Report on
Pilot survey of local leadership and capacity building in humanitarian response

By the
Shelter Centre intern team
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This report presents results from a pilot survey conducted as part of InterAction’s initiative to better understand and strengthen local leadership and capacity in humanitarian response.

The report was undertaken by the intern team at Shelter Centre, which is a humanitarian non-governmental organization based in Switzerland, on behalf of the Shelter and Settlements team of InterAction, the largest alliance of international non-governmental organizations and partners in the United States.

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1. Background

Previously, the topic of localization in the humanitarian and development fields generally focused upon direct funding, leaving other important topics such as local staff leadership in humanitarian response under-researched. To bring other issues under consideration, Shelter Centre assisted InterAction to reach national and local organizations along with other stakeholders through a pilot survey.

Despite the abundant local knowledge and competency in many countries dealing with programme implementation in humanitarian crises, international staff usually take on the majority of leadership and coordination roles. InterAction’s Shelter and Settlements team, therefore, is undertaking an initiative to better understand and strengthen local leadership and capacity in humanitarian response to highlight the challenges that local organizations face in taking on leadership roles.

The results and conclusions of the survey are presented in this report and the recommendations could be used to inform future actions by InterAction.
In order to shed light on the research objectives, an online survey questionnaire was developed in consultation with InterAction. An online survey questionnaire was selected as a methodology because it enabled snowballing, permitted different languages to be used and it was inclusive in approach.

Using an online survey, we assumed that the stakeholders we aimed to reach would have internet access. Because of the time frame and the limited methodology used, however, it was assumed that stakeholders of the survey would not be fully representative. In this instance, we accepted this risk because of the rapid nature of the survey. These barriers were mitigated by making the online survey questionnaire short, so that it could be answered in under ten minutes.

The online survey was a semi-structured interview with closed and open-ended questions, which allowed respondents to add more detail, should they wish to do so.

- **Timeframe for data collection**
  18th of June to the 3rd of July 2022

- **Online questionnaire**
  16 semi structured interview questions, quantitative questions and quantitative questions

- **Languages**
  English, French, Hindi and Swahili

- **Coverage**
  Initially France, India and Kenya and then extended globally

- **Widening the survey radius**
  Snowball (asking the initial respondents to share the survey with other stakeholders)

- **Survey analysis**
  Summarizing the results into a report

The online survey questionnaire resulted in preliminary conclusions of the survey and recommendations for future surveys, that are presented in sections 4 and 5.
3.1 Quantitative result section - Respondents’ profile

The survey consisted of 16 questions. The first four questions were demographical and allowed us to determine the profile of the respondents, while the second part shed light on the current state of the humanitarian response.

Profile summary

The 38 total respondents were based in Africa, Asia and Europe (see figure 1). It is worth noting that although the survey was later widened, the percentages of respondents was influenced by the initial pilot countries: India, Kenya and France.

![Graph showing the distribution of respondents based in different countries]

**Figure 1:** Question 1 - Where are you based?

![Bar chart showing the type of organization respondents work for]

**Figure 2:** Question 2 - What type of organization do you work for?
3.2 Quantitative result section - Current functioning of humanitarian response

**Figure 3:** Question 5 - Which of the following types of organizations are involved in humanitarian response and conflict in your country?

- Local non-profit organizations
- International donors
- United Nations agencies
- International non-profit organizations
- Regional non-profit organizations
- Private (business)
- National non-profit organizations
- National academic and research organizations
- Government agencies (local/ national/ ministries)
- Other

Among the 38 respondents, 34 stated that local staff should be more involved in the response coordination.

Regarding leadership capacity, 29 out of the 38 respondents affirmed that existing national and local organizations have the capacity to take on leadership roles during a humanitarian response.

36 out of 38 respondents believed that local organizations and staff need to receive training and career guidance to take on leadership roles in humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

Concerning the communication among the different stakeholders, 21 out of 38 respondents believed that factual and analytical information needed to aid during a humanitarian response is generally conveyed in a reliable and timely manner.

21 of the 38 respondents identified access to resources, such as funding and staff capacity, as difficult and unfair for local organizations. In fact, to access these resources they are subjected to the same requirements as INGOs, despite their size and limited staffing resources.
3.3 Challenges faced by respondents

Summary of the results from qualitative analysis with selected supporting quotations.

Lack of trust

Respondents commented that one of the common challenges faced was the lack of trust over the capacities of local organizations to effectively take up greater leadership roles. Doubt was cast about the capacity of local organizations to take on all the needed actions during humanitarian responses on their own.

Smaller / local organizations will have local knowledge and usually niche specialisms. Larger orgs will have overview and the ability to marshal greater resources for more complex / large scale plans. Integrating these two can be difficult, [...] and strained initial relationships between local / national orgs early on have wide-ranging later repercussions

Decision-making

Respondents from the different countries highlighted that the exclusion from formal decision-making structures and processes continues to limit the space for them to take up a greater role in humanitarian response. There was also a perception that many decisions on programming are made at the donor level, which removes decision-making power from the hands of local organizations on the ground, despite their vast contextual knowledge.

Local and national organisations are highly dependent on donors for their continuity and sustainability, therefore, usually they submissively accept the argument of the donors. In order to continue their relationships with donors and international organizations, they sometimes accept that they are lacking expertise and accept to get capacity building grants, just with the purpose to carry on their relationships with donors

Lack of resources

The respondents identified a lack of access to resources, meaning staff capacity and funds, as another challenge in ensuring a locally-led humanitarian response. Lack of access to these resources negatively impacts the organizations’ ability to take on necessary tasks during humanitarian response.

