



# Localisation in the Context of UK Government Engagement With the Humanitarian Reform Agenda

Ellen Goodwin<sup>1</sup> and Alastair Ager<sup>2,3\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Oriental and African Studies, London, United Kingdom, <sup>2</sup>Institute for Global Health and Development, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, United Kingdom, <sup>3</sup>Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, New York, NY, United States

## OPEN ACCESS

### Edited by:

Kilian Spandler,  
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

### Reviewed by:

Christopher Chen,  
S. Rajaratnam School of International  
Studies, Singapore  
Joakim Öjendal,  
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

### \*Correspondence:

Alastair Ager  
aager@qmu.ac.uk

### Specialty section:

This article was submitted to  
Peace and Democracy,  
a section of the journal  
Frontiers in Political Science

**Received:** 28 March 2021

**Accepted:** 06 September 2021

**Published:** 17 September 2021

### Citation:

Goodwin E and Ager A (2021)  
Localisation in the Context of UK  
Government Engagement With the  
Humanitarian Reform Agenda.  
*Front. Polit. Sci.* 3:687063.  
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2021.687063

Localisation is a key element of the humanitarian reform agenda. However, there are continuing debates regarding its form and emphasis, linked to understandings of the local, the role of the state and the implications for interpretation of humanitarian principles of “de-internationalised” humanitarian response. This paper considers UK engagement with the localisation agenda, particularly through examination of the policies and programmes of the Department for International Development (DFID). The UK was a major contributor to dialogue on localisation at the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016 and has subsequently shown strong support for Grand Bargain commitments and implementation of a larger proportion of programmes involving cash transfers. Overall, however, advance on this agenda has been limited. The paper notes three major areas of constraint. First, logistical concerns have frequently been noted, particularly with respect to tasks such as procurement and financial monitoring. This has limited the engagement of many local actors lacking organisational capacity in these areas. Second, conceptual ambiguity has also played a significant role. Localisation is poorly theorised, and the roles, functions and capacities—beyond procurement of supplies and emergency technical assistance—that local actors may be able to fulfil far more effectively than international ones are not frequently addressed. Narrowly framed understandings of principles such as independence and impartiality, for instance, appear to severely limit confidence in engaging with local religious actors. Third, political considerations appear to have increasingly limited the space for more radical interpretations of the implications of localisation. Successive UK Secretaries of State for International Development have defended the commitment to a fixed proportion of Gross National Income (GNI) for development assistance based on strong public support for UK aid expenditure to reflect national interests and values. In this context, there are few clear political incentives to cede power over decision-making regarding UK Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to national and local actors in a manner required for fundamental localisation of humanitarian response. Even where there is a clear potential UK interest—for example, bolstering capacity of local actors in contexts vulnerable to humanitarian emergency to avert more costly emergency response—the public perception of capacity strengthening (compared to life-saving humanitarian actions) mitigates against such moves in a climate of contested public spending. The establishment of a merged Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office in 2020

signals the likelihood of a reframing of localisation. While some advancement in terms of some logistical and conceptual barriers may be anticipated, issues of both national interest and public perceptions of national interest seem likely to continue to constrain a more radical implementation of localisation, particularly with current suspension of the commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA.

**Keywords:** humanitarian action, government strategy, localisation, humanitarian reform, United Kingdom

## INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian crises are becoming more frequent, complicated and protracted. Violent conflict and human rights abuses have seen record numbers of people forcibly displaced, with more vulnerable to malnutrition, illness, violence and death. At the end of 2019, UNHCR estimated that there were 79.5 million people forcibly displaced worldwide (UNHCR 2020). The Syria crisis—despite over half a million deaths and a fall in life expectancy of over 13 years—has been displaced by the state of affairs in Yemen as the pre-eminent situation of humanitarian concern (Jabbour et al., 2021). Natural disasters are also becoming more frequent and set to intensify due to the effects of climate change, hitting low-income contexts hardest. Processes of rapid urbanisation and natural disasters increasingly happening in already fragile, conflict-affected contexts add another layer of complexity for responding to such humanitarian crises.

In an attempt to keep pace with the changing nature of humanitarian crises, many actors have urged reform of the humanitarian system. The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, followed by the publication of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA's) report in 2017: *The New Way of Working (NWOW)* highlighted the principle of localisation as a key tenet of the humanitarian reform agenda.

The UK has been a strong proponent of the agenda to make humanitarian response more effective, efficient and save more lives. Localisation, notably through putting more aid into the hands of national and local actors, has been a prominent focus of their reform efforts. However, while the UK has been highly committed to promoting localisation within a wider humanitarian reform agenda in terms of policy statements, making significant headway in certain areas, the UK has been criticised for not advancing practice at a sufficient pace. A number of internal and external constraints have created obstacles to the UK investing more significantly in, or more meaningfully with, localisation. The recent merger of the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to create the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) presents some opportunities for putting localisation at the heart of the UK's humanitarian work. It also threatens to exacerbate some existing constraints.

This paper seeks to take stock of the UK contribution to advancing the principle and practice of localisation and, through such analysis, identify issues of potential relevance for other

actors engaging with this agenda. It begins by positioning localisation as a key component of the global humanitarian reform agenda and identifying key debates framing its understanding. It then uses this as a foundation to explore the UK's commitments to the humanitarian reform agenda generally, and localisation more specifically. We then note a number of initiatives implemented by DFID coherent with the localisation agenda and the UK's Grand Bargain commitments. However, we also highlight how, despite these initiatives, UK advancement of the localisation agenda has been limited. We link this lack of advance to three major sources of constraint: logistical challenges, conceptual ambiguity and political considerations. The paper then reflects on the prospects for UK government humanitarian policy under the auspices of the FCDO and what this means for the UK's future reform and localisation efforts. It concludes with recommendations for advancing policy-making and practice impact.

## Localisation and the Humanitarian Reform Agenda

Over the last decade, the requirements for what constitutes "effective" humanitarian intervention have been called into question as the humanitarian sphere comes to terms with more frequent, complicated and protracted humanitarian crises. It is widely acknowledged that the formal humanitarian system has failed to keep pace with the changing nature of crises, remaining "...outdated and resistant to change, fragmented and uncommitted to working collaboratively, and too dominated by the interests and funding of a few countries" (former Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, cited in Aneja 2016, 3).

In response to this shifting humanitarian landscape, the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) was held in 2016, led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The WHS brought together over 9,000 participants representing 180 Member States, including Heads of State and Government, hundreds of civil society and non-governmental organisations, and partners including private sector and academia (*Agenda for Humanity 2021*). The WHS generated numerous commitments and launched many new partnerships and initiatives with the aim of making meaningful change for the world's most vulnerable people (*Agenda for Humanity 2021*). Specifically, the WHS called on states and other relevant stakeholders to commit to five responsibilities: prevent and end conflict; respect the rules of war; leave no one behind; work differently to end need; and invest in humanity. As part of former General Secretary Ban Ki-moon's

agenda for reform, “One Humanity: Shared Responsibility”, the WHS focused on reducing risk, vulnerability and overall need, moving towards more long-term strategies to deal with the underlying causes of humanitarian crises.

The WHS saw agreement of a Grand Bargain between some of the world’s largest donors and humanitarian organisations, with the aim of getting more means into the hands of people in need, in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian processes. This included a commitment to get more support and funding to local and national responders. However, signatories of the Grand Bargain also committed to working across a number of work streams to implement this vision of humanitarian action that go beyond funding including “a participation revolution” to “include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives” (Grand Bargain 2021).

Subsequently, OCHA published its report *New Way of Working* (NWOW) in 2017 which set out a vision of a humanitarian sphere better equipped to address contemporary humanitarian crises. Together the WHS and the NWOW (2017) marked a significant commitment to the principle of localisation:

“...working over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors, including those outside the UN system, towards collective outcomes. Wherever possible, those efforts should reinforce and strengthen the capacities that already exist at national and local levels” (OCHA, 2017, p. 6)

Broadly, localisation “. . . is about decentralising power, money and resources in humanitarian and development aid. It’s about local actors influencing action and making decisions throughout—with international actors (including INGOs) stepping in only if and when necessary” (Humanitarian Academy for Development 2020).

In terms of getting funding to local and national organisations as directly as possible, there has been significant engagement by the international community. For example, the Charter 4 Change, an initiative led by national and international NGOs “to practically implement changes to the way the Humanitarian System operates to enable more locally-led response” (Charter 4 Change, 2021), is endorsed by over 420 national and local organisations and 38 international NGOs. The Charter 4 Change includes commitments to pass 25 percent of humanitarian funding to National NGOs (NNGOs), and regularly publish the proportion of funding routed in this manner (Charter 4 Change 2021).

