

Strengthening Localisation through Capacity Building and Inclusion in Iraq: Research Paper

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Abbreviations

APMBC – Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

CCM – Convention on Cluster Munitions

DCA – Danish Church Aid

DMA – Directorate of Mine Action

GICHD – Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

HCT – Humanitarian Country Team

HMA – Humanitarian Mine Action

IASC – Inter Agency Standing Committee

ICVA – International Council of Voluntary Agencies

IHSCO – Health and Social Care Organization in Iraq

IDP – Internally Displaced People

IED – Improvised Explosive Devices

IFRC – International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

IKMAA – Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation

IS – Islamic State

KPSRL – Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law

L/NNGO – Local/National Non-Governmental Organisation

MSP – Meeting of State Parties of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

NA – National Authority

NDM – International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and United Nations Advisors

NNGO – National Non-Governmental Organisation

OCED – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

RMAC South – Regional Mine Action Centre South

UN – United Nations

UNMAS – United Nations Mine Action Service

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

WHS – World Humanitarian Summit

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Executive summary

Localisation commitments are a result of the Grand Bargain reached during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. The concept of localisation encompasses making changes to ensure that the humanitarian system is “as local as possible and as international as necessary”. The purpose of this project is to design and implement a ‘co-created learning process’ on the theme of localisation in the Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) sector in Iraq. This would include reviewing the lessons learned from previous localisation efforts, convening local and international actors in Iraq to jointly discuss, learn and reflect on the issues around localisation, and to commission joint research on the topic to feed into those discussions.

This study is the first empirical learning trajectory appraising localisation in HMA in Iraq which contributes to bridging the gap of scarcity of information about this concept. The study unpacks the situation of what localisation means in the context of Iraq’s mine action sector. It provides account of developments, challenges and enablers set out by participating NNGOs, INGOs, donors and authorities.

This report is nuanced with evidence-based research shedding the light on the views, priorities, experiences, and lessons learned of a breadth of participating organisations in relation to localisation. It lays out the premise for further studies that can increase clarity about localisation and progress in implementation of enabling initiatives. Furthermore, the study serves as a resource for donors and intermediaries interested in policy formulation and revisions related to roles and obligations towards actual localisation of HMA.

Despite the fact that there are few projects and initiatives that contribute to localisation from different angles and aspects cited, the study unveils key problems and barriers preventing change related to seven dimensions of localisation:

- Inequality of partnerships and limited recognition of newer national organisations.
- Limited involvement of NNGOs in decision making as a key problem in participation, alongside limited local participation in strategy development in general.
- No access of NNGOs to direct funding of donors and reliance on INGOs for funding and inequality in the distribution of funding across national actors.
- Lack of time and funds needed for successful capacity building processes, followed by employee turn-over in NNGOs preventing skills retention and affecting organisational capacity; and, the distance between NNGOs and donors leading to a dependency on INGOs.
- The lack of face-time and communication and coordination between operators and coordination mechanisms were being led by international entities.
- INGOs often having a more donor facing role in partnerships as the key challenge for visibility, credit-sharing and exposure of NNGOs.
- Lack of access to international events and lack of coordination between national authorities and NNGOs hinders engagement in influencing international policies and standards.

In response to the above hindrances to localisation in HMA, this report provides some recommendations based upon evidence of findings as well as those found in literature:

1. Supporting equitable partnership and reciprocal relationship. Power balance and equal and equitable partnerships are key to success of localisation.

- Improve partnership models to practice trustful, equal, transparent, complimentary and win-win relationships between intermediaries and NNGOs.
- Give more space for reciprocal and mutual evaluation about the capacity and quality of relationship between NNGOs and intermediaries and share findings with donors.
- Encourage and incentivise intermediaries to establish genuine partnerships where power is shared; not monopolised.
- Appreciate non-monetary value contribution by NNGOs that are relevant and crucial to reaching the partnership and project goals and objectives.
- Engage local partners in project designs, development and implementation with inputs and contributions that are reflected to donors.

