

# CSF Working Paper: Making sense of 'localisation' in Sudan



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## Executive summary

In this working paper, the Conflict Sensitivity Facility seeks to inform and enable a constructive conversation about the relationship between those working to provide aid in Sudan and the aid system in the country. Guided by a literature review and interviews with staff from international and national non-governmental organisations (INGOs and NNGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies in Sudan, it identifies and explores themes that are relevant to aid's conflict sensitivity.

Localisation is a contested term, covering issues with controversial and far-reaching implications. Talking about localisation seriously requires deep introspection from all actors to not only examine the systemic and structural nature of power within the aid sector, but also the day-to-day operational considerations that shape how aid is delivered, and its contributions to Sudan's communities. While there are many pitfalls and challenges, appropriate and meaningful localisation is one of the most powerful tools to ensure that the aid sector in Sudan does not unintentionally perpetuate conflict by reinforcing marginalisation or unequal power dynamics.

It is beyond the scope of a working paper to provide a comprehensive assessment of localisation in Sudan. Instead, this paper aims to shed some light on how the term 'localisation' is understood in the context of Sudan, what it means for power dynamics and relationships between local and national actors and international aid actors, and implications for aid actors today. It considers the main obstacles and opportunities that could shape how localisation manifests in Sudan alongside its implications for Sudanese society. It aims to provide an opening for further discussion and more sustained and focused engagement leading to practice and policy recommendations.

# Introduction

At its heart, the localisation agenda aims to address the systemic barriers and power asymmetries within the aid sector that give international rather than national or local aid organisations the most influence in shaping how aid is decided, planned and delivered.<sup>1</sup> Most observers, policymakers and aid agencies themselves agree that an aid system that is more grounded in local groups, capacities and systems would be more effective, strategic, efficient and conflict sensitive.<sup>2</sup> However, while large United Nations (UN) agencies, international NGOs (INGOs) and donors appear almost universally supportive of localisation, they still dominate Sudan's aid system, while national NGOs (NNGOs) and civil society and community-based organisations (CSOs/CBOs) are left with less resources and influence.

Among the aid community in Sudan, there is little consensus on why this remains the case. Such disagreement exists in part because there is no common understanding of what 'localisation' means. Yet, it is a sensitive issue, with many organisations reluctant to discuss it openly, creating an environment where 'all remains unspoken' about the inequalities in the aid system.<sup>3</sup>

In this working paper, the Conflict Sensitivity Facility (CSF) draws on literature and interviews with members of the aid community in Sudan (undertaken between November 2021 and March 2022) to explore contextual factors that shape the various perspectives, understandings and expectations of 'localisation' in the Sudan context, and what they mean for effective and conflict-sensitive aid.

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<sup>1</sup> Baguios A, King M, Martins A, Pinnington R (2021), 'Are we there yet? Localisation as the journey towards locally led practice: models, approaches and challenges', ODI (<https://odi.org/en/publications/are-we-there-yet-localisation-as-the-journey-towards-locally-led-practice>)

<sup>2</sup> Stephen M, Martini A (2020), 'Turning the Tables: Insights from Locally-Led Humanitarian Partnerships in Conflict Situations', Saferworld and Save the Children Sweden. See also: Corbett J (2015), 'South Kordofan and Blue Nile, Sudan 2010-15: Experiences with local and global responses to protection crises', Local To Global Protection ([https://usercontent.one/wp/www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/L2GP\\_SK\\_BN\\_2015\\_final.pdf](https://usercontent.one/wp/www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/L2GP_SK_BN_2015_final.pdf)); Wall I, Hedlund K (2016), 'Localisation and Locally-Led Crisis Response: A Literature Review', Local to Global Protection, May.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with NNGO member, Khartoum, February 2022.



## 1. Little consensus on what ‘localisation’ is in Sudan

In the space of a few years, ‘localisation’ has become a pervasive term and a popular agenda in humanitarian and development circles. At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, localisation was enshrined as a key objective of the ‘Grand Bargain’, for which 65 leading donors, UN agencies and INGOs committed to ‘making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary’.<sup>4</sup> According to this commitment, localisation was framed as a process of increasing direct, long-term funding to national and local agencies, removing barriers for direct funding from donors and supporting coordination mechanisms for national aid organisations and their leadership in international aid forums.<sup>5</sup>