There has, however, been a broadening of the localisation agenda in recent years. While increasing direct funding to national and local actors remains a priority, localisation may also encompass ensuring that local actors have an input at the strategic and decision-making levels, with international actors—including International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs)—stepping in only if and when necessary (de Geoffroy and Grunewald 2017, 1). This sees the localisation agenda shifting beyond an instrumental approach, where local actors are viewed as implementing partners for

pre-conceived programs, to one engaging with local actors as partners throughout the humanitarian program cycle, including for processes of strategic decision-making. This requires a long-term vision for building the capacity of national and local actors to deliver aid and programming that is locally driven. In these terms, the policy framework of localisation has moved closer to an approach which emphasises local initiative and local leadership (Wall and Helmund 2016, 11).

## Key Debates on Localisation

There are a number of debates shaping approaches to localisation and its relevance to humanitarian response. One key area of discussion concerns the understanding of the local.

Proponents of localisation commonly argue that humanitarian responses that are led by local people and organisations, in which the governments of affected countries assist and are accountable to local civil society, are more appropriate and save more lives, especially in response to smaller crises. The evidence base supports a number of reasons why localising humanitarian action can make interventions more effective, relevant, appropriate and connected (see Ramalingham et al., 2013.; Gingerich and Cohen 2015.; El Taraboulsi et al., 2016; De Wolf and Wilkinson 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

For example, local actors are often first responders to humanitarian crises and can be the only responders in the critical hours immediately after a disaster strikes. In 2015 following the earthquake in Nepal, local people were at the forefront of time sensitive operations to rescue people trapped under piles of rubble (El Taraboulsi et al., 2016). In certain conflict settings or in remote areas, local actors may be the only ones with access to affected populations (Featherstone 2015; IFRC 2018). They are also generally seen as more accountable to affected populations as they are present in communities during and following crises (Gingerich and Cohen 2015).

Other potential arguments for the primacy of local actors include the fact that they have a potentially strong position in linking preparedness and response (De Wolf and Wilkinson 2019, 10). For example in Gabon, tensions were expected to rise as a result of the presidential elections in 2016. The Gabonese Red Cross Society carried out refresher courses on topics like first aid, emergency response and communication to prepare for potential outbreaks of violence. These skills were put into practice when violence did break out (IFRC 2018). For many local and regional organisations, the distinctions between preparedness, relief, recovery and development are artificial at best and ‘counterproductive’ at worst (Taylor et al., 2012). These distinctions have been drawn by international actors, whereas local actors and organisations are generally aware that their acute needs are inextricably linked to other long-term needs within the community (Taylor et al., 2012).

Being embedded in affected communities, local actors may have the best understandings of the context and can therefore identify and address particular needs. Responses to the challenge of Ebola highlight the vital role that local actors play in humanitarian responses, particularly for ensuring they are contextually-driven (PaRD 2016, 8–9). At the start of the West

Africa Ebola epidemic in 2014, public health specialists identified that certain traditional practices, namely mourning rituals that involve touching and washing highly infectious bodies, were significantly contributing to the spread of the disease. However, distrust in international bodies meant that it wasn't until interventions were made more local, establishing and reinforcing links with local faith and community leaders, that there was significant change in behaviour within communities towards safe, as well as religiously and culturally accepted, practices which helped stem the spread of the Ebola. The Ebola crisis has highlighted the importance of decentralised (WHO 2015), locally-rooted (Laverack and Manoncourt 2016), and contextually-driven (Nabyonga-Orem et al., 2016) responses to humanitarian crises.

With respect to such evidence, Fast and Bennett (2020) conclude that humanitarian action that fails to account for the diverse "local" is always less effective, less relevant and more likely to fall short of commitments to Do No Harm. They assert that while "local humanitarian action is not always better, without it humanitarian action is always worse" (Fast and Bennett 2020, 19).

However, Gingerich and Cohen (2015) are amongst those who urge that in the framing of localisation the focus on the diverse local is not exaggerated at the expense of appreciating the key role of national states. Governments hold the responsibility to respect, protect, facilitate and fulfil the rights of their citizens and are thus seen as key actors in co-ordinating humanitarian response. Countries affected by crises are increasingly resisting international assistance and demonstrating their capabilities in responding to crises. For example, in 2004 the Indian government was resistant to international interventions following the Tsunami and in 2007 the government of Mozambique successfully handled the widespread flooding experienced in the country without international assistance (El Taraboulsi et al., 2016, 2). The effectiveness of this response, it can be argued, may be more appropriately attributed to the effectiveness of state-level preparedness and capacity than to geographically local actors.

Schenkenberg (2016) suggests that an issue that did not receive adequate attention at the WHS and in Grand Bargain commitments on localisation is state sovereignty and the shrinking of civic space. Giving more control to national state actors may strengthen authoritarian regimes and lead to a shrinking of civil space. The localisation agenda may, in these terms, be used as a pretext for states to push back against the presence of international humanitarian organisations. While a lack of international presence in these contexts reinforces the needs to build the capacity of local actors, restricted access for international actors means that governments can act without international observation and create cover for national governments to also restrict the activities of civil society. Schenkenberg (2016) uses the case study of Sudan to elaborate this concern:

"In March 2009, the government of Sudan did not hesitate to stop more than a dozen international NGOs from operating in the country. It did so as part of its effort to "Sudanise the humanitarian activities" under the claim that Sudanese

organisations had more than enough capacity to do the job of their international colleagues (see Darfur Consortium, 2009). The government neglected to mention that it had also stopped three leading local Sudanese NGOs from operating. These happened to be organisations working on human rights and protection issues" (Schenkenberg 2016, 17).

Finally, tensions also remain between the desire in part to "de-internationalise" humanitarian responses and adherence of actors within the formal humanitarian system to prevailing interpretations of the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. For many the definition of humanitarianism from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)—calling for the independent, neutral and impartial provision of relief to victims of armed conflict and natural disasters—is the barometer against which humanitarian action is measured (Barnett and Weiss 2011).

Until recently, the humanitarian principles were treated as universal. However, changes in the nature of conflicts, increasingly complicated contexts in which humanitarians work and a proliferation of humanitarian organisations have created a climate in which the humanitarian principles are debated, contested and negotiated (see Hillhorst and Schmiemann 2002; Hammond 2015). Questions have been raised around whether the core humanitarian principles are applicable in all situations. For example, adherence to the principle of neutrality, according to classical humanitarianism, provides humanitarian actors with access to affected populations as it testifies to the apolitical nature of the humanitarian agency, protecting the operational space within which they operate (Kellenberger 2004; Hammond 2015).

The unquestioning adherence to the principle of neutrality has also been challenged, particularly in contexts of human rights abuses. International humanitarian organisations including the ICRC have been criticised for not speaking out against atrocities like the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. These events and the failure to speak out against them have seen some INGOs re-think their adherence to the principle of neutrality. The ICRC has apologised for its "failure to help and protect the millions of people who were exterminated in the death camps" (ICRC 2020). Medecins Sans Frontieres also questioned whether it was acceptable for them and other humanitarian organisations to "remain silent" during the Rwandan genocide in the name of neutrality (MSF 2014).

Nevertheless, for the ICRC and many other major humanitarian organisations, the ICRC's definition of humanitarianism and adherence to the core humanitarian principles remains the "gold standard" and perceived departures from those principles is actively resisted (Barnett and Weiss 2011, 29). Therefore, concerns over whether local actors are less inclined to be neutral and act impartially and independently than international actors, raising issues around equal coverage to affected populations, can produce significant resistance towards the localisation agenda (Obrecht 2014).

Debates around the role(s) of local faith actors in the humanitarian sphere, as distinct from International Faith-Inspired

Development Organisations (IFIDOs) (Jennings et al., 2021), in some ways epitomise these fears around engaging local actors for humanitarian responses. Major IFIDOs occupy a prominent place in the formal humanitarian architecture (see Gaillard and Texier 2010; Ferris 2011; OCHA 2016). Many IFIDOs were incorporated into the formal humanitarian sphere during its processes of secular codification from the end of the 19th through the 20th century, and so largely adhere to the “secular script” of humanitarianism and its interpretation of principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence (Deneulin and Bano 2009; Ager and Ager 2011, 457; Burchardt 2012).

While IFIDOs, many of whom themselves commit to the humanitarian principles, are well-established in the humanitarian sphere, questions are often raised relating to whether local faith actors are less inclined to be neutral and act impartially and independently. Concerns around equal coverage, proselytization and tensions with human rights approaches (PaRD 2016) are often presented as reasons for why local faith actors are not suitable partners for humanitarian action. These fears that local faith actors may not see humanitarian principles as the principal basis for determining response are not unfounded; many religious actors are, by their very definition, partial, and potentially politically entrenched (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager 2013). Principles of compassion, sacrifice and solidarity may play a more influential role on engagement in humanitarian response. As Burchardt notes, local faith actors generally employ strategies that

“follow their own rationality, which cuts across the formal/informal divide [and] in limited ways also engender their own form of power, even if the power remains largely invisible in formal accounts” (2012, 31).