Lack of leadership training and mentorship

Local organizations highlighted that they have capacities in some areas to lead, however they need tailored leadership training in other areas to ensure a locally-led humanitarian response. Lack of necessary training affects the ability to take on leadership roles.

They [the local organizations] are despaired for not having capacity to deliver on leadership & coordination of humanitarian response

Dependency on international donors

The survey respondents identified local organizations’ dependency on donors, not only in terms of direct financial support but also in terms of support for certain work capacities, such as managing funding, as a limitation to the organizations taking up leadership roles.

Insufficient resources. The decision sometimes is dictated at donor level
Respondents were asked to expand on tackling the challenges faced by local organizations and the actions that could drive improved leadership opportunities. The most common responses are summarized below.

Support from UN agencies and international organizations

Respondents of this survey were of the opinion that support from UN agencies to local organizations may be helpful. UN agencies should facilitate training and access to resources needed for capacity-building.

UN agencies could also assist with collaborations between local organizations, international organizations and donors to help build networks towards ensuring a locally-led humanitarian response.

[How can these challenges be improved?] UN and international organisations supporting local organisations

Training and education

Respondents claimed that institutional, long-term investments and support to local organizations are crucial to creating conditions for local humanitarian leadership. They recommended INGOs should mentor local organizations, to strengthen capacity, and focus on developing tailored training opportunities and courses to reduce existing gaps.

There should be a long term strategic partnership approach between local / national organisations rather than a projectized approach

Resource provision

Local organizations stated that institutional development depends on having access to dedicated support funds. Respondents highlighted that there should be access to direct funding for local organizations from donors.

Providing more funding opportunities to local partners

Communication

The respondents affirmed that to make substantive progress towards local leadership, there must be effective communication channels that allow for information sharing and exchange of ideas.

Collaboration and cooperation

Respondents identified the need for collaboration and cooperation between local organizations and INGOs. This partnership can be strengthened by INGOs working, training and collaborating with their local partners’ ambitions and development paths.

Creating the space for local actors to participate in decision-making equally as INGOs and giving them the opportunity to lead as well, while strengthening their capacity where gaps exist
This section presents conclusions made by the intern team on local leadership and capacity-building in humanitarian response from the survey key findings.

Funding is at the core of local leadership

While there are many definitions and aspects of localization, funding and local leadership proved to be strongly correlated. To be able to lead and address humanitarian responses, local organizations ought to have the ability to access sustainable funding that can ensure their continuity.

Local organizations’ lack of access to sustainable funding, however, becomes a strong challenge in local leadership, as they face constraints in meeting all the requirements and prerequisites of the donors. This often leaves INGOs, to which donors channel most of the funding, to consolidate the leading role in humanitarian response at the expense of local organizations.

Recognize local organizations in all phases of decision-making

Local organizations recognize the importance of partnering with INGOs to effectively lead and address humanitarian response. If the local organizations have no decisions in leading, planning and implementing the responses that involve them, this constitutes a barrier to local leadership.

Fill existing gaps

Respondents acknowledged the need for support in overcoming some of the challenges to local leadership. One of the ways to support is capacity building, which should be specifically tailored to the needs of the organization.

To promote the role of local leadership in humanitarian response, there need to be programmes on capacity-building and mentorship that are tailored to address specific capacities. While the survey did not assess capacities, various respondents stated that some support or assistance has been generic, rather than tailored to address their existing gaps and specific context. INGOs can work with local organizations to invest in capacity-building related to local leadership and create opportunities for decision-making in the field. Through these investments, they can also identify the gaps in local capacities and find solutions with the local organizations.
These recommendations are proposed by the intern team at Shelter Centre to inform InterAction’s next steps towards conducting subsequent surveys on local leadership.

Time consideration for a wider collection of responses

Adequate time should be allocated to responding to the next survey, so that there is wider reach, especially when snowballing is involved as part of the methodology. Additionally, time impacts the collection of data, and a longer response time would allow for respondents who have busy schedules to give their feedback. InterAction should also consider development of a sophisticated methodology and sensitization efforts of the survey.

Broadening of the survey methodology

The use of a mixed-method approach, which includes the use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, is suggested for future surveys. Using more than one method to collect data can play a part in reaching different respondents and allow for triangulation, which is useful in analyzing counterfactual data.

Identification of key contacts working on localization and local leadership

It is evident that the scope of localization may be covered by different organizations using different definitions and terms of reference. Efforts should be made to identify focal contacts working in local organizations involved in localization and local leadership efforts or those that are members of networks keen on this subject. Their involvement in sharing the survey may help boost sensitization efforts, identify respondents who are interested in the topic, and expand survey outreach.

Build linkages with in-country discussions and initiatives on localization

There are a good number of ongoing conversations and initiatives on localization in different countries. Going forward, InterAction might consider connecting with these localization focused initiatives and conversations in the countries that will be included in their surveys, in an effort to create linkages, so as to share ideas. Engagement with such programmes and discussions might inform the development of a survey that caters to the needs of local organizations, in terms of local leadership, and possibly contribute to better questions and responses through the involvement of participating organizations.

Should you wish to find out more about the next steps for this initiative, kindly contact Juli King at jking@interaction.org