This mainstream framing of localisation has been subject to wide-ranging critiques.<sup>6</sup> Some express scepticism towards a localisation agenda that is led and overseen by the very international signatories who are being asked to cede power and resources. The language, tools and narrative driving these global efforts are still those created by and perhaps best-suited to already dominant global players. In a recent article for *Frontiers in Political Science*, Oneheba Boateng suggested the approach aimed to ‘adapt this international process to local spaces’,<sup>7</sup> requiring local actors to adopt the international discourse and logic around localisation instead of using their own ideas and approaches.<sup>8</sup> This risks ‘NGO-isation’,<sup>9</sup> where NNGOs feel pressure to start ‘acting’ like international actors and groups with exactly the same ‘rationality, way of being and jargon’.<sup>10</sup>



One staff member at a Sudanese NNGO explained, “We have to internalise the codes to be respected and accepted, otherwise we are not seen as serious...we have to be like they want us to be.”<sup>11</sup> As such, national and local organisations that sufficiently resemble international organisations are rewarded for complying with the ‘imagined and ideal local’<sup>12</sup> type by receiving greater direct funding and allowing them to act as gatekeepers to other locally based groups. This creates hierarchies between the different national and local players as more formalised organisations (often those with better contacts and with more formally educated staff) are allowed to play a stronger role in shaping where and how aid is delivered.

Another concern is that ‘localisation’ efforts may end up becoming a form of window-dressing by international agencies who seek to signal that they have local partners, without making real changes in terms of where agency, funding, power and decision-making lie. The consequence of this approach can be that some international processes may include a ‘token’ NNGO for appearance’s sake, without meaningfully involving them in decision-making over how aid is used, equitable resource sharing or strategy building.<sup>13</sup>

In Sudan, the Arabic translation is also ambiguous and potentially misleading. The often-used Arabic term *tawtin* can be interpreted to mean ‘nationalisation’, which has different connotations. The term is also a homonym of ‘relocation’,<sup>14</sup> which is also confusing. The lack of a clear Arabic term for localisation indicates the degree to which the concept is imported, ‘belonging’ to international actors, rather than local actors. Naturally, it is more difficult to stimulate inclusive engagement among Sudanese society with an agenda that has no coherent meaning in their language.

Complicating things further, the term itself originally emerged during the colonial era: ‘localisation [was] the term invented by the British colonial office to describe the process by which expatriates in the public services of the former British colonies were replaced by local people’.<sup>15</sup> The relationship between colonialism and the international narrative around localisation, and the racism embedded in that history, continues to challenge both national and international actors who seek to understand what ‘localisation’ could, or should, mean in the aid sector today.

For these reasons and others, some advocates have a legitimate aversion towards the term and suggest alternative formulations, such as ‘sharing resources and power’, ‘working in solidarity’ or ‘supporting locally led processes’. This paper will address localisation as a spectrum, ranging from more limited forms where local or national organisations are somewhat engaged in shaping decisions around international aid, to more genuinely locally led forms where such organisations and initiatives largely determine for themselves how aid is designed and directed – with support from international organisations being sought on their terms.<sup>16</sup>

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- <sup>4</sup> Barbelet V (2018), 'As local as possible, as international as necessary: understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action', HPG Working Paper, ODI.
- <sup>5</sup> IASC Grand Bargain 2016–2020 website: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders>
- <sup>6</sup> Robillard S, Atim T, Maxwell D (2021), 'Localization: A "Landscape" Report: Final Report to USAID, Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance', Tufts University (<https://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/localization-a-landscape-report/>) See also: Peace Direct, Adeso, the Alliance for Peacebuilding, Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security (2021), 'Time to Decolonise Aid: Insights and Lessons from a Global Consultation', May.
- <sup>7</sup> Boateng OA (2021), 'Building Africa's Homegrown Humanitarian Systems: Restoration as an Alternative to Localization', *Front. Polit. Sci* 3: 711090, doi: 10.3389/fpos.2021.711090.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Roy A (2014), 'The NGO-ization of Resistance', *Pambazuka News*, 23 September.
- <sup>10</sup> Eade D (2007), 'Capacity-building: who builds whose capacity?', *Development in Practice* 17, pp 4–5, 630–639, DOI: [10.1080/09614520701469807](https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520701469807)
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with NNGO staff member, Khartoum, February 2022.
- <sup>12</sup> Obradovic-Wochnik J (2018), 'Hidden politics of power and governmentality in transitional justice and peacebuilding: The problem of "bringing the local back in"', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23, 10.1057/s41268-017-0129-6.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview, Khartoum, February 2022.
- <sup>14</sup> IFGD with NNGO, Khartoum, February 2021.
- <sup>15</sup> Al-Teraifi, Al Agab (1977), 'Sudanization of the Public Service: A Critical Analysis', *Sudan Notes and Records* 58, University of Khartoum (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/44947360>)
- <sup>16</sup> Stephen M, Martini A (2020), op. cit.



