

Localisation and the steps towards transformation in the ChildFund Alliance

Localisation is not a new concept and has existed in some form in international development, humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors for many years. From the emergence of participatory rural appraisal and participatory learning for action approaches in the 1970s and 80s, through UN General Assembly resolutions and initiatives by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies, Civil Society Organisations and academia in the 90s, 2000s and up to the present day – all have **revealed a strong desire to put local voices, local people and local actors at the heart of collective action**. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, brought localisation to the fore by compelling leading global donors, aid organisations and NGOs to sign up to the Grand Bargain commitments, which focussed on four main areas – partnerships, capacity strengthening, coordination and financing. It is important to recognise that not only is localisation directly relevant to and has applications across the **triple humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus**, but localisation is equally relevant to and has applications to all of the ways of working that are manifested within ChildFund Alliance members’ regional and country operations around the world.

The ChildFund Alliance commissioned this brief research study to find out the impacts of increasingly ‘localised’ programming delivered across its programming regions and the implications of this trend on donor funding (both existing and new donors). Between 1st April and 14th May 2021 The study focussed on the following objectives:

- a) Defining localisation, paying attention to distinctions between local entities and local partners,
- b) Mapping key donor trends in localisation in key programming regions (Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East),
- c) Providing an overview of local funding models and capacity,
- d) Providing advice and guidance on the potential implications for the ChildFund Alliance.

The research compiled findings from a desk review of **114 key documents and resources** (51 internal documents and a webinar provided by the ChildFund Alliance and member organizations and 64 external documents and a webinar) and **46 consultations** with a sample of key informants (42 by online interviews and 4 written responses by email) from a range of ChildFund Alliance staff from ChildFund Alliance member organisations, regional and/or country offices and two peer organisations. Overall a **response rate of 92%** was reached. Within this remit, priority countries for more in-depth analysis included: Ethiopia, India Cambodia, Solomon Islands, Bangladesh, Bolivia and Burkina Faso. However, the timeframe for the study and the small sample of key informants were limiting factors.

Defining localisation is hard to fulfil at this stage. There is no singular agreed definition; localisation has many interpretations in a diverse array of operational contexts; some donors, agencies and organisations have adopted their own definitions and have done that only after quite a long period of reflection, consultation and feedback from multiple stakeholders and these are given as examples in the report (**table 1**, with sources). Likewise, this diversity is also reflected across the ChildFund Alliance. Key informants were asked whether they had a working definition of localisation or, if not, what localisation means to them and responses fell into **eight broad themes**, in decreasing order of frequency: i) Capacity strengthening, ii) INGOs shifting decision-making authority and power to local actors, iii) Strong connections to and understanding of localities and communities iv) locally defined and locally led v) local registration and governance vi) unknown vii) empowerment of local actors viii) alignment with donor definitions. Some Alliance members are already working on their own strategies for localisation, such as ChildFund Australia, who are using some key elements of a definition based on the Grand Bargain commitments and WeWorld, who, owing to their diverse modes of operation in different contexts, will orient around a key set of principles. Their strategy will be published soon. **It will be possible to reach a consensus on a suitable definition of localisation that makes sense for the ChildFund Alliance, through carrying out the first three recommendations in the matrix of recommendations.**

Much work has been done by many actors over the last few years to bring the element of funding and financing into balance alongside other key factors of localisation, which have been framed in the **Seven Dimensions of Localisation** proposed by the Global Mentoring Initiative, which were based on the Grand Bargain commitments and the Charter4Change and **it makes sense that the ChildFund Alliance adopts these dimensions as a starting point:**

The Seven Dimensions of Localisation						
Relationship quality	Participation revolution	Funding & financing	Capacity	Coordination mechanisms	Visibility	Policy
Respectful & equitable Reciprocal transparency & accountability	Deeper participation of at risk & affected populations	Quality & quantity	Sustainable organisations & collaborative capacities	National actors have greater presence & influence	Roles, results & innovations by national actors	National actors greater presence & influence in international policy debates

When discussing localisation it is useful to establish **what ‘local actor’ and ‘local partner’ mean in practice** and definitions and perspectives from the IASC, ICVA and Plan International are presented. Key informant interviews revealed that **the ChildFund**

Alliance has a broad definition of local partners. The most common local partners are formally registered local NGOs and CBOs, followed by National Government or Local Government Institutions/Departments, ChildFund Member Country Offices or CF-created NGOs (an important partner for traditionally fundraising CF members), Private Sector companies and Academic bodies (see **table 2**). The least common are informal local CSOs, social enterprises, parastatals and the media. It will be important to take into account his broad range of local partners, when developing a localisation strategy. Next, key informants shared some of their best experiences of working with local partners, that are presented by region in the full body of the report.

