

Locally Led Development through Quality Partnerships: ChildFund Alliance Position and Commitment Paper 2023

1. Background

The achievement of a world where governments and civil society everywhere effectively meet the needs, and protect the rights and freedoms of all their citizens requires a universal acknowledgement that poverty and humanitarian crises – regardless of where they occur – are a global concern and responsibility.

ChildFund Alliance seeks to position our members proactively within the discussions regarding locally led development. Further, we seek to have a unified statement on good practices or sector norms, as related to localization, for internal and external use going forward.

Locally led development is critical to *effective* development and humanitarian response. Different actors including civil society advocates, major donors, INGOs, academic institutes (ICSC), the European Union and government AID and development departments (USAID, DIFID, DFAT, CIDA among others) are currently framing the conversation about localization including power, race/racism, local ownership, capacity sharing and the history of AID and development.

2. Defining locally led development and response

The Alliance’s working definition of locally led development is broad, inclusive and should seek to challenge the status quo and be aligned with the following concepts. Core guiding concepts for locally led development and response have been identified from a strong body of existing evidence¹:

- Locally led development is sharing power and leadership with local actors.
- Purposeful, strategic and action-oriented transition to support the sovereignty, self-determination and full independence of local actors/partners.
- Fundamental transition, scaling up, and promotion of civil society rather than a predominant focus on INGO activity.
- Recognition of local and indigenous knowledge; understanding local systems and the priorities, strengths, and goals of local partners.

Drawing from current literature² locally led development is not:

- INGOs competing with local actors³;
- INGOs growing (fostering a transition mindset rather than a growth mindset);
- INGOs creating/registering local organizations that are just entrenching their footprint;
- Transactional partnerships;
- INGO’s working only with ‘local elites’ and sidelining grassroots organizations; and

¹ Literature review summary referenced in the Transformation in the Aid and Development Sector: Decolonising Aid. 2002. View at: <https://centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Decolonising-Aid59.pdf> Noting that this is not exhaustive and that there is a extensive literature on this subject matter released between 2020-2023.

² Localisation in Practice. 2021. View at: https://www.preventionweb.net/files/59895_localisationinpracticefullreportv4.pdf

³ ChildFund Australia Localisation Working Paper 2022

- Imposing untenable compliance and management requirements.

3. Guiding principles

The Alliance observes the following guiding principles:

- Accountability;
- Complementarity;
- Accompaniment (development with, rather than development to);
- Non-competition with local actors wherever possible; and
- Do no harm.

4. Local leadership

Adeso is a leading Kenyan-based organization who in consultation with multiple localization players, lobbyists and advocates, frame the issue that INGOs such as the ChildFund Alliance, need to address as follows:⁴

Our organizations, founded in response to emergencies and inequalities in our own societies and across the world, have contributed to numerous relief, development, and solidarity efforts over many decades. However, the established INGO organizational structures, cultures, policies, and practices have also inadvertently perpetuated historical power imbalances and biases deeply rooted in colonial and racist legacies. The result is an unequal system of aid and solidarity in which international actors hold disproportionate amount of power, influence, and resources. Despite multiple public commitments and transformative efforts by international aid actors, the people most impacted by crises, poverty and injustice and local civil society actors are too often marginalized and sidelined. This undermines our collective ability to support resilience, wellbeing, and sustainability of development outcomes in the countries where we work. (Adeso, 2021)

Adeso is one of many locally led actors that has called for transformation in the international development and humanitarian sectors. Within current discussions and debate, there are calls for major INGOs such as ChildFund to commit to approaches to partnerships and business models. *Pledge for Change*⁵ is one such campaign supported by various partner INGOs. The Pledge reflects thinking and proposed action by many partners exploring ways to progress previous commitments to localization including the Grand Bargain.⁶

5. Shifting donor environment

The adoption of new approaches and business models to advance locally led development are unfolding at a rapid pace. From the early work around the Grand Bargain to recent United Nations General Assembly side meetings, calls continue for locally led development. One such example is USAID's new Africa Localization Initiative⁷.

⁴ Degan Ali (Adeso, 2021)

⁵ The Pledge for Change – see <https://pledgeforchange2030.org/about-us/>

⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2016) *The Grand Bargain: A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, OCHA, accessed via https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/grand_bargain_final_22_may_final-2_0.pdf

⁷ USAID Localization Initiative, 2023, view at: <https://www.devex.com/news/samantha-power-announces-usaid-africa-localization-initiative-104028>

The US initiative plans to set aside funding exclusively to work with local organizations across the continent on sub-Saharan Africa and elevate their leadership to achieve shared goals. The initiative builds on learnings from Central America localization approaches.

Similarly, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade within the Australian Government has recently channelled funds directly to local partners bypassing INGOs that were previously “managing” such funds. Such actions message that donors are increasingly looking to support local partners.⁸

The European Union funding institutions, a key donor in our sector, is committed to locally led development.

6. Progressing our ambition

ChildFund Alliance, as a leader and practitioner in international development, acknowledges that we cannot remain a passive part of an established system that contributes to the very same issues of poverty and inequity that our organizations seek to address. Together, we do have the responsibility and power to transform the sector and ourselves.

Discussions regarding locally led development and response have progressed rapidly post COVID19. ChildFund’s transition to locally led development is a process that will be progressively realized over time. We acknowledge that while all members will commit to progress this work, it will happen at a varied pace across Alliance members.

The ChildFund Alliance recognizes the complexity of change management required to demonstrate a genuine transition. We are committed to a program of action in the 2023/24 period.⁹

7. ChildFund Alliance commitments 2023

The ChildFund Alliance Secretariat and Members commit to the following:

1. Locally led development and a response is a standing item at annual CEO Forum meetings.
2. Members commit to report on concrete steps and progress towards to transition along the spectrum from direct implementation to working with local partners.
3. The implementation of programs is delivered through quality partnerships with local actors and direct implementation is used in exceptional circumstances.¹⁰
4. Establish any new country presence, ordinarily, as a last resort (aligned with the Geographic Collaboration policy).
5. Review of members programs approaches and operating models and communications/storytelling via the ChildFund Alliance Program Committee and Communication Marketing Committee respectively.
6. Active participation in external dialogues, meetings, academic fora, and donor discussions to ensure the Alliance is connected to the emerging agenda.

⁸ Caritas Australia Presentation to DFAT Canberra August 2022

⁹ Plan of action to be developed by APC and CMC.

¹⁰ The reference to ‘exceptional circumstances’ includes contexts where there is a legal requirement for direct implementation by INGOs; or there are no viable options to build local partnerships.