## 2. The legacy of ‘Sudanisation’ continues to shape views of localisation

The historical context in Sudan also has a significant bearing on perceptions of what ‘localisation’ might mean in theory and practice. For instance, localisation can be compared to ‘Sudanisation’, a term – coined shortly before Sudan’s independence – referring to the transition of important economic, political and social roles in government to Sudanese rather than colonial authorities.<sup>17</sup> This was a deliberate, formal process of decolonisation as part of the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial governance system. The same term was appropriated in the 1990s to frame the growing efforts of the National Islamic Front (NIF)/National Congress Party (NCP) government to control and influence the international aid sector. The ‘Sudanisation’ initiative came to a head in 2009 when the then-government began to require that at least part of the humanitarian response be implemented through national partners, including through government institutions.<sup>18</sup> Aid agencies and international observers, however, said that in practice this policy required INGOs to use pro-regime organisations to implement their programmes at the state level, which had massive implications for the impartiality and conflict sensitivity of aid and its potential to be manipulated or diverted.<sup>19</sup> This policy coincided with the expulsion of 13 INGOs from Sudan and government rhetoric around the need to build the capacity of national NGOs.<sup>20</sup>

For many national and international aid actors, this ‘forced localisation’<sup>21</sup>

undermined the aid sector, giving the government at the time justification to politicise aid actors' access to visas and travel permits and to influence hiring protocols and the selection of partners. Normal bureaucratic procedures were effectively transformed into political tools by the state, seeking to shape who delivered or benefited from aid, and who did not. This led to deep distrust on all sides as international aid actors sought to manage dilemmas around independence and neutrality. Government actors suspected aid actors of helping rebel groups, and NNGOs were suspected of complicity with both sides. In addition, NNGO agendas and actions were often influenced or driven by local interests and agendas. Both international and national organisations faced complex dilemmas around the level to which they would accept potential manipulation by political and conflict actors in order to reach the communities they intended to support. These dynamics and this legacy remain highly relevant today, and continue to shape the relationships and trust levels between national and international aid actors.

The history of 'Sudanisation' also highlights an important question for the localisation debate: which local actors should benefit from localisation, and how should localisation efforts and processes be targeted? Localisation initiatives could focus on a wide range of different actors, including national or local government actors, professional NNGOs, CBOs, civil society, thought leaders (including academics), religious institutions and traditional community structures. Sudan's history suggests that localisation approaches that only work with state institutions and pro-regime groups have the potential to be manipulated for political ends and to feed into conflict agendas. However, localisation efforts that seek to work in solidarity and in support of NNGOs, CSOs, CBOs, civil society and traditional community structures will require substantive changes in the way international aid actors work and collaborate.

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Teraifi, Al Agab (1977), op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> OCHA (2015), 'Global evaluation of the humanitarian fund. Country report Sudan'.

<sup>19</sup> United States Department of State (2019), 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Sudan' (<https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/sudan/>)

<sup>20</sup> Reuters (2009), 'Sudan says willing to admit new NGOs', 6 May (<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL6984857>)

<sup>21</sup> Interview with an INGO representative, February 2022





### 3. ‘Local’ actors changed significantly prior to and since 2019

Since the revolution in 2019, a diverse range of civil society groups and initiatives have come to the fore, bringing both opportunities and risks for localisation in Sudan. These include the Neighbourhood Change and Services Committees, which are largely focused on community-level support, and Resistance Committees, which are generally perceived to be more politically oriented, politically sensitive and polarised. In practice, however, the division of labour between these committees is often blurred. These groups have important roles within communities and are able to effectively reach and interact with a wider range of stakeholders than the aid sector has previously had access to, including many groups that have historically been politically and economically marginalised. They tend to be organised horizontally and function in a decentralised, rather than hierarchical, way. This is an important element, as it can be understood as an alternative to the hierarchical systems typically employed by both the Sudanese state and the international aid sector.

Consequently, these grassroots initiatives are both a blind spot and a space of confusion for international aid actors. As such, INGOs and donors must better understand the internal dynamics of these groups and their role in marginalised

spaces and conflict-affected areas. This requires gauging the impact and involvement of the Neighbourhood Change and Services Committees in different localities and communities – for example, in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) – as frontline aid delivery actors. There are both types of committees in the main IDP camps and their interactions with INGOs and UN agencies bring them both opportunities and risks. Benefits might include greater funding and increased access to new ideas around organisational development. However, international organisations may be viewed as non-neutral actors within a community, aligned with different groups or leaders, and local committees are often apprehensive about partnering with them.