Owing to the lack of clarity or an agreed definition of localisation within the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors and the problems it is trying to mitigate, two broad categories of interpretation and their resultant visions of success have emerged: a **decentralised interpretation** and a **transformative interpretation**. A decentralised interpretation focusses on trying to be more cost-effective by bringing strategic, operational and financial decisions closer to the at risk or affected areas and mostly on the distribution of 'power' between 'HQ' and the regional/country offices, which also can manifest as local registration or creating NGO affiliates. In contrast, a **transformative interpretation focusses on much stronger national capacities and leadership, where strategic, operational and financial decisions are made by undisputedly 'national' actors and ideally, national and local governmental and non-governmental actors collaborate effectively in a shared infrastructure for crisis management (or development)**. Key informants were asked to situate their organisation/office along a **localisation spectrum** (no localisation, limited, partial, advanced or strong) and in discussion it was apparent that **most respondents aligned with transformative localisation, while a few adhered to the decentralised interpretation** and some were in between the two, owing to the differences in operational contexts within organisations, as well as the need to do a listening exercise among local partners. **Overall, there is a strong desire to move along the localisation spectrum to reach advanced or strong localisation in future.** (see table 3). Therein, lie two dilemmas within the ChildFund Alliance which must be resolved:

- How will members of the ChildFund Alliance reach a consensus about their position and ways forward? It will take a lot of time, energy and effort among various levels of the ChildFund Alliance and its constituent members to close this gap (between decentralised and transformative interpretations), if at all, the majority view of transformative localisation prevails.
- What kind of roles will ChildFund Alliance members have in future, the further along the spectrum towards transformative localisation they progress?

The subsequent section introduced **three significant macro trends on the horizon, which must be taken into account** including the **existential funding challenges for INGOs** (based on research, which gives a grim outlook and urges INGOs to transform, die well or die badly and gives practical recommendations to CEOs and Board members); **the shifts in power globally and domestically** (introducing an inspiring approach by Save the Children Sweden involving 'disruption' of their business model and using the **collective impact model**); **rising forced displacement** (half of those displaced are children), bringing with it challenges of joining up responses across international borders and raising important questions regarding how portable are ChildFund Alliances ways of working and resourcing (including child sponsorship).

Following that an overview of **localisation trends among some of the major donors** is presented in **table 4**, and summary findings of key donor trends in ChildFund Alliance's programming regions (including priority countries) are set out in **table 5**. Several themes from both maps emerge, including:

- A **strong shift towards localisation in many institutional donors** (government and UN agencies),
- **Many institutional donors are moving out of middle-income countries** either owing to their own shift in country priorities or as a result of changes in national laws on subcontracting,
- **Traditionally 'donor' ChildFund Alliance members are finding it much harder to channel funds through other CF Alliance members in a long chain,**
- **Many ChildFund Alliance members rely on unrestricted funds** (child sponsorship and other forms of committed giving),
- Some ChildFund Alliance members are **actively pursuing more support from the private sector** in some countries,
- **All institutional donors have high expectations of compliance, accountability and transparency,**
- **ICR is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain,**
- **All donors have high expectations that CF Alliance members will strengthen capacity of local partners, but most only allow for capacity building activities that are directly linked to projects,**

A brief overview of the types of operational models in the ChildFund Alliance is given, before a discussion of some of the urgent issues key informants raised, which are brought to the foreground by localisation and the macro trends previously mentioned, such as:

- The **Child Sponsorship model** and NGO-isation: it is time for a reset
- **Competition for grants:** An Alliance on paper only?
- The **attraction of local funding:** competing with local partners
- **Private sector and ethical business principles,**

Next, there is a brief overview of capacity issues arising within the ChildFund Alliance such as:

- The **danger of mission creep into humanitarian responses**, where the organisation or office concerned has limited experience of humanitarian response,

- **The perceived lack of capacity on advocacy and campaigning** and the demands of Alliance-wide campaigns,
- The need to **incorporate climate change and environmental considerations** into programming and ways of working.
- The need to know **how to work with and enable other forms of civil society**, not only NGOs but smaller CSOs.