2. Promoting direct access to donor funds by local and national organisations.

- Donors to walk the talk by changing funding policies to allow access of NNGOs to direct funding.
- Grand Bargain signatories to hold intermediaries and partners accountable to achieve the 25% funding target.
- Allow quality and flexible funding and sharing overheads costs equally among all partners (intermediaries and L/NNGOs).
- Set criteria and benchmarks of the minimum accepted levels of compliance capacity of L/NNGOs in order to be able to access direct funding from donors.

3. Ongoing investment in strengthening NNGO capacities with needs-based interventions to meet donor standards.

- Allocate longer term funding for multi-year partnerships.
- Support NNGOs with enhancing their capacities to meet donor requirements of due diligence and compliance.
- Involve existing national capacities in supporting new emerging organisations in building their capacities.
- Intermediaries to support NNGOs with retaining their staff to sustain the organisational capacity.
- Give credit to NNGOs work and report to donors transparently about roles and achievements of local partners.

4. Propagating coordination and contribution of NNGOs to national and international policies and plans.

- Improve representation of NNGOs in coordination mechanisms.
- Use more advocacy practices to raise the awareness about localisation among the authorities, donors and intermediaries.

- Allocate resources and enable NNGOs to participate in international coordination mechanism, networks, events, meet with donors and have more visibility.
- Facilitate meetings between donors and NNGOs and encourage open discussions.

Introduction:

In recent years, the concept of localisation has emerged as a significant paradigm in humanitarian mine action (HMA), underscoring the critical role of local actors and communities in addressing the challenges posed by landmines and explosive remnants of war. This shift towards localisation reflects a broader recognition of the need for more inclusive, sustainable, and context-specific solutions in HMA. Yet, there is a stark scarcity of reports and studies that document the situation of localisation in HMA in Iraq.

This research paper, titled *Strengthening Localisation through Capacity Building and Inclusion*, explores the complex dynamics of localisation in the HMA sector in Iraq, and aimed to gain insights into current, and potential localisation efforts in Iraq. This research was conducted by The Health and Social Care Organisation in Iraq (IHSCO) and The HALO Trust, on behalf of the Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL), funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The overarching goal of this research is to enhance the understanding of localisation among International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), National Non-Governmental Organisations (NNGOs), national authorities and the donor community, whilst collecting and sharing their insights and experiences for wider learning. Understanding localisation is crucial to inform policies and effectively incorporate localisation into programming.

Approach to the Project

Project Overview

The *Strengthening Localisation through Capacity Building and Inclusion* case study followed the KPSRL Learning Trajectory model. The research was conducted under a co-led structure between IHSCO and HALO, and was designed to be grounded in the experiences and insights of national and international non-governmental organisations.

Under the Learning Trajectory model, IHSCO and HALO conducted a co-creation workshop, hosted in March 2023 in Erbil, attended by the representatives from the Dutch Embassy, the KPSRL and NNGOs and INGOs working in Iraq within and outside of the Mine Action sector. Of the organisations participating, several INGOs work under the Dutch Mine Action and Cluster Munitions Programme, and several NNGOs and INGOs had participated in previous UNMAS capacity building initiative. Discussions throughout the workshop informed both the project's definition of localisation, and the basis of the project's Learning Agenda, stating the priorities of the research going forward. The workshop, which was initially planned for 15 participants from 6 NNGOs, 6 INGOS and 1 Donor representative (Dutch), saw increased interest and included 24 participants. Interactive sessions, within the co-creation workshop facilitated the sharing of diverse perspectives and the identification of key facilitators and obstacles to Localisation.

Throughout the project, additional stakeholders were added, in line with the project's Learning Agenda priorities, and based on the insights of our participants. National Mine Action Authorities – The Directorate for Mine Action (DMA) of Federal Iraq and the Iraqi

Kurdistan Mine Action Agency (IKMAA) – were included from the project’s midpoint, and the trajectory wrapped up with interviews and an engagement activity with two donors.

Project Methodology:

The project methodology for exploring and enhancing Localisation in the Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) sector in Iraq was multi-dimensional, involving a range of activities and strategies for engagement. The project conducted both advocacy and research alongside each other. Initial engagement with each ‘group’ of stakeholders – our NNGO/INGO participants, National Authorities and Donors – began with initial advocacy, namely an overview of the grand bargain and localisation as a concept, acting as an entry point for discussions. These were followed up with qualitative interviews to collect the insights and understand the experiences of our participants. These took place at different stages throughout the project respectively.

