



Brief Locally-led Humanitarian Action

Sida's Department for Humanitarian Operations (HUM), Last updated July 2026

This brief aims to translate the strategy for Sweden's humanitarian aid and international commitments into coordinated and concrete priorities and approaches on locally-led humanitarian action. This brief is intended to support Sida staff working with humanitarian assistance, foster coordination with Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and to provide clarity to Sida's partners and local and national actors (L/NAs). Sida maintains that L/NAs should be recognised and supported to fulfil their commitment to save lives and relieve suffering in their own communities. This recognition and support will not only improve the quality, but also the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian responses. Sida is committed to ensuring the equitable inclusion and leadership of L/NAs in the humanitarian system, prioritising local engagement whenever feasible and international involvement when relevant and required.

Definitions

Locally-led humanitarian action (or Localisation^{1,2}) is defined as a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses.³

The Grand Bargain⁴ signatories agreed to the following definitions of local and national actors:

- Local and national non-state actors: organisations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid-recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO or organisations.
- National and sub-national state actors: state authorities of the affected aid-recipient country engaged in relief, whether at local or national level.

IASC5 Definition of a women-led organisation:

- Local women-led organisation (WLO): An organisation with a humanitarian mandate and/or mission that is (1) governed or directed by women; or 2) whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50 % or more occupying senior leadership positions.

BACKGROUND

In humanitarian crises, L/NAs play a crucial role in protection and needs-based assistance. Thanks to their presence in the context, they can ensure effective and context-relevant responses based on quality analyses done with affected communities. They are also critical in an early response and assisting the affected population especially in hard-to reach areas.

L/NAs have wide networks, proximity and comprehensive understanding of the context-specific vulnerabilities, risks and agency of the affected populations. Therefore, they contribute to reducing the risk of violence, threats and abuse for crisis-affected people, in other words, reaching protection outcomes.

Due to their continued presence in their local and national contexts, L/NAs also contribute to efficient and sustainable humanitarian responses in the face of rapidly rotating international personnel. They are often the first to respond and often the most committed in high-risk conditions. As mentioned, L/NAs are present before, during and after a humanitarian crisis. As such, they are also often well-placed to work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and with anticipatory

¹ One of the two enabling priorities of Grand Bargain 2.0, often summarised as "localisation", is to ensure: Greater support is provided for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders.

² [Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream](#) - Home (ifrc.org) for Grand Bargain commitments on Localisation

³ [OECD \(2017\) Localising the response: World Humanitarian Summit – putting policy into practice, the commitments into action series.](#)

⁴ [IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group](#)

⁵ [IASC Gender Reference Group Guidance Note on Funding Women Led Organizations in Humanitarian Action](#)

action. Despite this, they generally lack recognition and access to decision-making in the international humanitarian system as well as adequate resources.

Significant amounts of humanitarian funding and resources are channelled to international and multilateral organisations who in turn often subcontract L/NAs to deliver humanitarian responses. Humanitarian coordination structures have also been designed and led by international actors. This has reinforced a power imbalance where international actors have greater influence and power over decisions as well as resources in formal humanitarian responses. This dynamic limits the ability of L/NAs to reach their potential as humanitarian actors.

Sweden is committed to advance work on strengthening locally-led development cooperation, including locally-led humanitarian action (LLHA), in line with the government's policy. [The reform agenda for Sweden's development assistance](#) highlights the importance of local ownership, strengthening local civil society and that Sweden will contribute to the target of 25% of humanitarian funding going directly, or indirectly, to local organisations. Furthermore, Sweden has made commitments to promote locally led development cooperation such as the [Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness \(2005\)](#), [Agenda 2030 \(2015\)](#), the [Grand Bargain 2.0 \(2021\)](#), the [OECD DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society \(2021\)](#), the Donor Statement on Supporting Locally-Led Development (2022), the [DAC Recommendation on the OECD Legal Instruments Humanitarian – Development – Peace Nexus \(2020\)](#) to mention a few.

Sida recognises the significance of locally-led humanitarian action within the varied humanitarian crises where Sweden's partners operate. As part of the [Strategy for Sweden's humanitarian aid 2025 2029](#)⁶, Sida shall aim to strengthen the ability of local actors to deliver effective humanitarian assistance including by establishing new partnerships to increase the proportion of support to local civil society organisations. Sida shall work to contribute to the global goal of at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding going directly or indirectly to local and national actors (L/NAs). Sida will also report on the proportion of funding that reaches L/NAs. In addition, Sida will simplify and clarify its guidelines and requirements, with the aim of making it easier for L/NA to implement an effective and sustainable humanitarian response.

PRIORITY AREAS

Sida's Department for Humanitarian Operations has identified the following three priority areas where progress is needed and where Sida can support stronger locally-led humanitarian action.