Localisation thus requires a recognition of both the plurality and complexity of such local dynamics and the positionality and hegemonic presumption of the global humanitarian regime regarding the interpretation of such concepts as “neutrality” and “impartiality” defined according to an international perspective. However Ager and Ager have observed how the negotiation of the Core Humanitarian Standard (Core Humanitarian Standard 2021) involved international agencies clinging to the totemic value of such terms, while conceding that there were many issues on which in practice their mandate positioned them as far from neutral and, indeed, often active campaigners (2015, 92). Ager and Ager also note profound asymmetry in the application and interpretation of the principle of independence. They observe the irony and incongruity of a situation in Jordan where:

“An international secular agency receiving funding from a Western government with a clear political interest in local containment of refugee displacement declines to partner with a local faith-based organization mobilizing funds within its local community on the basis that the status of the latter compromises humanitarian principles” (2015, 92).

The challenges that local faith actors pose to the presumptive interpretation of humanitarian principles appear inevitable in

this context of global humanitarian reform. According to Hilhorst and Jansen (2010) arena approach to humanitarianism, the introduction of different humanitarian actors in the humanitarian arena inevitably renegotiates humanitarianism. Localisation brings in a variety of non-traditional actors, at the local, national and regional levels, to the humanitarian arena (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013), with a diversity of skills, experiences and perspectives. Proponents of localisation suggest that engaging with a variety of locally-led activities serves to leverage the responsibilities and capacities of states, civil society and affected communities (Zyck and Krebs 2015). However collective action and localisation may not only expand the space in which different actors, including those outside the traditional, formal humanitarian sphere, can engage with humanitarian interventions, but may also expand the understanding of humanitarianism itself.

## Localisation and UK Commitment to Humanitarian Reform

What role has the UK Government played in the evolution of the localisation agenda? The UK is a major humanitarian donor, providing around £1.56 billion for humanitarian response in 2017–2018, half of which was channelled through UN agencies. Humanitarian reform has been a prominent element of UK policy for successive governments. As the principal government actor regarding humanitarian response, DFID sought to use its influence as a major funder of UN humanitarian agencies to build their capacities to improve global humanitarian practice. It is recognised to have pursued a clear set of reform objectives including better coordination, more flexible funding and greater use of cash transfers, although the UK’s record in promoting practical reforms to date is mixed (ICAI 2018, 3).

In 2011, DFID published the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR) positioned by then Secretary of State Andrew Mitchell as an “ambitious agenda...to change the way in which we fund the system, making it more effective and efficient, particularly in the first hours of an emergency” (Mitchell 2011). The HERR signalled several areas of strategic development, presented as seven “threads”, setting out the UK’s ambition to reform the international humanitarian system. First, the UK committed to “...developing a more anticipatory approach, using science to help both predict and prepare for future disasters and conflict” (DFID 2011, 4). Second, the HERR focused on resilience, including “engaging more closely with local people and institutions so as to strengthen local capacity” (DFID 2011, 4). The third thread of the UK’s Humanitarian reform agenda was to improve leadership across the humanitarian system, while the fourth was to boost innovation for more effective and efficient aid delivery. The UK committed to being more transparent and accountable “towards both donor and host country populations” (DFID 2011, 4) as its fifth thread. Sixth, the UK sought to create new humanitarian partnerships to better influence and work within the humanitarian system. Finally, the HERR committed the UK to strengthen humanitarian space, ensuring access and protection, especially in conflict-affected

areas. Localisation was a prominent theme within the UK's developing humanitarian reform agenda and was implicit in statements in the HERR, such as:

“Donor agencies like DFID have to work with governments, and with affected people, as well as with aid agencies. They have to support local institutions rather than weaken them” (DFID 2011, 13)

The report acknowledged the important role local actors play as first responders in times of crisis. It also highlighted how the governments of many countries routinely affected by disasters have become adept at responding to them and preventing further crises. Similarly, the report criticised the persistently dominant paradigm that casts local actors as passive actors waiting to be rescued by the international community. Crucially, in keeping with analysis by other actors regarding the unsustainability of the prevailing humanitarian system, HERR concluded that to not undertake a process of localisation would be costly; with local capacities not being utilised, beneficiaries not involved in the response and the quality of delivery low.

The HERR recognised the UK's historical failures in this domain due to a previous lack of conscious strategy in relation to funding local and national actors. While DFID had undoubtedly funded many local and national NGOs indirectly, as many INGOs funded by DFID work with local partners, there had been a lack of direct funding for governments enduring crises and a “hit and miss” record of funding national and local NGOs (DFID 2011, 13).

The will to localise humanitarian responses is present implicitly across all seven threads of the HERR, calling for the integration of national and local actors in humanitarian leadership and creating new partnerships with a range of actors and groups, including some at the national and local levels such as “emerging nations, NGOs, the private sector, faith groups, and the diaspora” (DFID 2011, 9). However, the influence of the localisation agenda is most explicit in the second and fifth threads of the HERR, as evidenced above. The HERR sought to embed resilience in development programmes, which requires more of a focus on regional, national and local capacities. The ambition was to fund national and local actors more directly and to “preserve international capacity for those disasters that are truly overwhelming” (DFID 2011, 13). One of the recommendations in the HERR states that:

“DFID should promote national response capacities of governments and civil society in at risk countries including: The development of national resilience strategies; The establishment of direct funding mechanisms; Regional funding mechanisms where they add value; Through civil society organisations such as Red Cross and Crescent Societies; National and local private companies which are able at the country level to support entrepreneurial and market solutions, which will increase in resilience and improve response” (DFID 2011, 31)

The HERR also emphasised the importance of downward accountability to affected populations. It highlights an “accountability deficit” where “people who are on the receiving end of” UK assistance “are rarely consulted on what they need, or able to choose who helps them, how...” (DFID 2011, 8). In response to the review, Secretary of State Mitchell emphasised the importance of downward accountability in his statement to the House of Commons:

“We must always be accountable for and transparent about how we spend our development budget. It is taxpayers' money. That duty of accountability extends not only to British citizens and taxpayers, but to those who depend upon our aid. We will therefore make accountability central to our humanitarian work and do more to measure our own impact and that of our partners.” (Mitchell 2011)

The HERR laid the foundations for the UK to be a major contributor to dialogue on the issue of localisation at the WHS in 2016. DFID was very active in the lead-up to the WHS and as a result, elements of its thinking are reflected in the Grand Bargain (ICAI 2018, 17), an outcome that the new Secretary of State, Justine Greening, highlighted in the Houses of Parliament (Greening 2016). Indeed, following her attendance at the WHS, Greening made a number of commitments towards this new vision of humanitarianism, keen to demonstrate the UK's leadership in addressing global crises. For example, Greening (2016) highlighted the importance of finding a new approach to addressing protracted crises, committing the UK to “an extra £30 million of support to a new joint fund for education in emergencies which was launched at the Summit to make sure no child misses out” (Greening 2016). This financial commitment was to contribute to finding a new approach to protracted crises, building on the UK's Supporting Syria and Region Conference the February before, which promised to scale up the approach begun in Syria to address protracted crisis and displacement more broadly. This approach included going beyond basic needs to invest in education, jobs and livelihoods, reflecting a WHS commitment to bridge the humanitarian-development divide. According to OCHA's NWOW, this was the principle that was most widely accepted during the WHS (2017, 4). Through bringing humanitarianism and development closer together, the aim was to address the root causes of crises as well as their consequences. This commitment to the use of UK convening power was further demonstrated by the UK co-chairing a high level event specifically around new approaches to protracted forced displacement (DFID 2017). The forum agreed on five core principles, on which the UK's new approach to protracted forced displacement came to be based, known as the Wilton Park Principles. The commitment to localisation is evident in these principles, including in relation to working through, and strengthening, national and local systems and support for host communities to build local cohesion.

Subsequently, DFID's Humanitarian Reform Policy (HRP) was published in 2017, building on the HERR and following

the WHS. The HRP highlights a couple of major changes in the UK's humanitarian responses. Firstly, the UK commits to helping other countries prepare for humanitarian crises, through building resilience and resolving conflicts, not just responding when disaster strikes. The HRP also commits to bridging the humanitarian-development divide and pushing for radical reform of the international system to make it more efficient and innovative, including working with the private sector.

Once again, the role of localisation is implicit throughout: seeking to build the capacity of local and national actors, and strengthen international capacity to step in when national and local systems are overwhelmed. The HRP builds on the UK government's response to Lord Ashdown's HERR, highlighting the importance of "building the resilience of individuals, communities and countries to withstand shocks and recover from them" (DFID 2017, 5) as one of their seven policy goals for improving the effectiveness of UK humanitarian support. The HRP further recognises that local actors are first responders in times of crises and commits to strengthening "local actors" ability to respond...and the capacity of national governments and regional organisations to anticipate disasters and respond accordingly' (DFID 2017, 9). The HRP demonstrates the UK's persistent commitment through policy statements to getting humanitarian assistance more directly into the hands of affected populations. It is one of many examples of the UK's high level commitments to humanitarian reform in general and localisation specifically.

## The UK's Humanitarian Reform Agenda and Localisation: Mixed Results

A concrete example of the UK's efforts to bring about reform within the UN-led humanitarian sector is its introduction of Payment by Results to UN humanitarian agencies. This initiative sees 30 percent of the funding to UN humanitarian agencies conditional on their making satisfactory progress as a group towards reform objectives from the WHS and the Grand Bargain. If sufficient progress is not made, the UK may withhold some of the funding. The remaining 70 percent of funding remains guaranteed. However, failure to make sufficient progress towards the outlined reform agenda could affect the amount of core funding offered to agencies in the future.