A summary of **priority areas for capacity strengthening** among ChildFund Alliances local partners is also set out, which offers opportunities for ChildFund Alliance members to work together more closely:

Organisational development	Programming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Governance •Leadership •Strategic planning •Compliance mechanisms including financial accountability •Human resource management •Fundraising and business development •Use of technology including multi-media, social media and online safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accountability to beneficiaries including complaints mechanisms •Emergency response and care of vulnerable displaced people •Child protection •Education •Disaster risk reduction •Environmental assessments •Monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement

The impact of COVID-19 on ways of working in the ChildFund Alliance is discussed, which highlights just how creative and dedicated local partners and ChildFund member organisations have been during the pandemic and continue to be, with concrete examples given under **coordinating and capacity strengthening; fundraising and financing; greater use of digital technology and multi-media; scaling up and shifting priorities**. The pandemic also posed significant challenges, as well as inequities among beneficiaries regarding digital learning, which will need to be addressed. However, one of the most exciting developments has been the **democratisation of the ChildFund Alliance network**, which lends itself well to transformative localisation in the future.

In addition to the recommendations, given throughout the main body of the report, **some closing pieces of advice on the potential implications of localisation**, are outlined which are:

- Rationalise where the ChildFund Alliance works globally, regionally and at country level;
- Develop multi-member country and/or regional strategies that ensure complementarity,
- Radically reduce costs and increase efficiency,
- Reconfigure your roles and responsibilities as INGOs – as i) catalysts and connectors, ii) technical experts iii) facilitators, coaches and mentors iv) multi-level advocates v) fundraisers
- Conduct further work on key themes relevant to transformative localisation, specifically i) **explore your expertise in humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction, climate change, resilience and environment** ii) **explore the linkages between child sponsorship models, cash transfers and social protection systems in the triple nexus**, iii) Explore the implications of the greater use of digital technology in the ChildFund Alliance.

A matrix of recommendations summarises proposed actions in three phases, as follows:

Recommendations	Responsible persons
Phase 1: First 6 months	
1. Circulate this report to all the key informants, who were interviewed as part of this study and more widely across the ChildFund Alliance to stimulate a period in which members and local partners, and, ideally other stakeholders can pause, reflect, listen and engage. (section 4)	Grants Support Committee
2. Convene a localisation working group of colleagues drawn from the different members of the Alliance and regions to take the localisation agenda forward in a horizontal structure. (section 4)	ChildFund Alliance Secretariat
3. Facilitate ChildFund Alliance members to conduct a listening exercise among the local partners, and, if possible local communities and other stakeholders, with whom ChildFund Alliance members work on localization. Find out what it means to them, how they would define it and what is working well or not working well regarding the approaches that ChildFund Alliance members have taken and are using, including opportunities for further advancement. (section 4)	Localisation Working Group
4. Set aside sufficient time and space to carry out recommendations 1-3 well. This cannot be rushed, as localisation intersects with many fundamental issues, themes, structures and ways of working. (section 4)	All participants
5. From recommendations 1-4 establish a meaningful and practical definition of localisation that makes sense in the vast range of ChildFund’s operational contexts. (section 5.1)	Localisation Working Group
6. As some Alliance members are already working on their strategy for localisation give them the space to feed their learning into the process, which will be helpful for CF Alliance members. (section 5.1)	ChildFund Alliance member organisations
7. Adopt and use the Seven Dimensions of Localisation as a sound basis for catalysing further engagement, action planning, resourcing and measuring progress in taking the localisation agenda forward. Pay particular	Localisation Working Group and all participants