I. Recognise and safeguard leadership of L/NAs in humanitarian responses

Sida maintains that the recognition, engagement and emphasised leadership of L/NAs in every step of the humanitarian cycle programme, is essential to ensure better quality and reach of pertinent assistance and protection. Humanitarian coordination structures, needs analysis and funding mechanisms, both at the global and local level, should ensure the meaningful engagement, representation and leadership of diverse L/NAs. Diverse L/NAs include organisations of varying sizes and expertise, WLO/women rights organisations (WRO), LGBTQI, disability and refugee-led organisations. L/NAs' access to information, dialogue and decision-making should therefore be ensured.⁷

II. Facilitate access to quality funding for L/NAs

Expanding quality funding is a core commitment for humanitarian donors under the Grand Bargain. Sida deems that L/NAs should have access to quality funding, in addition to Sweden's commitment to increasing direct and indirect funding to L/NAs. L/NAs should, as far as possible, have access to flexible and predictable resources.

Quality funding should also include the fair and adequate provision of administrative/indirect and security costs to L/NAs to enable sustained implementation and mitigate risks in humanitarian contexts. Quality funding enhances humanitarian actors' ability to plan and deliver timely, needs-based and prioritised assistance and protection services in both sudden onset and protracted crises. Multi-year funding has been identified as a key enabler that can bring important efficiencies and quality gains to emergency response in protracted crises. In addition, Sida recognises L/NAs' need for flexibility and adaptability in politically constrained contexts.

Sida aims to facilitate access to diverse sources of flexible funding including through partners and diverse pooled funds. Sida will therefore work closely with Central Operational Partners receiving flexible and multi-year funding to ensure that the benefits of these modalities are transferred to local and national partner organisations.

6 And in line with Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance and Grand Bargain commitments

7 As in line with [IASC Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms 2.pdf](#) (interagencystandingcommittee.org)

III. Establish equitable partnerships between Sida's partners and L/NAs

For Sida, equitable partnerships between international and L/NAs are a prerequisite for a more equitable humanitarian system. Sida's operational partners are expected to develop equitable partnerships with their local and national partners rather than using subcontracting arrangements. Such a partnership should be based on complementarity and recognition of each party's added-value. Partnerships should be based on joint collaboration, transparent strategic decisions, capacity sharing and technical exchanges, not only on financial transactions. The partnerships should allow for L/NAs to contribute and co-lead in all areas of the programme cycle.

THE APPROACH

Sida recognises that in order to achieve progress, Sida needs to engage with stakeholders and responders at different levels whilst also creating an enabling environment as a donor. Therefore, Sida's Department for Humanitarian Operations has identified three streams through which Sida will have an impact and make progress on the abovementioned priority areas.

I. System influence and change as a donor

Sida acknowledges that its behaviour as a donor is an important component of the enabling environment. Sida also recognises its role in influencing change to achieve commitments and strategic priorities. Sida will advocate for locally-led humanitarian action in line with Sida's aforementioned priorities at both the global level and in humanitarian responses together with relevant stakeholders.

Sida acknowledges its role as a donor in overcoming any bureaucratic and compliance impediments that may hinder access to quality funding and more equitable partnerships with L/NAs. In order to relieve such impediments and to provide clarity, Sida will review and update its internal and instituted policies and/or guidelines where appropriate.

This workstream includes targeted support to organisations that generate global and local knowledge and strengthen the visibility, leadership and capacity of L/NAs within the humanitarian system.

In addition, Sida will provide targeted support to enabling functions in the humanitarian system both at the global and local levels, that ensure meaningful engagement, representation, and leadership from various L/NAs. This includes global actors that provide technical support to L/NAs to safeguard their inclusion in humanitarian coordination structures such as HCTs, clusters, context-specific coordination models and NGO fora, needs assessments/data collection, and funding mechanisms.

II. Direct engagement with and funding of local and national actors

It is widely acknowledged that increased direct support to L/NAs will improve the quality and impact of humanitarian responses. Inclusive and diverse locally-led humanitarian responses enable stronger connections with local voices and contribute to improving accountability to affected populations.

Furthermore, given the increasingly strained humanitarian budget, it is important to acknowledge the cost-effectiveness of supporting L/NAs. A study analysing cost structures for the United Nations (UN) and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), showed that local intermediaries can pass on money with 32% more cost efficiency than international actors⁸, which can be invested in assisting more rights-holders.

Support to humanitarian women's rights and women-led organisations

Crises impact women, girls, boys and men of all ages differently. As a result, their needs and interests differ, as do their resources, capacities and coping strategies. Despite the fact that women's meaningful participation, voice and leadership in affected settings is key to addressing humanitarian needs, funding is still largely inaccessible for women's rights organisations and women-led organisations, and their leadership is largely unrecognised. At the same time, women's rights and women-led organisations (WROs/WLOs) are a critical driving force in providing effective solutions across all sectors, often at rapid speed, including food, water, safety, shelter, psychosocial support, and life saving protection assistance, i.e. child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services.