One of the criteria against which the UK's Payment by Results initiative measures the performance of UN agencies is strengthening localisation and delivering through national and local partners. The UK has implemented a number of initiatives through DFID, coherent with the localisation agenda, including support for the Grand Bargain commitments and the implementation of a larger proportion of programmes involving cash transfers. In keeping with commitments made as part of the Grand Bargain, the UK has been "...highly influential in promoting the use of cash transfers" (ICAI 2018, 18). In the area of cash-based programming for improving global humanitarian practice DFID has been recognised as a thought leader, encouraging the use of cash transfers as a form of humanitarian support, instead of distributing food and household items (ICAI 2018, 18). DFID has approached cash-

based programming in a structured way, building evidence to support its case, engaging in high-level advocacy and funding initiatives at country level. DFID has played a key role in the growing use of cash in humanitarian response, which doubled in volume between 2014 and 2016 to \$2.8 billion (ICAI 2018, iii).

While cash transfers may not always be appropriate, and risks in different settings need to be taken into account, increasing the use and coordination of cash programming was one of the Grand Bargain's commitments to getting more aid into the hands of those in need, to empower them to make the decisions that affect their lives. Cash has been presented as a "catalyst" for positive reform in the humanitarian sphere, with links to other reforms including the push for localisation. In the right conditions, cash transfers can stimulate local markets while affording more dignity to the recipients (World Bank Group 2016, viii). There is evidence that cash transfers can help effectively meet the needs of people in fragile contexts instead of, or to complement, in-kind aid. Beyond the benefits for local and national actors, cash-based programming is inherently multi-actor and multisector with national actors, governments, donors, the private sector and civil society playing critical roles in ensuring improvements for the humanitarian sphere's effectiveness (World Bank Group 2016, viii).

Perhaps the most explicit example of the UK's commitment to put national and local actors at the centre of humanitarian responses is DFID's Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP). This £40 million project, which ran from 2014 to 2019, worked in high risk countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Jordan, Myanmar, Philippines, Bangladesh and Pakistan) to promote disaster preparedness. The overall objective of DEPP was to "improve the quality and speed of humanitarian response in countries that are at risk of natural disasters of humanitarian emergencies" (Pham et al., 2018, 6), with one of its key approaches to build the capacity of local and national humanitarian staff and communities. The programme was delivered through support to two non-governmental consortia: the START network and the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network (CDAC-N).

DFID was the majority funder of the START network, which represents one of the most tangible of its investments in the localisation agenda. The START network is made up of aid agencies from five continents which seek to drive change in the global aid system through innovation, fast funding, early action, and localisation (START Network 2021). The START network embodies the principles of localisation by seeking to address what it sees as the main challenges to effective humanitarian responses including: slow and reactive funding, centralised decision-making, and an aversion to change. It does this through a number of initiatives such as the START fund, a multi-donor pooled fund managed exclusively by NGOs to provide rapid financing to under-funded, small to medium scale crises, to address spikes in chronic humanitarian crises, and to act in anticipation of impending crises. For example, the START Fund in Bangladesh has piloted a new way of decentralised working through national and regional hubs which are in control of their own funds to which local and national NGOs have direct access.

The UK's localisation efforts in the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) sector also extends to funding the Humanitarian Leadership Academy which seeks to build skills in the DRR sector, particularly at the local and national levels in disaster-affected countries (DFID 2017, 4). Collaboration is a key element of the Academy's work, with partners ranging from

“technology companies to universities, local communities to multilateral corporations, drawing on the knowledge, expertise and resources of a range of organisations to ensure the best solutions are found for those most in need” (Humanitarian Leadership Academy, 2021).

A pertinent example of a DEPP project that epitomises its commitment to the localisation agenda, was Shifting the Power (STP), led by Action Aid and CAFOD, alongside Christian Aid, Tearfund, Concern Worldwide and Oxfam in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Kenya and the DRC. The aim of the project was

“[t]o support local actors to take their place alongside international actors in order to create a balanced humanitarian system that is more responsive and accountable to disaster-affected communities” (Pham et al., 2018, 6).

Another DEPP project that seeks to encourage the localisation of disaster response is Financial Enablers (FE), led by Oxfam alongside Tearfund and Christian Aid and implemented in the Philippines. The goal here was

“[t]o transfer humanitarian capacity, autonomy and decision making to organisations closer to people affected by crisis, as a way of facilitating more effective and appropriate aid” (Pham et al., 2018, 6).

An external evaluation by Harvard's Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) found that the constellation of projects that made up DEPP had made some headway in putting local and national actors at the heart of responses to disasters. For example, the evaluation highlights how DEPP helped build buy-in from government agencies for disaster preparedness, develop early warning systems and build capacity across stakeholders including national and local actors. Similarly, there were some real improvements in individual, organisational and community preparedness among DEPP beneficiaries, particularly among local organisations (Pham et al., 2018, 13). Changes in the capacity of local organisations led some of them to be eligible for UN pooled funding, securing external emergency response funds and being given leadership roles in humanitarian response (Pham et al., 2018). However, the most significant area of progress was seen in attitudinal changes towards—and increased support for—the localisation agenda, including how international NGOs consider, address and involve local actors and communities.

While the UK's investments in cash-based programming have been successful, many of its other reform objectives have not been

pursued as intensely and with mixed results (ICAI 2018, 27). Indeed, ICAI has suggested that localisation is not being actively pursued, except by mechanisms such as pooled funds which only make up a small percentage of humanitarian funding (ICAI 2018, 30). Despite the commitments set out in the DFID 2017 HRP, in practice, DFID was judged to have appeared “ambivalent” about the objective of localisation (ICAI 2018, 30). While qualitative and quantitative data from projects across DEPP for example highlight changes in attitudes towards the localisation agenda, they were not translated into quantitative behavioural change related to localisation (Pham et al., 2018, 18). In general, attitudinal change towards, and increased acceptance of, the localisation agenda has been instigated, but the will to localise humanitarian responses has not been sufficiently put into practice. This, despite the UK's commitment to humanitarian reform generally, and localisation specifically, overall advancement towards ensuring that humanitarian action is “as local as possible as international as necessary” (Barbelet 2018, 1) has remained limited.

## Barriers for the UK's Progress on Localisation

This paper suggests three major barriers that have constrained the UK's progress towards localising its humanitarian efforts. While this section will focus on the experiences of DFID in the UK, we suggest that these constraints may be a useful lens through which to consider the progress of other humanitarian actors.

### Logistical Concerns

Logistical concerns around localisation have frequently been noted, particularly with respect to tasks such as procurement and financial monitoring. This has limited the engagement of many local actors lacking organisational capacity in these areas. On occasion, DFID's reform agenda has created logistical constraints that have not only failed to support localisation efforts but have potentially undermined them. For example, the ICAI (2018) independent review found that DFID's Payment by Results initiatives made the UK an increasingly demanding donor. Introducing new reporting and due diligence requirements that give greater oversight of how recipients manage UK aid funds was time consuming for both recipients and DFID staff, potentially drawing time away from programme implementation. Similarly, subsequent to press coverage of exploitation of procurement systems by certain suppliers, Secretary of State Patel initiated a “supplier review” which led to DFID requiring all implementing partners to engage with more extensive due diligence checks of their local partners and to report on their delivery chains. As a result, DFID often lacked the capacity in country offices to provide funds directly to local partners with weak management systems or directly support their capacity development.

Similarly, in keeping with DFID's Civil Society Partnership Review (CSPR) which was published in 2016, DFID consolidated its centrally distributed funding for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) into a few larger, competitive funding instruments (ICAI 2019, 5). These funding instruments, aimed at increasing

engagement with CSOs, included stringent conditions and requirements on CSOs awarded grants. While these criteria individually could be justified, they were judged “collectively onerous” (ICAI 2019, 6). They require high investments costs to develop proposals leading to a low success rate for CSOs winning grants. Ultimately, such stringent conditions and requirements create significant obstacles for CSOs gaining funding.

DFID has thus clearly struggled to develop mechanisms through which to work with a broader array of actors. Crucially, DFID has not found a means to mobilise the flexible funding needed to support local initiatives (ICAI 2018, 31). The lack of flexible funding presents significant constraints on putting commitments to localisation into practice. The need for this was recognised in the HERR back in 2021, though subsequently the call for transparency appears to have trumped speed and flexibility.

A further logistical constraint to localisation for DFID relates to a lack of staff capacity. ICAI (2018) independent review highlights that while DFID has begun to align its influencing efforts at the international and country levels, its humanitarian cadre has lacked the resources to support the grand ambitions supported at the Grand Bargain. In regards to DFID’s broad reform agenda, which includes an emphasis on localisation, ICAI (2018) review suggests that DFID had not specified the changes it wanted to see nor had it equipped its humanitarian cadre to take issues of localisation forward. ICAI (2018) recommended in their evaluation that DFID step up its engagement in international working groups that seek to translate the Grand Bargain Principles into practical measures to provide guidance to country offices on how to pursue these measures.

