

LOCALIZATION

POLICY





DRC

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An abstract graphic consisting of several overlapping, flowing blue shapes that resemble waves or stylized flames, set against a solid blue background. The shapes are in various shades of blue, creating a sense of depth and movement.

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Introduction



In recent years, the concept of "localization" has emerged as a central theme of reform during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul, where it was included as one of the key commitments of the Grand Bargain. The “Grand Bargain” is a unique agreement between major donors and humanitarian organizations that have committed to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action, and to promoting greater access to funding for local actors. Today, it is considered a key pillar of humanitarian system reform towards a more equitable, effective and sustainable way of designing and delivering humanitarian aid, in a global humanitarian landscape characterized by increasingly complex, interconnected challenges. Currently, 67 signatories (25 Member States, 26 Non-Governmental Organizations - NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross/Red Crescent movements and two intergovernmental organizations) have established working groups and caucuses to implement and monitor the commitments made.

In the current landscape of discussion on the topic of localization, COOPI recognizes that there is still a long way to go. Despite the efforts made, funding for local and national actors engaged in humanitarian or development emergency contexts remains limited, and a binary dynamic persists in the relations between local and international entities. This situation underscores the need for a deep reflection on the paradigm shift regarding roles within the humanitarian system, highlighting the importance of decolonizing humanitarian aid and the necessary cultural change that must accompany this process. COOPI acts as a facilitator of a change that sees greater inclusion, empowerment and leadership of local and national actors in decisions that affect their lives and their future. In this sense, this document defines the guidelines and principles that guide COOPI's commitment to effective localization, outlining the objectives and strategies for promoting a humanitarian response inclusive, respectful and sustainable.

Objectives of the document

This document seeks to clarify COOPI's strategic approach to localization, drawing inspiration from the best practices acquired in the 60 years of the organization's activity and those of the sector, to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of projects through deeper involvement of local and national actors and sharing of objectives and responsibilities. The document is part of an operational framework and guidelines that lay the foundations for medium and long-term change.

More specifically, in this document COOPI sets the following objectives:

- 1. Define the concept of localization with regard to COOPI's mandate and vision;**
- 2. Align COOPI with a localization standard defined by the global and local context;**
- 3. Incorporate localization into the organization's approaches and culture across the board, in line with its vision and operational standards.**

The concept of localization and its relevance in the humanitarian sector

6 The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has defined localization as the process by which humanitarian response becomes "as local as possible and as international as necessary". The concept of localization in the humanitarian sector is not something new: the importance of strengthening local capacities and improving partnerships between international humanitarian actors and local/national actors¹, reducing the barriers that prevent them from being protagonists of their own development, has long been recognized.

The Grand Bargain 2.0, updated in 2021, places a renewed emphasis on localization and quality of financing, underlining the importance of greater support for the leadership, operational capacities and response capacity of local and national actors, identified as the primary culprits in addressing crises, both in development and emergency settings. This approach emphasises the importance of long-term

investment in the institutional capacities of these actors, particularly in fragile contexts exposed to conflict, natural hazards, recurrent epidemics and climate change impacts. It also highlights the importance of reducing barriers and obstacles that prevent local and national actors from building partnerships with donors and international organizations or from accessing financing mechanisms.

In the context of the evolution of the humanitarian sector and the growing importance of localization, the Charter for Change (C4C) emerges as a key element, alongside the Grand Bargain and its subsequent iteration. The Charter for Change is distinguished by its specific commitment to promoting structural change that places local and national actors at the center of humanitarian action and is based on the idea that greater involvement of local and national actors not only improves the efficiency and effectiveness of responses but also strengthens the

1. COOPI adopts the definition of "local and national actors" of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), that is, "Organizations engaged in relief activities that are based and operate in their own country receiving aid and that are not affiliated with an international NGO" (<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/localisation>).

resilience of communities themselves. This initiative sets out eight concrete commitments for international actors, including the promise to transfer at least 25% of humanitarian funding directly to local and national actors and to remove obstacles that limit their effective participation in humanitarian responses. Today, the international humanitarian system with its dynamics and infrastructure faces persistent obstacles in achieving these goals, remaining far from the target proposed by the Charter for Change: according to recent data shared in the Global Humanitarian

Assistance Report 2023, only 1.2% of funding went directly to local and national actors².