Additionally, we aimed to keep our project accountable to our participants through regular engagement through our Quarterly Learning Sessions with our participant pool. These sessions provided the opportunity for project updates and put back our initial findings to our participants, such as through an interactive analysis, explained later in this paper. This was done through an online collaboration platform (via Skype), promoting continuous information sharing about Localisation among participants from local NGOs and INGOs. This ongoing engagement facilitated real-time updates and discussions. We also developed an orientation for newcomers who joined during the process, as was the case for a change in focal point for an organisation.

Within its advocacy role, the project participated in platforms for external advocacy, as a representative of the project on an international level appeared on panels at three UN events, namely the 26th International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and United Nations Advisors (NDM-UN26) where he spoke of the lack of recognition of national capacities; the 21st Meeting of State Parties of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (21MSP); and, the 27th International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and United Nations Advisors (NDM-UN27) speaking as a panellist at the side event titled: Unpacking the Localization Debate in Mine Action.

Research Methodology:

This research employs a case study approach. Case study is an investigative research approach sought to answer specific research questions, by applying multiple suitable sources of evidence. It is an empirical inquiry being the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. To examine the research goal outlined above, the case study design is applying a mixed-methods approach but remains primarily based on qualitative methodological techniques. The research has employed two primary qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews and focus groups (in workshop format), and one secondary method that is documentation and archival records. In order to minimise the risk of errors, invalidity and unreliability of the data; to increase the reliability of data and quality of the research; and, to cover all aspects of the research comprehensively, this study has applied multiple arrays of evidence sources to examine the same phenomena. This is referred to in literature as *data triangulation*. The use of a multi-

source method enables the researcher to better understand the broad range of the context as well as having more solid and in-depth convincing findings and conclusions

The following research is based on a collection of qualitative interviews conducted with representatives from NNGOs and INGOs. National Authorities, and donors conducted at various stages of the project and secondary research, in the form of a literature review.

Focus groups: The Project Team held four workshops. The Co-creation workshop was a two days’ workshop on localisation in humanitarian mine action in Iraq for twenty four representatives from different international and national mine action organisations and the donor community represented by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Iraq. Three follow up workshops with the min action authorities Directorate for Mine Action (DMA) and Regional Mine Action Centre-South (RMAC-S) were conducted. Furthermore, the above-mentioned Quarterly Learning Sessions were collective groups discussions among participants in this research project.

The project team conducted two sets of interviews with NNGO and INGO participants. The first was a Stakeholder Analysis, whereby participants rated the power and interest of HMA actors/stakeholders in localisation (first during the co-creation workshop, then again at interview stage) and provided further insights on how they could contribute towards localisation. This acted as the basis for including other groups – national authorities and donors – which were identified as particularly influential. The second was focused on the Seven Dimensions of localisation: Relationship Quality, Participatory Approaches, Funding and Financing, Capacities, Coordination and Contextual Policies and Standards, Credit Sharing and Visibility, and International Policies and standards. During these interviews the project team asked questions about the current status, necessary changes, success criteria, anticipated obstacles, strategies to overcome challenges, and progress markers, to gain an understanding of where we are now, what we should improve and how to get there (as per matrix below).

	Where are we now?	What needs to change?	What obstacles can we anticipate & how will we overcome them	What would success look like?	What progress markers can tell us whether we are advancing?
Relationship quality					
Participatory approaches					
Funding and financing					
Capacities					
Influencing coordination & contextual policies and standards					
Visibility					
Influencing international policy and standards					

Source: Global Mentoring Initiative (2020), "Dimensions of Localisation"

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58256bc615d5db852592fe40/t/5f1e9d7e33dc5444793ca391/1595841921735/GMI+Dimensions+localisation+2020.pdf>

Following our NNGO and INGO interviews, the team then conducted interviews with the DMA and IKMAA, also covering the themes of the Seven Dimensions. Lastly, the project team went back to our pool of participants to prioritise three main dimensions – Funding and Financing, Visibility and International Policies and Standards – to cover in Donor interviews.