There are a number of things that the UK needs to do to overcome some of these logistical constraints to localisation. The HII’s evaluation of DEPP calls for further understandings of strategies that might enable donors to more easily support local counterparts within the context of risk aversion and due diligence processes (Pham et al., 2018, 28). The UK clearly needs to invest in and build the capacity of staff, including at the country level, to support local or civil society actors to access funding and to navigate complicated application processes. The UK also needs to fill gaps in knowledge around how to engage with a broader array of actors if it is to engage, in the terms of the earlier discussion, with the plural local beyond the state government.

### Conceptual Ambiguity

We noted earlier how thinking about localisation is marked by ongoing debates around understandings of the local, the role of the state and the implications for interpretation of humanitarian principles of “de-internationalised” humanitarian response. With no consistent or agreed definition of localisation—Wall and Hedlund (2016) noting that it can be used to describe all and any activities involving local actors—the concept remains conceptually ambiguous. This conceptual ambiguity creates space for different stakeholders to interpret the localisation agenda according to their own interests.

For example, many international actors define localisation in terms of “partnerships”, to describe the way they work with local organisations. However in practice, defining localisation in this

way tends to limit local and national organisations to implementing partners, to whom international actors outsource pre-determined and pre-conceived programme delivery (Barbelet 2018, 6). Similarly, localisation is also frequently used to describe the relationships international actors have with communities through the language of “participatory approaches”. However once again, in practice, this often refers to approaches which at best invite beneficiaries to comment on pre-designed projects (Wall and Hedlund 2016).

The narrow and superficial engagement with local actors that may result from this conceptual ambiguity is clearly reflected in DFID’s history of engaging with civil society. While DFID’s HERR and CSPR recognise the potential value added through engaging with a wide range of local and national actors for humanitarian responses, in practice their engagement with CSOs became increasingly constrained over the last decade. The UK government has a long history of funding CSOs, even before the establishment of DFID. DFID’s bilateral civil society portfolio peaked from 2014 to 2015, where 25 percent of its bilateral spend went to civil society (ICAI 2019). However, in 2016, nearly all of DFID’s “unrestricted” or “core” funding for CSOs to use as they saw fit was brought to an end. Instead, DFID’s funding of CSOs became increasingly aimed towards the pursuit of DFID-agreed priorities (ICAI 2019). In practice, this meant that CSOs were often “treated as implementing partners of mostly shorter-term projects, with funding tightly conditioned by results frameworks” (ICAI 2019, 6). While this shift did to some extent increase competition, transparency and accountability, it also reduced “CSO’s opportunities for self-driven capacity development, longer-term strategic thinking and adaptation in the evolving contexts in which they operated” (ICAI 2019, 6). Similarly, while these funding instruments did include elements of CSO capacity building, they remained overly focused on the requirements and standards of DFID, overlooking the needs of the CSO (ICAI 2019). Not only does this approach to engagement with local actors exclude CSOs from decision-making processes, allowing for the continuation of donor-led responses, it also reduces the flexibility of CSOs to respond to crises.

The specific ambiguity of what constitutes the “local” has also influenced DFID’s approach to implementation of policies regarding localisation. Wall and Hedlund (2016) have highlighted how for the World Bank ‘community’ is synonymous with “community-based organisations”. As a result, the range of community-based humanitarian responders outside of structures that resemble organisations is not acknowledged. DFID appears to have followed the same path in their CSPR (DFID 2016), a review of DFID’s partnerships with civil society. The review focuses almost exclusively on its work with CSOs, overlooking the variety of civil society actors, who do not resemble an organisation, who respond to humanitarian crises.

DFID’s track-record of working with local faith actors also demonstrates the influence of a partial understanding of the diversity of local resources. Based on a document review and consultation with a broad range of DFID staff (DFID, 2020) a

recent review found that in comparison with other states—notably Germany and the USA—religious engagement by the department—both centrally and in-country—

“could be characterised by disconnection, wariness and a falling behind development literature and practice. There continue to be examples of innovation and effective partnership, but these tend to be *ad hoc* rather than coherent reflections of a wider strategy”.

In examining the reasons for this, the review identified a number of factors linked to the theme localisation. This included operational challenges in partnering with local faith groups, related to the logistical issues of working with small and informal organisations noted in the previous section. However, issues of conceptualisation of appropriate forms of engagement were also flagged. There was clear uncertainty in establishing policy and strategy for engagement with a group of actors and institutions where there was such wide contextual variation in religious expression and its political significance across the settings in which the department worked. This appears to reflect a discomfort in strategic engagement in an area where the “local” is indeed diverse. The review also noted ‘a persistent culture of “religious blindness” (notably reflected in approaches to operationalising humanitarian principles such as impartiality) which echoes the challenge noted earlier of global humanitarian actors needing to become more self-aware of their presumptions and positionality in a more diverse humanitarian system.

In general, DFID’s commitment to localisation has been reflected much more consistently with respect to state governments than to local actors. However, in the context of COVID-19 the UK government did take steps towards a more localised humanitarian response through DFID’s Rapid Response Facility which put out a call for proposals from NGOs, including two criteria for supporting local efforts (ICAI 2020; Mollett 2020). Applications needed to provide at least ten percent of funds to local partners and they needed to track and report on the level of funding local NGOs received (Mollett 2020). More generally, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has served to demonstrate the lack of capacity and decision-making power that had been shifted to national and local actors in the preceding years. The withdrawal of many international humanitarian actors has, in some cases, resulted in civil society being left to do the heavy lifting without decision-making power. Media reports from NGO staff in Somalia demonstrated that this left local actors to carry the burden of response, information gathering, and analysis of what’s happening on the ground, while decision making processes remained UN-led (Cornish 2020). As a result, responses have been inefficient; decisions have been slow and responses delayed, slowed further by the lack of expatriate and international staff on the ground. At best the COVID-19 response in Somalia has been called inefficient, at worst, decisions made at a distance, based on a lack of understanding of realities on the ground,

seem to have exacerbated health, economic and food vulnerabilities (Cornish 2020).

Despite the UN continuing to perform poorly on partnerships and getting funding to local NGOs, most of DFID’s funding for COVID-19 responses went through UN agencies (ICAI 2020). The Center for Global Development found that funding is still failing to get to local actors directly; only 0.07 percent of funds channelled through the UN reached national and local NGOs for COVID-19 responses as of mid-June 2020 (Mollett 2020).

Overall, then, in the ambiguous conceptual space of the localisation agenda the UK has generally taken a rather narrow and superficial view of the “local”, with a primary focus on supporting the responsibilities of state governments to prepare for and manage humanitarian crises. The continued emphasis has been on funding mechanisms, with significantly less attention in policy and programming on building institutional capacity, especially within civil society and at the most local level. Since the analysis underpinning the HERR and the shaping of the WHS agenda the UK government has shown little appetite for engaging with the project of “de-internationalising” humanitarian response. In response to rising global tensions—e.g. the weakening of US commitment to multilateralism, the rise of China, deteriorating relations with Russia—the UK has firmly committed itself to preservation of an international rules-based system as a major policy objective (FCDOa, 2021). In this context, promoting de-internationalisation by expanding the range of actors engaged with coordination of humanitarian response to those outside the traditional, formal humanitarian sphere becomes at best a marginal, and at worst an unattractive, move.

### Political Considerations

It is apparent, then, that underpinning the principle of localisation are questions of power, and the need to shift the power from international to local actors, both in terms of strategic decision making and control of resources (de Geoffroy and Grunewald 2017, 1). However, for members of the international humanitarian community, there may be very little political incentive, and insufficient appetite, to give up power to more local actors. As a result, they focus on other aspects of the localisation agenda such as cost effectiveness and funding mechanisms.

A common argument for localisation made by UK politicians initially was that it will increase cost effectiveness. This push for cost effectiveness was part of DFID’s broader reform agenda, introducing a stronger focus on Value for Money into humanitarian practice (ICAI 2018, i). A strong driving force behind this is an increasing awareness in UK politics of being accountable to UK taxpayers for ODA expenditure. The influence of accountability to UK taxpayers was acknowledged in the 2011 HERR which stated that “DFID is being asked to be more accountable than ever before to UK taxpayers” through several periods of heightened budgetary constraints (DFID 2011, 27).