In the brief on [Gender Equality in Humanitarian Assistance](#), Sida commits to strengthening its support to WROs/WLOs and feminist movements across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus.

In line with Sweden's commitment to LLHA and achieving the goal of at least 25% of humanitarian funding going directly or indirectly to L/NAs, Sida will increase its direct support to L/NAs and establish new, targeted partnerships with pooled funds and/or other local intermediaries, with a clearer focus on local ownership and leadership. The ambition is for these new direct funding and pooled fund partnerships to account for at least 3-5% of Sida's humanitarian funding during the strategy period.

In order to recognise and support L/NA leadership capacity and power sharing in humanitarian responses, Sida will also ensure direct engagement, consultation and dialogue with diverse L/NAs in crisis affected contexts. This requires understanding local power dynamics, including conflict dynamics, the position and

⁸ Chilande, K., Warria, B., Cullen, I., Bryson, T., Clarey, K., Mulwa, M., Mala, C., Cabot, V. and Co-Authors (n.d.). PASSING THE BUCK The Economics of Localizing International Assistance. [online] Available at: [Passing the Buck_11.18.22_FINAL.docx](#) (squarespace.com) [Accessed 16 May 2024].

potential risk of exclusion of minority or marginalised groups, gender and other inequities as well as oppressive state-society relations, which are especially challenging in politically constrained contexts. This reinforces the need to consider contextual risks (e.g. security or political risks for the L/NA caused by visibility or [perceived] affiliations), risks to neutral and impartial humanitarian action, conflict sensitivity, and do no harm approaches.

Sida maintains that humanitarian assistance must be based on humanitarian needs and the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. However, Sida deems that while impartiality and humanity are ends in themselves, independence and neutrality are operational principles which enable humanitarian assistance, by allowing organisations to access people in need and maintain safety for aid workers in complex conflict settings.

Sida recognises that L/NAs, while fully committed to saving lives and relieving suffering, may not wish or be able to work as broadly as international actors do, including across conflict lines. This means that neutrality and independence may be of less operational importance to them, than it is for international actors. However, for all actors, both international and local, principled humanitarian work must be clearly distinct from support to military objectives, to prevent the risk that humanitarian activities are seen as part of the conduct of hostilities. Sida will assess the application of the humanitarian principles by L/NAs against this backdrop.

II. With Sida HUM's operational partners through partnerships with L/NAs

The majority of Sweden's humanitarian funding is channelled and will continue to be channelled to the Central Operational Partners (eleven INGOs, UN agencies and the Red Cross Movement) and targeted operational partners of Sida's Department for Humanitarian Operations. Research has shown that UN agencies, followed by INGOs, have the greatest influence in humanitarian funding decisions and responses.⁹

As such, Sida is committed to following up on the partnerships between Sida's humanitarian operational partners and L/NAs and their contribution to all three priorities. Within this workstream, Sida has developed

Humanitarian Partnership Principles with six areas to follow-up with partners:

- **Equitable partnerships:** Partners should establish partnerships that are grounded in mutual respect and fairness rather than a subcontracting relationship.
- **Collaborative capacity support:** Partners support local partners in capacity sharing initiatives, addressing co-identified capacity needs.
- **Inclusive governance:** Partners recognise the role and ensure the inclusion and joint collaboration of local partners in decision-making, analysis, project design and exit strategies.
- **Advocacy and visibility:** Partners broker relationships with donors/funders, advocating for increased funding and decision making for local actors. As well as facilitating access, visibility, and profile for local partners.
- **Quality funding:** Partners provide quality funding to L/NAs.
- **Participatory risk management:** Partners include local partners in and collaborate on risk management; Partners provide adequate support in strengthening risk management systems including security risks and relevant protection for L/NAs staff and volunteers.

Acknowledging that L/NAs often work in high-risk environments including the frontlines of conflict affected areas, Sida expects the co-development and co-ownership of risk management strategies between Central Operational Partners and L/NAs. Sida also advocates for L/NAs to receive relevant and adequate equipment, training and support, including relevant duty of care packages, to provide humanitarian assistance to affected populations.

Sida, in coordination with MFA, will advocate for the abovementioned areas and follow-up with Central Operational Partners through meaningful dialogue, reviews and reported results.

ACTION PLAN

In addition to this brief, the Department for Humanitarian Operations has an action plan to clarify actions and ensure implementation.

⁹ 9C. Schmalenbach with Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, ActionAid, CAFOD, Oxfam, Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships (2019) Pathways to Localisation: A framework towards locally-led humanitarian response in partnership-based action. [online] Available at: [pathways-to-localisation-report-oct2019.pdf](https://www.interagencystandingcommittee.org/pathways-to-localisation-report-oct2019.pdf) ([interagencystandingcommittee.org](https://www.interagencystandingcommittee.org))