This reality highlights the need to renew commitment and adopt a critical approach to overcome the obstacles to the localization process, in full awareness of the asymmetric relationships that have dominated the sector to date. It is essential to move towards a more collaborative, equitable and effective humanitarian system, which places local and national leadership at the center and provides complementary support from international actors.

COOPI's commitment to localization

Integrating the principles of the Charter for Change and the Grand Bargain in its localization agenda, COOPI aims to contribute to the rebalancing of the humanitarian sector, promoting a system where partnership, collaboration and the strengthening of local capacities are considered key elements for an effective and sustainable humanitarian response.

With a solid ten-year experience in collaborating with local and national actors in the field of development and emergency, COOPI pursues a future in which localization is no longer just a one-off practice, but a cornerstone of every humanitarian intervention. The organization wants to promote cultural and operational change, through partnerships with local and national actors and community participation, to trigger a lasting and effective localization process around which to redefine its operations.

For this reason, COOPI is committed to:

- integrate localization deeply and systematically into its strategic planning and action, making participation and cross-cutting support to local and national actors a key pillar;
- ensure equitable partnerships through adequate allocation of resources and careful monitoring, thus ensuring a coherent and responsible approach across all areas of intervention;
- support access by local and national actors to ever-increasing funding and coordination mechanisms, for long-term local leadership;
- enhance and invest further in the transfer and development of skills and management capabilities of local and national, development and humanitarian actors, moving towards greater autonomy of the same for greater sustainability of interventions.

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2. *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023, Development Initiatives.*

PARTNERSHIPS: FROM TRANSFER OF FUNDS TO KNOW-HOW

In line with its operational model, COOPI considers the creation of partnerships with local and national actors a fundamental aspect to effectively respond to humanitarian and development challenges in the contexts in which it is present.

This approach is already operational through COOPI's partnership strategy, which seeks to go beyond the inter-partner collaboration of project consortia but also extends to strengthening their capacities and creating strategic partnerships with selected local and national actors. Through a pragmatic and tailor-made approach, COOPI promotes fair and transparent collaboration, where it aspires to become less and less central, leaving space for local actors to lead crisis responses in their context. **COOPI's partnership guidelines** are in fact based on key principles aimed at building context-appropriate partnerships, such as:

- **Tailor-made approach to partnership:**

The partnership models adopted by COOPI adapt flexibly to the reference context, reflecting the variety of local situations and needs according to the peculiarities of each environment, influencing crucial aspects such as the duration of the partnership and the distribution of responsibilities, including risk sharing.

- **Strategic collaboration:**

COOPI's approach aims at strengthening partners' capacities and developing strategic partnerships for the pursuit of long-term programmatic objectives, valorizing local knowledge and expertise.

- **Transfer of skills and mutual learning:**

For COOPI, partnerships represent an opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and skills, promoting joint growth and enrichment of both parties.

- **Sustainability:**

COOPI involves local partners in the transition process aimed at ensuring project continuity and the transmission of technical skills, both directly and through specific training.

- **Joint risk analysis and sharing:**

Through joint risk analysis, potential challenges and responsibilities are identified, and strategies are developed to mitigate them. This collaborative process ensures that both COOPI and its partners are prepared to face and overcome any obstacles, ensuring the continuity and success of the project even in the face of adverse conditions.

- **Diversity and Inclusion:**

The choice of local partners favors organizations that represent marginalized groups, to ensure that the most vulnerable voices are heard and valued.

- **Results orientation:**

COOPI and its partners collaborate in identifying and achieving project objectives, sharing strategies and jointly addressing any operational challenges.

■ FAIR MANAGEMENT OF FUNDS

COOPI recognizes that to invest in organizational development, local and national actors need financial resources, and is therefore committed to promoting an equitable distribution of funds, including administrative costs, to the organizations with which it collaborates in the implementation of projects. Together with a risk analysis appropriate to the context and the intervention, COOPI provides transversal support to its programmatic partners, ranging from the coverage of support costs to capacity-building activities, in the financial plans of the projects. Finally, where COOPI plays an intermediary role between donors and local and national actors, COOPI is dedicated to promoting a constructive dialogue on the simplification of mechanisms for accessing institutional funding which currently preclude direct access to most local and national actors.