This is also evidenced by the frequent mentions by successive Secretaries of State for International Development in media interviews, of the department’s responsibility to be accountable

to UK taxpayers' (Mitchell 2011; McVeigh 2018). The influence of accountability to UK taxpayers on the UK's humanitarian reform agenda, and its role in shaping the reform narrative and priorities, is clear in an interview given by then Secretary of State David Mitchell in relation to the UK's reform agenda and the upcoming publication of the HERR in 2011:

"The truth is that if I go on television tonight and announce 20 million pounds for Tanzania, the reaction from many people will be to want to put their boot through the television set, given the state of the deficit and public debt in Britain. But if I announce that I am going to help to get another 200,000 girls to school in Tanzania, then with the British spirit of generosity and concern for the least well-off, there is a chance to capture people's attention and support for this budget." (Davison, 2010)

Reporting and due diligence requirements gave DFID greater ability to oversee how UK Aid is spent, however to some extent this constrained DFID's engagement with localisation. Approaching localisation through a lens of cost efficiency has been criticised. While there is a growing literature supporting localisation for effective humanitarian response, there is a lack of robust evidence showing localisation as cost-effective (Manis 2018, 3). Similarly, DFID's framing of localisation in terms of cost-efficiency has been criticised for keeping localisation efforts narrow, with funding distributed through a limited number of national and local partners. DFID's approach to Value for Money (now carried over to the FCDO) was controversial and DFID has been criticised for driving down costs, rather than innovating to improve results which will ultimately impact the quality of its localisation efforts within broader humanitarian reforms (ICAI 2018, ii).

Particularly in times when public finances are tight, this emphasis on cost-efficiency, Value for Money and accountability to UK taxpayers has shrunk the space for political conversations around aid and how to improve its delivery. It has de-incentivised aid spending, despite the investments necessary for humanitarian reforms, including localisation. There is a perception amongst politicians, that UK taxpayers are resentful over aid spending. Sensitivities to this are understandable, given that during austerity policies in Britain under David Cameron's government, DFID's budget doubled in 10 years to more than £14 billion (Ashcroft 2019). Former Secretary of State for International Development Rory Stewart shared how hard it was to get politicians to talk about aid and development and the UK to spend money in this sector during times of austerity (Worley 2020). Stewart spoke of how politicians would rather avoid the topic, particularly as voters who were dealing with the repercussions of austerity measures didn't want to hear it. A reluctance to engage in public discussion of humanitarian aid undoubtedly constrains motivations and reform objectives generally and localisation efforts specifically.

A lack of flexibility, innovation and room to fail within the UK's humanitarian responses risks creating obstacles to finding

ways to overcome the logistical constraints to the UK's localisation efforts. The evaluation of DEPP highlights that there was scope to replicate and further scale up some components of the programme. However, this would require some components of the project to be modified and re-tested, while others are replicated in different contexts and potentially on a larger scale programme (Pham et al., 2018, 20). The considerable investment required, and the growing political climate making any apparent loosening of financial accountability unacceptable, appears to have contributed to the decision to not extend DEPP.

The prevailing political climate clearly de-incentivises initiatives to shift decision making power and resources into the hands of national and local actors, as this may be perceived to limit accountability to UK tax payers. However, this overlooks the other actors to whom aid agencies and donors are accountable. In DFID's Humanitarian Policy the importance of downward accountability to beneficiaries—consulting with them on what support is provided and how it is delivered—is emphasized (DFID 2017, 16).

Beneficiary accountability was signalled as a core element of DFID's humanitarian work (DFID 2017, 19) by former Secretary of State Andrew Mitchell, but it has been accountability to UK taxpayers that has been emphasised by subsequent Secretaries of State. However, there are grounds for seeing increasing the UK's downward accountability to affected populations as a means to enhance accountability to tax payers, rather than as a rival objective. The International Development Committee's report and survey on "Progress Tracking the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Aid beneficiaries" found that localisation may play a key role in stamping out sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid system (Worley 2021a). The extensive report and survey highlights the ways that the current aid system builds distrust between local and aid actors by not including beneficiaries in the design or implementation of humanitarian assistance. Such an "us and them" dichotomy, reinforced by unequal power relations and an enabling culture in aid agencies, creates space within the aid system for the kind of exploitation and abuses of power revealed to have taken place in Haiti in 2018, causing public and political outrage.

## Localisation in the FCDO: Challenges and Opportunities

The merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and DFID to form the FCDO in 2020 signalled a new era for the management of development assistance in the UK, including humanitarian response. This new governance arrangement needs to be seen in the political context of not only the completion of Brexit in January 2021 but also of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Gross National Income (GNI) from which UK ODA is committed and the broad humanitarian context. Battling a global pandemic as it simultaneously embarks on a road of political unknowns, as in seeking a role for a "Global Britain" outside of the EU, has created a world of contradictions in terms of the UK's approach to aid, development and humanitarianism. This creates both

challenges and opportunities for the UK's future localisation efforts.

In terms of challenges, the political and economic context brings further acute pressure for accountability to the UK tax payer, a vocal and prominent scepticism around the amount of aid flowing from the UK (Ashcroft 2019), and an increasing fiscal squeeze as a result of substantial public spending in response to COVID-19. While 2020 saw preparation for a cut in aid expenditure commensurate with the projected fall in GNI, 2021 has seen suspension of the legally mandated spending target of 0.7% of national income (Worley 2021b), representing over a 30% cut in assistance. This has led to projection of major reductions in support of key humanitarian crises, including Yemen, countries impacted by the Syria conflict and the DRC (Wintour 2021).

While the underlying fiscal pressures are very real, the scale of these cuts clearly threatens the prevailing commitment to reform of the humanitarian system. Without investment in strengthening the capacities of actors at all levels to respond to the increasingly frequent and complicated humanitarian disasters the cycle of costly (in all terms) humanitarian disasters that could have been mitigated by timely (and less costly) preparedness and resilience measures will once again be set in motion.

Concerns have also been raised that with humanitarian and development concerns more explicitly intertwined with UK national interest in the new FCDO there will be even less political incentive to ceding power to "other" (local) actors. However, without this step, the UK and the international system more generally will fail to live up to the commitments made to the principle of localisation. An increasing political influence in the UK's development and humanitarian decision making in the FCDO may further disincentivise shifting the centre of power in humanitarian decision-making to national and local actors.

The search for an identity for a post-Brexit "Global Britain" sees the UK active in mobilising and profiling its convening power in multilateral fora. CoP26 and the G7 Presidency have seen the UK prominent in discussion of pandemic recovery, climate change and the "green growth" agenda that connects the two. The profiling of aid cuts – and the Indo-Pacific pivot of the 2021 UK Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy – suggests a weakening of commitment to a number of fragile and conflict-affected states. However, the Integrated Review also represents an opportunity to operationalise a "joined-up" approach to the roots of conflict and displacement that is marked by a strong commitment to contextual analysis and engagement of – diverse – local actors (Ferguson 2021). Bringing together the development and humanitarian knowledge of DFID, and the country-specific awareness and diplomatic skills of the FCO, accompanied by a new international independence, present an important opportunity to work more closely with countries, national governments and civil society on this agenda.

The FCDO role in drafting the policy paper on the G7 Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Compact for the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers meeting of May 2021 (FCDOb 2021) provides some early indication of likely policy emphases. The paper sees continuing commitment to "effective response to crises", and

for this to be achieved through initiatives addressing critical funding gaps; promotion of humanitarian access; respect for International Humanitarian Law; scale-up anticipatory action; enhancing crisis preparedness and response; and strengthening data and analysis to facilitate early action. Localisation is noted just once in the document, in the context of re-affirming Grand Bargain Commitments related to the first of these areas: funding. The overall emphasis is statist, with an emphasis on "support [ing] governments to discharge... [their] responsibility to address the needs of their own populations" (FCDOb 2021, p. 7). However, with respect to the issue of scaling-up anticipatory action there is a recognition of the importance of local action in the commitment to "grow support to the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund and the Start Fund to ensure local, including women-led, organisations can access finance to act ahead of shocks" (FCDOb 2021, p. 10).

It is too early to judge what UK commitments to humanitarian reform and localisation will be taken forward by the FCDO following the UK G7 Presidency. However, it is clear that both the decision to merge DFID and the FCO, and the decision to cut the aid budget, has increased attention to and reinvigorated debates around the UK's approach to humanitarianism. While some advancement in terms of negotiating the logistical and conceptual barriers to localisation may be anticipated, issues of both national interest—and public perceptions of national interest—seem likely to constrain a more radical implementation of localisation and, indeed, reverse the progress that has been made in recent years.

## Recommendations for Policy Making and Practice Impact

What does the preceding analysis imply for policy-making regarding humanitarian response, particularly with regard to policy that will have practice impact? We close by identifying recommendations for the FCDO, the principle institution with responsibility for UK government contribution in this area, as well as for other actors for whom the lessons of this case study may have utility.

First, in the context of the UK government's "Global Britain" aspirations there is an urgent need for the FCDO to clarify its position on the localisation agenda. From a highly influential position in shaping this agenda in the context of humanitarian reform 5 years ago there is a risk that the UK falls to the margins of global cooperation in this area. To the extent that FCDO strategy within the Johnson government increasingly reflects an emphasis on bilateral above multilateral investments, this positioning needs to clearly signal what residual role, if any, the UK seeks to play in shaping (and financially supporting) the investments of multilateral institutions in a manner consistent with the commitments made at the WHS in 2017 and in the NWOW in 2018. Equally, this positioning needs to demonstrate what elements of localisation are reflected in bilateral relationships to foster preparedness and capacity building in states vulnerable to humanitarian crisis, as committed to in the recent G7 Foreign and Development Ministers meeting.