attention to articulating where and how the vision, value base and principles of the ChildFund Alliance and its members align or can better align with localisation. (section 5.1)	
8. In developing a localisation definition (or principles) and localisation strategies at global, regional and national levels, reflect the broad range of categories of local partner and share learning with each other about partnerships with other actors e.g. informal civil society organisations, social enterprises, academic bodies, parastatals and the media. (section 5.2)	Localisation Working Group and all participants
9. Drawing upon recommendations 1-8, develop an Alliance-wide position paper on Localisation. (section 5.2)	Localisation Working Group
10. Commit to the Teaming Protocol and Agreement and willingly work towards reducing competition between CF Alliance members for grants and ensure that this is communicated to all levels within respective organisations. (section 5.6.4)	Leaders across the ChildFund Alliance
Phase 2: 7 to 12 months	
11. Consider using an appreciative inquiry approach with local partners for capacity assessments, which will start from a position of appreciating their unique talents, strengths and capacities that they already have. (section 5.3)	ChildFund Alliance member programme staff
12. In a spirit of mutual respect and learning, recognise and appreciate the knowledge and learning that local partners have shared with you and tell those stories, especially where your partnerships with local actors have strengthened your capacity. (section 5.3)	ChildFund Alliance member programme staff & communications staff
13. If the majority view of transformative localisation holds true from the wider engagement within the ChildFund Alliance (during recommendations 1 – 8), commit to a shared vision of and actively pursue transformative localisation strategies and refrain from pursuing a decentralised interpretation. (section 5.4)	Leadership in ChildFund Alliance (Board members, CEOs, Country Directors and Managers)
14. Facilitate an appreciative inquiry into strengths and expertise within the Alliance in relation to advancing transformative localisation and capacity strengthening needs. (section 5.7.1)	Localisation Working Group
15. Strategically review where ChildFund Alliance member organisations operate in the world at global, regional and country levels and ask the hard questions. in order to rationalise and consolidate operations and support to partners in advancing transformative localisation. From the evidence generated, critically consider reducing the number of ChildFund members per country and discuss options to merge, handover or withdraw. Work towards a one country one ChildFund member basis where possible. (section 5.6.4 and 6.1)	CEOs, Regional and Country Directors and Managers
16. Allow Regional and Country Offices to develop their own transformative localisation strategies that take into account their different operational contexts and constraints, in which visions of success of transformative localisation may look quite different. (section 5.4)	Regional Directors, Country Directors and their teams
17. In multi-member countries develop a joint country (or regional) strategy using the Seven Dimensions of Localisation Framework that is based on a shared vision and values and the active participation of local partners, children and youth. Ensure complementarity between ChildFund members and between CF members and local partners. Work towards scaling back over time and make the most of joint working with Joining Forces organisations where present to influence government policy. (section 6.2)	Leaders of ChildFund Member organisations at regional and country level where there are multiple members present
18. For ChildFund Alliance member organisations and offices, who align more with a decentralised form of localisation, consider the implications of how a decentralised interpretation of localisation affects relationships with local partners and relationships between ChildFund Alliance members, especially in countries where two or more ChildFund Alliance members are present. (section 5.4)	ChildFund Member Organisations, who have pursued or are pursuing local registration
19. ChildFund International, together with ChildFund India (CO) and the ChildFund India Society to document the lessons learned from the situation in India, arising from the changes in the law and the subsequent impact this has had on operating models and more importantly on local partners. (section 5.6.5)	ChildFund International, ChildFund India and ChildFund India Society
20. ChildFund Alliance members and Country Offices contemplating local registration should explore alternatives, including handing over to or merging with either local partners other ChildFund member organisations or withdrawal. (section 5.6.5)	ChildFund Members and Country Offices planning to register as local NGOs
21. Carry out future horizon scanning, beginning with the topics and guiding questions in section 5.5, to map out trends and how they inter-relate with the localisation agenda and implications for the ChildFund Alliance and its members. (section 5.5)	ChildFund Alliance members
22. Facilitate a more detailed and in-depth analyses of operational models, funding models, trends and opportunities in priority countries. (section 5.6.2)	Localisation Working Group with country offices
23. Commission a piece of research and partner with one or more research institutions to conduct a retrospective, longitudinal study on the child sponsorship model and child sponsorship programmes around the world in the CF Alliance, in order to gather evidence of impact and recommendations on how to transform this model so that it better aligns with the seven dimensions of localisation and is fit for purpose in future. (section 5.6.3)	ChildFund Alliance Secretariat
24. Facilitate one or more learning events for a deep dive into innovative models of working from within the ChildFund Alliance that align well with transformative localisation, including but not limited to, the Road Mapping to Self-Reliance Approach (ChildFund New Zealand), Community Protection Approach and Nexus Principles (WeWorld). (section 5.6.3)	Localisation Working Group (with other task forces)
25. Facilitate a lessons-learning exercise focussing on initiatives to reduce costs and increase efficiency and explore how these can be applied elsewhere. Within this, identify opportunities for exploring the feasibility of shared services either between ChildFund Alliance members or between ChildFund members and Joining Forces organisations. (section 6.3)	Self-selected staff from ChildFund Alliance member organisations
26. In developing a position and strategy (or strategies) on transformative localisation, build in some time and space to reflect on and discuss the suggested roles for ChildFund Alliance INGOs and feed in other ideas.	Localisation Working Group with key staff from