There is also an important distinction to be made between complementing and supporting these local grassroots efforts, on the one hand, and co-opting and unintentionally undermining them on the other. The latter can happen when international aid actors partner with local organisations in such a way that renders the local organisations more accountable to its international partner than to its community. The aid sector should consider ways of working with local grassroots actors, based on principles of solidarity and support for their ways of doing things, rather than imposing external agendas.

## 4. Power asymmetries perpetuate barriers to localisation

The localisation discussion often focuses on funding disparities, but perhaps more important is the disparity in power between international and local players. One INGO staff member in Sudan explained, “We hate admitting that we have power. We like saying that donors have power but it’s hard for us to admit that we could be doing more to support local partners.”<sup>22</sup> Power manifests in different ways that can reinforce the status quo and make it difficult for national actors to meaningfully shape the design and delivery of aid. The staff members of international and national organisations who spoke to us for this paper highlighted several ways in which power dynamics perpetuate systemic barriers for local organisations.

**Local partners are often excluded from information flows.** This manifests most obviously as a language issue, as many donor documents, cluster (sector) strategies and operational documents are written only in English. However, it is also a social and cultural issue. Many of the most powerful actors in the aid funding system, including many donor representatives and country directors, do not speak Arabic. As many decisions and objectives are developed in a mix of professional and informal spaces, Arabic speakers from NNGOs are effectively excluded from these discussions. In addition, information-gathering exercises are often one-way and extractive. Aid programmes typically gather data from communities and local groups to inform aid activities and report to donors, but do not share their findings or plans with these communities and downstream partners.

**NNGOs are often excluded from decision-making about how aid is used and how strategies and programmes/projects are designed.** Decisions regarding project-level strategy and design are often made by donors and international organisations, even when the projects are implemented by national groups at the operational level. This has multiple impacts on both the quality of the programme and the implications for the NNGOs involved. At the sectoral level, clusters and working groups can often prove exclusive for national organisations due to the heavy use of aid jargon and acronyms, documents exclusively written in English, and short-hand use of international aid frameworks. Few NNGOs are able to navigate this highly complex and foreign arena. One staff member of an NNGO explained, “We are the only one that sits in the different clusters, it happens in English, you need to be in the loop, we don’t see other NNGOs.”<sup>23</sup> Participation in an international–national consortium does not necessarily mean that these risks are avoided.

**Institutional development and sustainability are under-resourced.** Budgets for NNGOs are often focused heavily or even exclusively on restricted operational

and programme costs, with very little unrestricted funding allocated for overheads, institutional development or staff capacity strengthening. This has obvious implications for NNGOs who struggle to invest in their systems, training and organisational development as a result. It also makes it difficult for NNGOs to cover staff costs when there are gaps in project cycles and funding. This, in addition to lower salaries in comparison with most INGOs, makes it difficult for NNGOs to retain staff and institutional memory. Once staff have a strong level of competence and experience, they are often recruited by INGOs or UN agencies, which are able to pay much better. Equal pay across organisations could go a long way towards levelling the playing field for international and national organisations.

**Donors, INGOs and UN agencies often outsource risk to NNGOs.** NNGOs are often asked to bear levels of risk that are not commensurate with their size or project management responsibilities, and that are not properly resourced. This includes security risks, as well as reputational and fiduciary risks. Because of their relative lack of power, they are often unable to negotiate better terms, and this leads to a vicious cycle as the greater levels of risk they bear reinforce the precariousness of their position. A former NNGO staff member now working with an INGO recalls, “We are at times a spillway of risks, we risk everything, but it remains invisible, being a national staff is really an everyday combat sport.”<sup>24</sup>

**Accountability must go both ways.** Strong mechanisms and norms around accountability to donors often come at the expense of accountability to local actors. One NNGO employee mentioned that, “There is this culture of naming and shaming of the national actors among the internationals, while they are all the time assessing and scrutinising us, but no accountability for them. Their interventions or decisions are never openly questioned by us or by the communities that we are serving.”<sup>25</sup> Accountability as a form of power goes beyond being able to demand compliance – it also means deciding what standards should be set, who should set them, and what ‘satisfactory performance’ looks like.

