arakan Humanitarian Coordination Team (AHCT) in Rakhine, the

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP (April 2021) COVID-19 Coup D'etat and Poverty

<sup>2</sup> UN (January 2022) Humanitarian Response Plan Myanmar

Weed in Central Myanmar, Sittaung Than Sin in Bago and Northern Karen, Humanitarian Support Team for Myeik and many others in Karen and Mon states. More recently the creation of the Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network aims to render humanitarian assistance more strategic and coordinated in reaching the most vulnerable and far-fetched areas, while pushing the localisation agenda at the heart.

## **B. Positioning on Localisation**

Based on the World Humanitarian Summit (2016), the UN agencies and a number of international donors signed the commitments of the Grand Bargain (GB). Consequently, some international organisations also signed the commitments of the Charter for Change (C4C) and offered their support to the process and the practice of efficient localisation of humanitarian aid. The consensus has been made that 'localisation' refers to supporting the practice of locally led humanitarian action. As a part of the process, the formal humanitarian sector has committed to ensuring that there are enhanced opportunities in the field of funding; partnership values and accountability; and institutional capacity strengthening and promoting roles, along with visibility in favour of the local organisations.

Grand Bargain framework 2.0 also affirmed that "In order to achieve this impact and measure the success of the future Grand Bargain, two enabling priorities have been agreed to, (i) A critical mass of quality funding is reached that allows an effective and efficient response, ensuring visibility and accountability (ii) Greater support is provided for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs."

*For us, localisation need to **take into account local leadership** and their initiative, space, existing local knowledge, coordination mechanisms and their strategy as well as the decision-making power towards the affected communities instead of a instrumentalisation of the localisation agenda. Localisation needs to take into account the **current power imbalance** of existing internationalised humanitarian aid architecture and moving towards a real equitable and equal partnership.*

*Providing quality, direct and multi-year funding is one of the most practical requirements for localisation to be materialised. Overhead administration cost (indirect management cost) must be provided as part of institutional building.*

*We urge for mutual accountability, risk sharing and greater transparency under localisation and link it up with equitable partnership. While talking about risk sharing, it needs to go beyond fiduciary risk and the safeguarding aspect of ethical risks, since local actors in Myanmar are confronting multiple risks at the same time. Accountability towards affected populations and communities must be ensured throughout the process.*

*With this Myanmar humanitarian context; **contextualisation, simplification and flexibility** need to be the key guiding criteria. In addition to this, the **bureaucratic***

***burden must be reduced, as much as possible, while maintaining minimum requirements and accountability.***

***Promoting Horizontal Localisation, supporting local to local capacity building, and creating conditions for the development of local humanitarian leadership and its exercise in practice. Institutional and long term investment and support of local and national organisations is crucial if we truly want to carry out humanitarian localisation.***

Taking into account the above context, The Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network wants to make clear their **position and strategy regarding Localisation of Humanitarian assistance in Myanmar** being:

1. Myanmar Civil Society Organisations that include Myanmar Local Humanitarian Actors and their Network are the front-liners and most effective responders in Myanmar, playing a crucial role in protecting life with dignity and alleviating the suffering of the most vulnerable people in the most affected areas.
2. Working through Myanmar CSOs is the most efficient manner to respond to the most acute humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable communities in Myanmar, as well as to provide response for COVID-19 pandemics at grassroots level.
3. Myanmar Local Humanitarian Actors and their Networks, over the last decade, have grown in knowledge, experience and capacity and are at a mature stage to lead and manage humanitarian programs in most parts of the country.
4. Myanmar Local Humanitarian Actors and their Networks have shown their commitment and engagement with the most universal Humanitarian values and principles, as reflected in the Humanitarian Code of Conduct and the Core Humanitarian Standard among many others. Likewise, Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network are knowledgeable of IHL principles and guiding principles of Humanitarian action as well as its approaches.
5. Myanmar Local Humanitarian Actors and their Networks, are in the best position to bridge a real triple Nexus response (Humanitarian, Development and Peace), while building resilience at a community level and promoting social cohesion among communities
6. Myanmar Local Humanitarian Actors and their Networks have shown their willingness and capacity to contribute and cooperate effectively with other peer organisations, creating effective local networks at local, states/regions and at a national level.
7. Myanmar Local Humanitarian Actors and their Networks have proven to have the capacity to operate, coordinate with international actors, and operate at international management standards. Myanmar Local Humanitarian Actors and their Network members are willing to maintain and reinforcing a truly respectful partnership with INGOs, UN Agencies, Donors, and other relevant International Humanitarian Stakeholders.

### **C. Position on Locally Lead Intermediary Role**

In a broad sense, the intermediary role under humanitarian action could be somehow brokers of relationship between affected communities and aid providers or donors. According to Larissa Fast (2019), intermediary individuals, organisations, networks or institutions possess contextual knowledge, humanitarian expertise and access to local communities and to institutions at the centres of power. In this sense, several Myanmar National Non-Governmental Organization have been playing an intermediary role for many years – particularly their role has been more visible in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent coup. Those organisations experiences in working on an intermediary role are not only limited to the humanitarian work, but also link up with community development and peace-building under complex political, social and economic context which is also very much relevant with the triple nexus response to community resilience building in this given context.

Myanmar National Non-Governmental Organisations, those who are also part of Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network, have been working with several Civil Society Organisations including community based and faith-based organisations, women led organisation, minority based organisation etc., directly or through networks across the country and building up the trust and relationship for several years. Many of those locally based CSOs are acting as a frontline responder under this current crisis time under multiple challenges. Some of the recent experiences of working as intermediary roles by the national organisation under crisis are highlight as follows:

- Access to Health supported COVID CSOs grants
- LIFT supported Rakhine and Southern Chins CSOs grants
- LIFT supported small grants mechanism (Joint Strategy Team, Delta and Dry Zone)
- LIFT supported CSOs grants through strategic partnership
- Locally lead Consortium on applying Myanmar Humanitarian Response Fund
- Nexus Response Mechanism, Responding Emerging Needs in Northern Shan

National NGOs are the most relevant organisations to play the intermediary role in the current given context in Myanmar since they have already proven their long-standing working experience with several local CSOs under very challenging and complex situations. Formal Humanitarian Access is the most challenging aspect under the current scenario and the only solution that could sustain and maintain the community resilience during crisis time is through working with CSOs. National NGOs could be supportive by playing the intermediary role since they could connect with different actors and stakeholders in this given situation.

National NGOs play a critical role on providing mentoring, coaching and institutional building beyond funding for the local Civil Society organisation. Creating small grant mechanisms through National NGOs is also materialising true sense of locally led localisation agenda and it helps to create a decision-making process closer to the ground and affected communities. Accompaniment and constant coaching support is important for the CSOs to be able to mitigate associated risks.

Based on National NGOs experience in Myanmar, at least 70% of funding reaches directly to the affected communities, through working with National organisations. At the same time, most National organisations are able to negotiate with donors for the

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flexibility for implementation based on the changing context while fulfilling donors' minimum requirements and accountability. National NGOs will acts as a broker, a convener, a resource and as an umbrella for local civic action.

Based on this positive experience, donor communities should provide strategic support on the locally led intermediary role in Myanmar under the Localisation agenda. National NGOs will also step up for proactive engagement and take further role in having full commitment on this locally led intermediary role in Myanmar.

Endorsed by Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network, Local Intermediary Actors, other (2) Networks and (25) CSOs.

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