Consider the steps that will be needed, in order to reconfigure roles that go hand in hand with strategic goals and how this shift can be resourced. (section 6.4)	ChildFund Alliance members
Phase 3: 13 to 24 months	
27. Ensure that up to date ethical fundraising policies in place to ensure that partnerships with private sector companies do not cause children's rights violations. This may also mean reviewing current corporate partnerships. (section 5.6.6)	All ChildFund Alliance member organisations
28. ChildFund Alliance members should refrain from 'mission creep' into ways of working e.g. humanitarian response or sectors that they have limited experience in. Instead, put agreements in place, whereby other CF Alliance members, or more importantly strong local partners, can become 'the lead organisation' for those ways of working or sectors. Say no to opportunities that do not allow ChildFund member organisations and their local partners to play to their strengths. (section 5.7.1)	All ChildFund member organisations
29. Include blended methods and approaches to capacity strengthening and learning, including online and offline trainings, action-oriented learning and mentoring, as well as enabling partners and broader forms of CSOs to learn from each other. (section 5.7.2)	All ChildFund member organisations
30. Explore ways in which ChildFund Alliance member organisations can work together to share resources and technical expertise to strengthen the capacity of local partners and broader types of CSOs, both online and offline (and especially in countries where more than one member is present). (section 5.7.2)	All ChildFund member organisations
31. If there is not one already, create an Alliance-wide digital capacity strengthening platform that ChildFund Alliance and member staff and local partners can access, which can support these efforts and be a repository for online courses, notices about upcoming training events (both internal and external), lessons learned and best practices. Consider setting up a mentoring initiative for staff and partners, where mentors and mentees can be matched or rotated depending on changing capacity strengthening needs. (section 5.7.3)	ChildFund Alliance Secretariat in collaboration with leadership from CF Alliance members
32. Explore opportunities with Joining Forces peer organisations to share capacity strengthening of local partners and other stakeholders, particularly on themes that relate to joint advocacy campaigns and compliance measures related to child protection and child safeguarding. (section 5.7.3)	ChildFund Alliance Members and Joining Forces organisations
33. Allow local partners and peers to do a 360 review of ChildFund Alliance members' capacities to find out whether the ChildFund Alliance is consistently meeting their capacity strengthening requirements. (section 5.7.3)	Local partners and peer organisations with CF Alliance members
34. Plan and facilitate key pieces of work on the proposed themes in (section 6.5) in collaboration with colleagues, who wish to take the lead according to their strengths and expertise.	Localisation Working Group and key staff from CF Alliance members

To wrap up, **three useful localisation tools** are presented, which will assist the ChildFund Alliance on its journey towards transformative localisation:

- [1. The Localisation Performance Measurement Framework, Network for Empowered Aid Response, 2019](#)
- [2. Localisation in Practice, Emerging Indicators and Practical Recommendations, Koenraad Van Brabant and Smruti Patel, Global Mentoring Initiative, June 2018](#)
- [3. Measuring Localisation Framework and Tools, Humanitarian Advisory Group and PIANGO, December 2019](#)

Finally, the report concludes, that localisation brings with it opportunities for the ChildFund Alliance to strengthen its position as a family of organisations that works in solidarity with a diverse range of local partners around the world, in order to lever greater impacts for children and their families and communities on the ground. However, it also poses many challenges, particularly in light of numerous, significant macro trends on the horizon, as previously discussed.

To do nothing is not an option. To delay taking action could mean the difference between transforming the ChildFund Alliance and its ways of being and doing, in order to remain relevant and fit for purpose for the future and risking the Alliance and its constituent members 'dying well' or 'dying badly'.

Localisation is here to stay and the impetus to achieve greater localisation will increase with time. **It is the way the ChildFund Alliance achieves localisation that counts.** Taking action requires bold and expedient decisions at all levels of the ChildFund Alliance and its member organisations. The findings and recommendations of this report strongly guide the ChildFund Alliance towards transformative localisation and away from a decentralised interpretation, as far as practically possible.

The consultation process for this study has been very rich indeed and has revealed that **the ChildFund Alliance has everything it needs already to achieve this transformation** – knowledge, ideas, learning, enthusiasm, experience, committed and dedicated staff and volunteers, a diverse, network of local partners and relationships with other actors. Transformative localisation is in your hands and is only a step away.