Second, this political positioning needs to be reflected in much clearer technical conceptualisation and

operationalisation of localisation strategies within the FCDO. The preceding analysis has documented how lack of clarity on what constitutes localisation severely undermines effective action. In respect of one theme of the preceding analysis, recent moves in establishing a coherent approach to strategic engagement with faith actors—and developing the religious literacy within the organisation to sustain this—are a step in this direction.

Third, in terms of the logistical apparatus to operationalise localisation, the FCDO needs to establish and validate processes that support not only funding flows but also the levels of decision-making and local autonomy regarding expenditure. Accountability mechanisms that strike the appropriate balance between fiscal risk management and delivery chain mapping and enabling swift, discretionary, local commitment of resources are vital.

Although developed as a case study of UK government engagement with the principle of localisation, the presented analysis potentially has relevance for other actors. In particular, we identify two further recommendations.

For NGOs and civil society actors committed to advocacy regarding localisation we commend incorporation of analysis of the political cycle operating within states in their strategic engagement. Political transition through the UK coalition, Cameron, May and Johnson administrations has been substantial. While there has been a degree of momentum behind earlier policy commitments, the narrative of humanitarian policy, the political values and sentiments shaping it, and the alliances mobilised or marginalised regarding change have all shifted radically. To be effective, advocacy with governments needs to be mindful of such shifts, recognising the new opportunities as well as barriers that they create.

## REFERENCES

- Agenda for Humanity (2021). *Agenda for Humanity*. Available at: <https://agendaforhumanity.org/> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Ager, A., and Ager, J. (2011). Faith and the Discourse of Secular Humanitarianism. *J. Refugee Stud.* 24 (3), 456–472. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer030
- Ager, A., and Ager, J. (2015). *Faith, Secularism and Humanitarian Engagement*. New York: Palgrave.
- Aneja, U. (2016). *Bold Reform or Empty Rhetoric? A Critique of the World Humanitarian Summit*. New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation Special Report no. 13.
- Ashcroft, M. (2019). *Lord Ashcroft: An Open Letter to Alok Sharma, the New International Development Secretary*. Conservative Home. Available at: <https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2019/08/lord-ashcroft-an-open-letter-to-alok-sharma-the-new-international-development-secretary.html> (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- Barbelet, V. (2018). *As Local as Possible, as International as Necessary: Understanding Capacity and Complementarity in Humanitarian Action*. HPG Working Paper. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12527.pdf> (Accessed March 1, 2021).
- Barnett, M., and Weiss, T. G. (2011). *Humanitarianism Contested: Where Angels Fear to Tread*. London: Routledge.
- Burchardt, M. (2012). Faith-based Humanitarianism: Organizational Change and Everyday Meanings in South Africa. *Sociol. Religion.* 74 (1), 30–55. doi:10.1093/socrel/srs068
- Charter 4 Change (2021). *Charter 4 Change*. Available at: <https://charter4change.org/> (Accessed March 20, 2021).

Finally, we commend academic researchers to explore the relevance of the themes of logistical concerns, conceptual ambiguity and political considerations for understanding the translation of policy to practice regarding the principle of localisation with other donors and agencies. In spanning the domains of political strategy to operationalised practice these themes provide a prompt for considering translational processes from policy formulation to implementation. The wider utility of this framing needs to be considered.

## Notes

This paper, exclusively based upon publically accessible material, draws upon an earlier working paper *Localisation of humanitarian and development aid in the era of the FCDO* developed by the authors to promote discussion of these issues within staff of DFID in advance of the merger with the FCO.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AA conceived of the paper, guided identification of sources and supported elaboration of the analysis and conclusions of the paper. EG identified the topic, researched sources and developed working drafts of the paper.

## FUNDING

We acknowledge support from the Global Challenges Research Fund through the Scottish Funding Council for meeting the costs of Open Access article processing charges.

- Core Humanitarian Standard (2021). *The Standard*. Available at: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/> (Accessed March 28, 2015).
- Cornish, L. (2020). Is it Finally Time for the Localization Agenda to Take off? DEVEX. Available at: <https://www.devex.com/news/is-it-finally-time-for-the-localization-agenda-to-take-off-97323> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Darfur Consortium (2015). *One month on in Darfur and Sudan: the expulsion and suspension of international and national humanitarian and human rights organisations*. Reliefweb. HPG. Available at: [reliefweb.int/report/sudan/one-month-darfur-and-sudan-expulsion-and-suspension-international-and-national](https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/one-month-darfur-and-sudan-expulsion-and-suspension-international-and-national) (Accessed September 9, 2021).
- Davison, J. (2010). *A Conversation With Andrew Mitchell on UK Aid Reform*. DEVEX. Available at: <https://www.devex.com/news/a-conversation-with-andrew-mitchell-on-uk-aid-reform-70380> (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- De Geoffroy, V., and Grunewald, F. (2017). *More than the Money: Localisation in Practice*. Trocaire. Available at: <https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/more-than-the-money-localisation-in-practice.pdf> (Accessed March 5).
- De Wolf, F., and Wilkinson, O. (2019). The Triple Nexus, Localization, and Local Faith Actors: The Intersections Between Faith, Humanitarian Response, Development, and Peace. A Review of the Literature. Available at: [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/triplexnexus\\_southsudan\\_reviewofliterature.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/triplexnexus_southsudan_reviewofliterature.pdf) (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Deneulin, S., and Bano, M. (2009). *Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script*. London, New York: Zed Books.
- DFID (2011). *Humanitarian Emergency Response Review*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/67579/HERR.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67579/HERR.pdf) (Accessed March 5, 2021).