**Compliance and unattainable schedules.** Short project timelines, frequent delays in contracting and bureaucratic procedures – often alongside projects that were not well-designed, responsive to local realities, or conflict and gender sensitive – mean that NNGOs are sometimes enlisted to do work that cannot be fulfilled under such circumstances. As expressed by a state-level project coordinator, “We are trapped with this piecemeal existence, we have a six-month project where we spend the majority of the time dealing with the state and Humanitarian Aid Commission bureaucracy, we have two weeks left to execute, and then they [the respective donor] blame us for quality.”

INGOs operate pragmatically, according to the incentives and rules of the aid system. These systems encourage an approach where INGOs “want to reduce

costs and transfer risks but without really sharing power”.<sup>26,27</sup> The same applies to UN agencies. As described by Veronique Barbelet, “It is in their interests, if INGOs are to maintain sub-contractual partnerships as a means to an end (rather than as an end in itself), where harsh compliance is applied, costs are lowered, funding is of low quality and collaboration is project-based and short-term.”<sup>28</sup> This can be explained in part by the competitive nature of funding, and pressure from donors to reduce both costs and risks, as well as the resistance of some INGOs to share limited resources.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with an INGO staff member. Khartoum. February 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with an NNGO staff member. Khartoum. February 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with a former NNGO staff member. Khartoum. February 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Former national staff member interview, February 2022

<sup>26</sup> Some INGOs have deliberately and robustly sought to reduce these inequities, including by involving NNGO/CSO partners in project design and sharing overheads.

<sup>27</sup> Focus group discussion with NNGOs, Khartoum, February 2022

<sup>28</sup> Barbelet V (2018), op. cit.



## 5. Underestimating local ‘capacity’

The pervasive narrative of ‘low NNGO capacity’ raises the question of what is meant by the vague and subjective term ‘capacity’ – what sort of competences are ‘prioritised or are excluded under this term’ can be difficult to establish.<sup>29</sup> International understandings of ‘capacity’ are often aligned with sectoral demands around financial and operational accountability to accountants and bureaucrats, rather than accountability to local dynamics and communities. It should be a matter of debate as to whether a capacity to correctly fill out a financial reporting form is more important than the capacity to minimise political manipulation and conflict dynamics at a food distribution site, but donors and international organisations instinctively tend to prioritise the former. This forms part of the invisible power dynamics that act as a barrier to localisation.

The language used by different actor groups in Sudan when describing this dynamic is itself quite illuminating. International actors tended to perceive capacity as an obstacle to localisation, while national actors tended to feel that the international actors’ perception of local capacity itself is the actual obstacle. The local actors’ lack of capacity has often been framed in terms of ‘risks’ (fiduciary management), technical skills, as well as their ability to absorb funding. This in many ways has been a way of ‘policing the money’. Funding is intrinsically bound with a skewed definition of ‘capacity’ that gives preference to the capacities most prioritised and commonly found in international rather than local organisations.

Indeed, the deficiencies and shortcomings of most international actors are seldom highlighted, nor is their capacity questioned to the same level or ‘assessed in context’.<sup>30</sup> A greater appreciation of local knowledge may be a way of overcoming these power imbalances, improving the aid sector’s conflict sensitivity, and providing more ‘horizontal accountability’ between the different actors.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Eade D (2007), op. cit.



# Conclusion and recommendations

As a process, 'localisation' is as important as it is complicated. Like the aid sector itself, it has its roots in the historically challenging space of colonialism, and in systems that continue to perpetuate inequality globally. Talking about localisation seriously requires deep introspection from all actors to not only examine the systemic and structural nature of power within the aid sector, but also the day-to-day operational considerations that shape how aid is delivered, and its contributions to Sudan's communities. While there are many pitfalls and challenges, appropriate and meaningful localisation is one of the most powerful tools to ensure that the aid sector in Sudan does not unintentionally perpetuate conflict by reinforcing marginalisation or unequal power dynamics.

The following recommendations, some of which come directly from interviews for this working paper, seek to illustrate both principles and practical actions that can be taken to enable improved efforts at conflict-sensitive localisation.

## **1. Ensuring that localisation efforts are responsive to contextual dynamics.**

While shifting more of the aid system's decision-making power and resources to national and local organisations could facilitate more conflict-sensitive aid, that transition must also be informed by the specific dynamics of the context.

