



Communique from the Charter For Change Annual Meeting, 10-11 December 2019

From 10-11 December, 31 national NGOs from crisis-affected contexts and 25 international NGOs met for the Charter for Change (C4C) 2019 Annual Meeting in Copenhagen. A report and action plan will be shared in January, but this Communique highlights topline findings.

The first priority of the 35 C4C INGO signatories is to put our own house in order by accelerating progress toward empowering partnerships as outlined in the 8 C4C commitments. Our meeting reviewed actions by signatory INGOs and NNGO endorsers to implement those commitments. C4C signatories now channel over 21% of their \$1.2b of humanitarian programmes directly to local actors. Self-assessment against progress indicates that signatories are improving performance on ethical recruitment practice, but that increased focus is needed on capacity-sharing. A survey completed by 81 local NGO partners in 24 countries shows C4C signatories are honouring the Principles of Partnership to a significant extent and trying hard not to undermine local capacities through staff poaching; but that more needs to be done in being transparent with financial data, introducing partners to donors, and fully including partners in programme design. Signatories will work on these challenges in the year ahead.

Regards our analysis of next steps in the localisation agenda, C4C recommends:

- A focus on localisation and participation at the 2020 Grand Bargain annual meeting
- Concerted attempts to decentralise multi-stakeholder localisation dialogues from Geneva and Brussels to country level
- Ambitious targets for increasing local and national actor share of Country Based Pooled Funds
- New approaches to compliance, due diligence and risk management to enable locally-led humanitarian action to flourish
- A stronger gender lens across all localisation work, and targeted support to local and national women-led and women's rights organisations

Wider trends by INGOs, donors and UN agencies shape the operating environment. In a context of instability and rising autocracy, the political will of the international community to empower local civil society is challenged. Space for independent civil society is under threat. Smaller organisations find it difficult to compete in a system dominated by large actors. Last year's Grand Bargain annual review meeting focused on the important themes of needs assessment, quality funding and transparency. C4C partners recommend that the Grand Bargain annual review in June 2020 gives priority to participation revolution and localisation. To unlock a more transformative approach, we invite the Grand Bargain Eminent Person and all Grand Bargain signatories to come to the annual review with prioritised individual and collective actions to accelerate localisation towards 2021.

Secondly, we need Grand Bargain signatories and other key localisation debates to bring localisation discussions from Geneva and donor capitals to the country-level. Donors should brief and task Ambassadors and senior officials to champion this effort, and INGOs and UN agencies need to factor this into performance management of their country mission staff. To support this, we as C4C offer to co-convene country-level dialogues in at least 4 contexts between now and June 2020.

Third, on funding, the UN Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) are cited as an important route to channel funding to local actors. If donors want pooled funds to truly deliver on localisation, C4C recommends that all CBPFs and the Start Fund set extremely ambitious targets for the share of spend they channel to local actors; that donors significantly increase the level of funding to CBPFs and Start; and that all CBPFs and Start ensure strong local representation at all levels of governance. Encouraging initiatives exist, which can be built on. C4C signatories and endorsers offer to share lessons from promising models we are engaged with.

Fourth, C4C believes donors, UN agencies and INGOs need to adopt significant course correction when it comes to risk management, compliance, due diligence and accountability. It is essential for humanitarian actors, including local NGOs, to more effectively address safeguarding, fraud and risks in crisis contexts. A serious approach to these challenges should draw on local knowledge of the context, and invest in coherent country-level accountability and transparency frameworks. Local civil society – engaging with crisis-affected communities – should be central to this. International actors need to provide adequate overheads to national NGOs so they can retain staff with security, financial management, human resources and accountability expertise. UN agencies and INGOs claim significant percentages of the funding they channel to local NGOs who risk their lives delivering aid in insecure settings, but rarely resource the costs of doing so safely. C4C offers to partner with others to convene a dialogue in early 2020 on these issues.

Fifth, we prioritised gender-transformative localisation and local women leaders from Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria, Lebanon, Palestine and the Caribbean shared their insights. In some contexts, progress has been made through deliberate steps to bring local women into decision-making spaces, like Humanitarian Country Teams and Pooled Fund advisory boards. However, these gains are inconsistent, and women continue to face discrimination and exclusion from humanitarian jobs, decision-making processes and funding. They advocated for a systematic approach to their participation and establishing bespoke funding modalities for women-led organisations. Opportunities to progress this over the coming year include the 20th anniversary on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the Grand Bargain Annual Review. To support this, C4C commits to more deliberately engage women leaders and factor their priorities into both country-level and global dialogue on localisation.