Contextual Background: Mine Action and Localisation

This section aims to explore the concept of localisation in mine action in Iraq, focusing on its importance, challenges, and effective implementation, alongside insights into the significance of mine action in Iraq, the Iraq Mine Action Strategy 2023-2028.

Introduction to mine action and Localisation

An Overview of the Mine Action Sector in Iraq:

Iraq is one of the most heavily contaminated countries by explosive ordnance, due to a legacy of conflicts since the 1980s further exacerbated through the placement of IEDs by Islamic State (IS) (Mine Action Review, 2023). The presence of explosive ordnance poses a severe threat to the safety and livelihoods of millions in Iraq, hindering the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the reconstruction of conflict-affected areas.

Mine action activities include detection, clearance, and destruction of explosive ordnance, including landmines, cluster munitions, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and supporting activities, including risk education, victim assistance, and advocacy for the prohibition and elimination of these weapons (DMA, IKMAA and GICHD, 2023).

The National Mine Action Authority within the Government of Iraq holds responsibility for leading and coordinating mine action operators, supported by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) (DMA, IKMAA and GICHD, 2023). Iraq is a State Party to both the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), committing to clear known mined areas and cluster munitions by 2028¹. The country faces the challenges of the scale and complexity of contamination, alongside political, security, and administrative obstacles. Mine action operations are affected by data and access issues, alongside the technical challenges associated with the unconventional nature of explosives. Furthermore, situational challenges, such as weak coordination between authorities and operators, and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic further slows clearance.

Mine action management in Iraq is divided by territory. Mine action operations in Federal Iraq are overseen by the Iraqi Directorate for Mine Action (DMA) through three Regional Mine Action Centres (RMACs) and operations in the autonomous region of Kurdistan are overseen by the Iraq Kurdistan Mine Action Agency (IKMAA). Mine action strategies and policies in Federal Iraq are supervised by a cross-ministerial entity, the Higher Committee of Mine Action (DMA, IKMAA and GICHD, 2023). Following the closure of the UN-led cluster system, which had been coordinating mine action activities until the end of 2022, the DMA and IKMAA produces Iraq's National Mine Action Strategy for 2023-2028 (DMA, IKMAA and GICHD, 2023).

Challenges persist in coordinating mine action, partly due to DMA's low status within its reporting body, the Ministry of Environment alongside leadership turnover which impact program continuity.

¹ Iraq requested to extend the CCM deadline from 2023 to 2028 in within the Convention on Cluster Munitions September, 2023.

Iraq Mine Action Strategy 2023-2028:

The Iraq National Mine Action Strategy 2023 – 2028, outlines the Iraq Mine Action Programme's goals, objectives, and indicators for the next five years (DMA, IKMAA and GICHD 2023; Mine Action Review 2023; Iraqi News 2023). Among them is the aim to declare Iraq free of mines by 2028, while reducing the humanitarian, social, economic, and environmental impact of explosive ordnance. The strategy also seeks to improve national ownership and capacity of both mine action authorities and operators, promote the participation of affected communities and strengthen coordination among mine action stakeholders, while aligning the mine action program with national and international frameworks and agendas.

Within the strategy, the programme makes a commitment to localisation and the principles of the Grand Bargain, proposing the following approaches:

- Strengthen national authorities, and ensure they have an appropriate structure and sufficient resources.
- Develop and implement a national capacity development plan covering the needs of national authorities (including regional centres) and national mine action operators.
- Support the establishment of local mine action committees in governorates and districts.
- Promote the participation and representation of local communities, civil society organizations, and other affected groups in the planning, prioritisation, and monitoring of mine action activities.
- Encourage the development and use of local expertise, technology, and innovation in mine action, and fostering knowledge sharing and learning among local actors.

(DMA, IKMAA and GICHD, 2023)

The Concept of Localisation:

Localisation commitments are a result of the Grand Bargain reached during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. The Grand Bargain, is a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action, in order to get more means into the hands of people in need.