- DFID (2016). Civil Society Partnership Review. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/565368/Civil-Society-Partnership-Review-3Nov2016.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/565368/Civil-Society-Partnership-Review-3Nov2016.pdf) (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- DFID (2017). Saving Lives, Building Resilience, Reforming the System: the UK Government's Humanitarian Reform Policy. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/659965/UK-Humanitarian-Reform-Policy1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/659965/UK-Humanitarian-Reform-Policy1.pdf) (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- DFID (2020). *Religious Engagement, Development and the FCDO*. [Internal Document]. London: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.
- El Taraboulsi, S., Schell, J., and Gorgeu, R. (2016). Localisation in Humanitarian Practice. Available at: <https://www.icvnetwork.org/resources/localisation-humanitarian-practice> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Fast, L., and Bennett, C. (2020). From the Ground up: It's about Time for Local Humanitarian Action. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/publications/16991-ground-it-s-about-time-local-humanitarian-action> (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- FCDOa (2021). Human Rights and the Rules-Based International System: Objectives 2020 to 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/official-development-assistance-oda-fcdo-international-programme-spend-objectives-2020-to-2021/human-rights-and-the-rules-based-international-system-objectives-2020-to-2021> (Accessed March 28, 2021).
- FCDOb (2021). G7 Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Compact. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g7-foreign-and-development-ministers-meeting-may-2021-communique/g7-famine-prevention-and-humanitarian-crises-compact> (Accessed March 28, 2021).
- Featherstone, A. (2015). Keeping the Faith: The Role of Faith Leaders in the Ebola Response. Available at: <http://jflifc.com/resources/keeping-the-faith-the-role-of-faith-leaders-in-the-ebola-response-full-report> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Ferguson, K. (2021). A Pivot to Prevention? the UK's New Approach to Conflict and the Integrated Review. Available at: <https://blog.politics.ox.ac.uk/a-pivot-to-prevention-the-uks-new-approach-to-conflict-and-the-integrated-review/> (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- Ferris, E. (2011). Faith and Humanitarianism: It's Complicated. *J. Refugee Stud.* 24 (3), 606–625. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer028
- Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, E., and Ager, A. (2013). *Local Faith Communities and the Promotion of Resilience in Humanitarian Situations: A Scoping Study*. Joint Learning Initiative for Local and Faith Communities. Available at: <https://jflifc.com/resources/local-faith-communities-promotion-resiliences-humanitarian-situations-scoping-study> (Accessed September 14, 2018).
- Gaillard, J. C., and Texier, P. (2010). Religions, Natural Hazards, and Disasters: An Introduction. *Religion.* 40, 81–84. doi:10.1016/j.religion.2009.12.001
- Gingerich, T. R., and Cohen, M. J. (2015). Turning the Humanitarian System on its Head. Available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/turning-the-humanitarian-system-on-its-head-saving-lives-and-livelihoods-by-str-559151/> (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- Grand Bargain (2021). The Grand Bargain (Official Website). Available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain> (Accessed March 22, 2021).
- Greening, J. (2016). World Humanitarian Summit, Statement Made on 26. Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2016-05-26/HCWS24> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Hammond, L. (2015). "Neutrality and Impartiality," in *The Routledge Companion to Humanitarianism*. Editors R. MacGinty and J. H. Peterson (Acton, Abingdon: Routledge), 87–96.
- Hilhorst, D., and Schmiemann, N. (2002). Humanitarian Principles and Organisational Culture: Everyday Practice in Medecins Sans Frontieres-Holland. *Development Pract.* 12 (3/4), 450–500. doi:10.1080/0961450220149834
- Hilhorst, D., and Jansen, B. J. (2010). Humanitarian Space as Arena: A Perspective on the Everyday Politics of Aid. *Development Change.* 41 (6), 1117–1139. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01673.x
- Humanitarian Academy for Development (2020). INGOs and the Localisation Agenda. Available at: <https://had-int.org/blog/ingos-and-the-localisation-agenda/#:~:text=Localisation%2C%20on%20the%20other%20hand,only%20if%20and%20when%20necessary> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Humanitarian Leadership Academic (2021). Humanitarian Leadership Academy. Available at: <https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/about/> (Accessed March 1, 2021).
- ICAI (2018). The UK's Approach to Funding the UN Humanitarian System: A Performance Review. Available at: <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-Humanitarian-Reform-Report-2.pdf> (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- ICAI (2019). DFID's Partnerships With Civil Society Organisations. Available at: <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/review/csos/> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- ICAI (2020). UK Aid Spending During COVID-19: Management of Procurement Through Suppliers. Available at: [https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-version/uk-aid-spending-during-covid-19-management-of-procurement-through-suppliers/#:~:text=By%20the%20end%20of%20March,DFID%20\(%2C%20A377%20million\)](https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-version/uk-aid-spending-during-covid-19-management-of-procurement-through-suppliers/#:~:text=By%20the%20end%20of%20March,DFID%20(%2C%20A377%20million)) (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- IFRC (2018). Policy Brief. Localization – What it Means and How to Achieve it. Available at: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Localization-external-policy-brief-4-April-2.pdf> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- ICRC (2020). The ICRC in World War Two: The Holocaust. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-wwii-holocaust> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Jabbour, A., Leaning, J., Nuwayid, I., Ager, A., Cammet, M., Dewachi, O., et al. (2021). 10 Years of the Syrian Conflict: a Time to Act and Not Merely Remember. *The Lancet.* 397, 1245. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00623-1
- Jennings, M., Clarke, M., Feeny, S., Westhorp, G., and Donohue, C. (2021). A Potent Fuel? Faith Identity and Development Impact in World Vision Community Programming. *J. Int. Dev.* 33, 70–85. doi:10.1002/jid.3512
- Kellenberger, J. (2004). Speaking Out or Remaining Silent in Humanitarian Work. *Rev. Int. Croix-rouge.* 86 (855), 593–609. doi:10.1017/s1560775500181052
- Laverack, G., and Manoncourt, E. (2016). Key Experiences of Community Engagement and Social Mobilization in the Ebola Response. *Glob. Health Promot.* 23 (1), 79–82. doi:10.1177/1757975915606674
- Manis, A. (2018). Cost-effectiveness in Humanitarian Aid: Localisation Programming, Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D) Helpdesk Report. Available at: [https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14217/460\\_Cost\\_Effectiveness\\_of\\_Localisation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14217/460_Cost_Effectiveness_of_Localisation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- McVeigh, K. (2018). *Penny Mordaunt Hails 'heroic' British Aid Response to Plague in Madagascar*. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/feb/01/penny-mordaunt-hails-heroic-british-aid-plague-madagascar> (Accessed March 22, 2021).
- Mitchell, A. (2011). The Humanitarian Response Review. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/andrew-mitchell-the-humanitarian-response-review> (Accessed March 22, 2021).
- Mollett, H. (2020). How Can the UK Better Support Local Humanitarian Heroes? Available at: <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2020/08/how-can-the-uk-better-support-local-humanitarian-heroes> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- MSF (2014). MSF Speaking Out: Genocide of Rwandan Tutsis 1994. Available at: <https://www.msf.org/speakingout/genocide-rwandan-tutsis-1994> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Nabyonga-Orem, J., Gebrikidane, M., and Mwisongo, A. (2016). Assessing Policy Dialogues and the Role of Context: Liberian Case Study Before and During the Ebola Outbreak. *BMC Health Serv. Res.* 16, 4. doi:10.1186/s12913-016-1454-y
- Obrecht, A. (2014). *De-Internationalising Humanitarian Action: Rethinking the 'Global-Local' Relationship*. London: ALNAP. Available at: <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/%E2%80%98de-internationalising-humanitarian-action-rethinking-the-global-local-relationship> (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- OCHA (2016). Religious Resourcing for Humanitarian Efforts: Highlights from a Policy Roundtable in Preparation for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). Available at: <https://agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/WHS%20Religious%20Resourcing%20-%20Highlights.pdf> (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- OCHA (2017). New Way of Working. Available at: [https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/NWOW%20Booklet%20low%20res.002\\_0.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/NWOW%20Booklet%20low%20res.002_0.pdf) (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- Pacitto, J., and Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, E. (2013). *Writing the 'Other' into Humanitarian Discourse: Framing Theory and Practice in South-South Humanitarian Responses to Forced Displacement*. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper. 93. Available at: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp93-south-south-humanitarianism-contexts-forced-migration-2013.pdf> (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- PaRD (2016). Religious Engagement in Humanitarian Crises: Good Practice Collection. Available at: [https://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/Resources/Knowledge\\_Center/PaRD\\_Religious\\_Engagement\\_](https://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/Resources/Knowledge_Center/PaRD_Religious_Engagement_)

- in\_Humanitarian\_Crises\_-\_Good\_practices\_08-2016.pdf (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- Pham, P., Hemon, R., Jean-Francois, J., and Scott, J. (2018). DEPP Evaluation Summative Phase Report. Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. Available at: <https://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/depp-evaluation-summative-phase-report> (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- Ramalingham, B., Gray, B., and Cerruti, G. (2013). Missed Opportunities: The Case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-Based Humanitarian Responses. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/ellen/Downloads/14-461-j1503-partnering-in-emergencies-report-so.pdf> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Schenkenberg van Mierop, E. (2019). Emergency gap: The Challenges of Localised Humanitarian Aid. Medecins Sans Frontieres, Barcelona. Available at: <https://arhp.msf.es/emergency-gap-papers-aid-environment/emergency-gap-challenges-localisedhumanitarian-aid> (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- START Network (2021). A New Era of Humanitarian Action. Available at: <https://startnetwork.org/> (Accessed March 22, 2021).
- Taylor, G., Stoddard, A., Harmer, A., Haver, K., Harvey, P., Schreter, L., et al. (2012). The State of the Humanitarian System. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/ellen/Downloads/alnap-sohs-2012-lo-res.pdf> (Accessed March 20, 2021)
- UNHCR (2020). Figures at a Glance. Available at: [unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance](http://unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance) (Accessed March 22, 2021)
- Wall, I., and Hedlund, K. (2016). Localisation and Locally-Led Crisis Response: A Literature Review. Available at: [https://www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/L2GP\\_SDC\\_Lit\\_Review\\_LocallyLed\\_June\\_2016\\_final.pdf](https://www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/L2GP_SDC_Lit_Review_LocallyLed_June_2016_final.pdf) (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- WHO (2015). Liberia Succeeds in Fighting Ebola With Local, Sector Response. Available at: <https://www.who.int/features/2015/ebola-sector-approach/en/> (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- Wilkinson, O., Tomalin, E., Logo, K., Wani Laki, A., and De Wolf, F. (2020). Bridge Builders: Strengthening the Role of Local faith Actors in Humanitarian Response in South Sudan. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019-Tearfund-Bridge-Builders-En.pdf> (Accessed March 20, 2021).
- Wintour, P. (2021). Leak Reveals UK Foreign Office Discussing Aid Cuts of More than 50%. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/05/uk-foreign-office-discussing-aid-cuts-more-than-50-leak-reveals> (Accessed March 26, 2021).
- World Bank Group (2016). Strategic Note: Cash Transfers in Humanitarian Context. Available at: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/697681467995447727/pdf/106449-WP-IASC-Humanitarian-Cash-PUBLIC.pdf> (Accessed March 5, 2021).
- Worley, W. (2021a). *Localization Key to Tackling Sexual Abuse by Aid Workers, IDC Says*. DEVEX. <https://www.devex.com/news/localization-key-to-tackling-sexual-abuse-by-aid-workers-idc-says-98908> (Accessed February 22, 2021).
- Worley, W. (2021b). FCDO Staff ‘in Shock’ at Scale of Aid Budget. DEVEX. [Accessed: March 1 2021].
- Worley, W. (2020). UK Ministers ‘just Cannot Understand’ Merits of Aid Spending, Says Rory Stewart. DEVEX. Available at: <https://www.devex.com/news/uk-ministers-just-cannot-understand-merits-of-aid-spending-says-rory-stewart-98450> (Accessed February 22, 2021).
- Zyck, S. A., and Krebs, H. B. (2015). *Localising Humanitarianism: Improving Effectiveness through Inclusive Action*. London: HPG. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/publications/9695-localising-humanitarianism-improving-effectiveness-through-inclusive-action> (Accessed March 5, 2021).

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

**Publisher’s Note:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

Copyright © 2021 Goodwin and Ager. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.