- Build awareness and understanding of the context among staff members (including specific sub-national and local contexts within Sudan). Staff could be encouraged to attend orientations or training courses focusing on Sudan's contexts, such as the ones provided by the CSF, or contextual knowledge or experience could be specified in job descriptions for new staff. Moreover, staff might benefit from subscriptions to news and analysis sources.
- Ensure pre-existing context and conflict expertise is used. Staff and partners with expertise on conflict in Sudan should be supported to share rolling analysis on the context, which must then be used to inform programming decisions, partners selection processes, coordination mechanisms, and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.
- Create and convene regular trusted spaces for national and local actors to challenge and clarify practices that present barriers to localisation. These might occur at the programme design stage, during evaluations, or as part of ongoing monitoring efforts. It is important to emphasise that the experiences of national and local actors differ in nature from international actors. Therefore, international actors should also reflect on their relevance and added value in the context, including their role in supporting locally led responses.

- Address gaps in the evidence base on localisation and conflict in Sudan. Although it is a headline issue in the global aid system, there is limited literature on localisation in Sudan, let alone on its connection to conflict dynamics. Future research could address major gaps in the evidence base, such as how the changing political and social opportunities and challenges facing civil society and community-based entities might influence approaches to localisation. The aid sector would also benefit from learning lessons from past locally led responses to crisis in the country.

## **2. Promoting equitable partnerships.**

For the foreseeable future, the localisation of Sudan's aid system will depend on rebalancing international–national aid partnerships to ensure Sudanese organisations are adequately supported to sustain themselves, to shape and lead their own capacity-development agendas, and to ultimately shape and lead aid design and delivery. At the same time, international bodies should not see Sudanese organisations as one monolithic entity, but should seek to understand the intricacies of their diverse roles, strengths, specialist skills and geographic familiarity – especially in such a time of shifting political and conflict dynamics.

- Ensure partnership decisions are based on solid information about the context. When entering new partnerships, international and national actors should consider how their prospective partners' roles and the partnership itself interact with contextual dynamics.
- Shift from transactional relationships focused on bureaucratic requirements to more sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships with multi-year agreements, sufficient resourcing and diverse programming, putting the experience of national partners at the core.
- Assess, recognise and learn from existing strong capacities among local actors. This requires challenging current narratives around 'organisational capacity' and capacity strengthening of national and local actors in Sudan, and helps to emphasise that understanding the context and environment is more integral to effective and conflict-sensitive aid delivery than bureaucratic competence.
- Involve NNGOs in identifying and designing their own capacity-strengthening programmes, so that they are more likely to respond to actual needs rather than perceived needs.
- Diversify partnerships beyond Khartoum-based national organisations. Invest in supporting more sub-national and local actors from marginalised areas in the different states, as well as organisations led by – or who work to support – marginalised communities, including women, young people, people who are disabled and ethnic minority groups.



### 3. Rebalancing the policy and funding spheres.

Individual organisations and institutions can do a great deal to advance localisation in a conflict-sensitive way. However, some barriers to localisation require collective changes to the spaces where aid organisations and institutions interact.

- Tackle language barriers to Sudanese organisations. Much of the coordination, analysis and fundraising opportunities in Sudan are in English, despite Arabic being the most spoken language in Sudan. This presents a real barrier to Sudanese organisations and individuals that want to shape the aid system or hold it to account. The aid system must invest more in translating such communications but should also support national and local actors to contribute to the meanings of complex concepts (such as much of the aid sector's jargon), particularly when concepts like 'localisation' do not translate well.
- Advocate for more accessible, flexible and long-term funding for national and local actors, particularly those based outside Khartoum. These opportunities must involve realistic requirements in terms of reporting and compliance. They must support accountability to communities as much as possible, while supporting the recipient's institutional development/sustainability and risk assessment capabilities. When funding opportunities are also available for international actors, they should include provisions or requirements within all projects to work more equitably with local partners, including involving them in programme design, budget development, and monitoring, evaluation and learning.
- Support spaces for national and local organisations to coordinate, share learning and collaborate in programming and advocacy. Such spaces could help strengthen collective initiatives to advance and inform localisation but also hold donors and international organisations accountable to them and the communities they work with.
- Understand the impact of policies on national actors and support locally led efforts for reform. This will help to prevent national actors from being disproportionately impacted by national- and state-level policies, and mitigate operational challenges that are inherently different to international experiences.



**The Conflict Sensitivity Facility (CSF)** works with donors and implementing agencies to support the adoption of more conflict sensitive practices in their work. In doing so, we help organisations focused on delivering humanitarian and development assistance to avoid unintentionally feeding conflict, and maximize their potential contribution to peace. Together we are building a movement for Better Aid.

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