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■ CAPACITY-BUILDING

Working to support the capacity-building of local and national humanitarian and development actors plays a key role in COOPI's strategy, which considers it an essential investment for the long-term sustainability of interventions and the autonomy and growth in terms of skills of the entities involved, as well as to ensure compliance with financial standards and donor compliance requirements. COOPI identifies, starting from a preliminary analysis and in collaboration with the partner organization, training paths that promote immediate operational capacity but, in specific cases and in line with the objectives of the partnership, also organizational growth, highlighting the importance of targeted support and transfer of skills for long-term collaboration.

The main areas in which this support is articulated are related to safeguarding and programmatic-administrative management of projects.

In line with its strategic objective of "doing good well", in 2022 COOPI founded the "Scuola di Cooperazione Internazionale (School of International Cooperation)" to promote the development of skills and professionalism of operators in the sector. The School trains experts ready to cover central roles in project administration and management, and plans to expand its training offer and access to local and national actors, thus becoming a key element in COOPI's localization strategy. This will also allow the organization to pursue a gradual path of nationalization of the main operational figures.

A PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH TO LOCALIZATION

Over the years, thanks to decades of commitment alongside the affected communities, COOPI has consistently promoted targeted actions to support locally managed humanitarian responses and projects oriented towards sustainable development. In addition to the development of partnerships

characterized by a shared decision-making process and fair allocation of resources, COOPI combines a co-design approach that places local realities at the center so that communities and local civil society are an integral part of the localization process.

■ FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THIRD PARTIES

Through participation in financing schemes promoted by the main institutional donors in the field of support to civil society, COOPI acts by promoting access to micro-financing for local development while developing the management capacities of beneficiary entities. In these programs, COOPI facilitates the financing of initiatives that reflect community needs in different thematic areas, such as human development, environment and peacebuilding. The selection processes that are applied

guarantee a harmonized evaluation methodology, offering equal opportunities for participation to all civil society organizations (CSOs) operating in the reference context.

For COOPI, these actions aim not only to improve the capacities of CSOs, but also to strengthen the role of civil society and to trigger a significant change in the processes of democratization and community participation.

■ THE COMMUNITY - BASED APPROACH

Depending on the nature of the project and the context, COOPI promotes in its projects the adoption of the community-based approach aimed at fostering the participation of local communities, with a particular focus on the inclusion of the most marginalized groups. COOPI believes that the involvement of communities affected by crises in one or more phases of a humanitarian project - assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation - is highly relevant for the localization process, to ensure the valorization of local knowledge, and to develop their adaptive capacities and resilience to shocks. The

community-based approach is essential, for example, in socio-economic recovery projects, in socio-health and protection interventions, and in disaster preparedness, reduction and response. In such contexts, the adoption of community-led mitigation measures results in more effective interventions and a more sustainable reduction of vulnerability. This approach also allows to empower and encourage the full participation of communities in promoting their local development, with the support of existing administrative and traditional authorities.

Conclusion

In its mandate COOPI is committed against all forms of poverty and inequality, supporting populations affected by wars, socioeconomic crises or natural hazards, towards recovery and lasting and sustainable development. This commitment is closely intertwined with the organization's localization strategy, in the importance of enhancing local and national actors as the first to respond to crises, and has translated over the years into significant and long-term collaborations.

COOPI is actively reflecting on how to adapt to the changing role of international NGOs required by the current localization context, considering it a vital process to effectively align with the dynamics underway. To achieve these objectives, COOPI has undertaken the implementation of measures aimed at

the progressive empowerment of local and national actors with whom it collaborates, while ensuring that the support provided is coherent and sustainable.

COOPI is therefore determined to continue on its path of strengthening the capacities of local and national actors, ensuring that the established collaborations are not only effective but also fair and durable.

As an international humanitarian actor, COOPI is dedicated to promoting a cooperation model that values local actors and communities as the main protagonists of their change and development. In this context, the organization will continue to work with dedication to ensure that localization practices are deeply and systemically integrated into its intervention strategies, thus ensuring more inclusive interventions that respect local dynamics





Together we can make the world
a better place.

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