Localisation, as a concept, focuses on local actors, communities, and organisations with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of humanitarian interventions. It recognises the inherent knowledge and understanding that local entities possess about their own challenges, needs, and dynamics, and in what ways these actors can be better involved in decision-making, planning, and implementation in the humanitarian space.

Localisation refers to the need for systematic change in the humanitarian system, to reduce the level of humanitarian funds spent on bureaucratic costs, increase the amount reaching communities which they are designed to serve, and increase the space for local humanitarian actors.

Localisation carries varying interpretations; therefore, a universally accepted definition has not been established. Below are some samples of the range of definitions and perspectives expressing the multifaceted nature of this concept:

- USAID defines “Localisation as a set of internal reforms, actions, and behaviour changes, focusing on putting local actors in the lead, strengthening local systems, and ensuring responsiveness to local communities” (USAID, 2022).
- ICVA, Humanitarian Country Teams and various INGOs adopt a common perspective of “Localisation is a process through which a diverse range of humanitarian actors are attempting, each in their own way, to ensure local and national actors are better engaged in the planning, delivery and accountability of humanitarian action while still ensuring humanitarian needs can be met swiftly, effectively and in a principled manner” (HCT, 2023; ICVA, 2019; Oxfam, 2021; OECD, 2023)
- Sometimes, localisation is mixed up with nationalisation of staff and branches. One study revealed international staff perceived localisation as the recruitment and promotion of national staff (Wall & Hedlund 2016).
- Localisation is described as a more global approach to thinking about the transformation in development finance, emphasizing thinking and acting on emergencies and development starting with actors who are closest to the scene (Jideofor, 2020-2021).
- OECD (2017) defines Localisation as "A process of recognizing, respecting, and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses."
- Plan International (2022) describes localisation as “the process of better engaging local and national actors in all phases of humanitarian action, including greater support for locally-led action.”

Localisation means to “make humanitarian action as local as possible, as international as necessary” as defined in the Grand Bargain (IASC, 2023). Meanwhile, the participants in this study view localisation from a more local comprehensive perspective. Localisation means, according to the participants, that local organisations are “empowered to solve local problems”. Localisation will be much better supported when NNGOs are independent and able to access funds directly. Localisation, according to them, should not be seen as building capacity, but its goal should be to create ownership of both national organisations and national authorities. The idea that localisation is only capacity building of local NGOs was rejected and all participants agreed that to be successful, it must be a “two-way-street” where mutual learning is involved. To be effective, localisation requires a shift of power from the Global North to the Global South.

The Importance of Localisation

Why Localisation is crucial in Mine Action:

Localisation initiatives in the humanitarian mine action (HMA) sector are crucial. As a highly technical field conducting high risk activities, the sector balances the value of experience conducting technical activities safely and the connection to local knowledge of context and explosive ordnance in conflict affected areas. Localisation can facilitate efforts to tailor activities the specific context, needs, and priorities of a given region or community.

Localisation initiatives add value to the HMA sector through developing local capacities, which then strengthens the sector as a whole through “support[ing] prevention strategies, improve[ing] the quality, rapidity, and scale of the response, reinforce the resilience of national systems, and strengthen the means to realize accountability to affected people” (Global Protection Cluster, 2021). Additionally, the inclusion of NNGOs diversifies the operators working in the sector, and makes use of their comparative advantages (Global Protection Cluster, 2021) such as local knowledge and contextual understanding.

As alluded to above, localisation has a role in strengthening the humanitarian system as a whole, as local actors as early responders, an enabler of access and acceptance (IFRC, 2018.) “The overall objective of Localisation is to improve humanitarian response, ensuring access for all in need to fast, quality, impactful, and sustainable humanitarian assistance that is efficient, effective, and fit for purpose.” (IFRC, 2018).

Localisation is seen as an enabler of community engagement (Kipfer-Didavi and Bitong, 2018). Local actors are often those with access to affected people, with a stronger understanding of local structures and local conflicts, alongside often being the first to provide aid, and will stay in communities for longer, whereas international organisations are only able to support following the arrival of funding (Kipfer-Didavi and Bitong, 2018). Furthermore, localisation can bridge policy and practice, as is the case of HMA actors, such as DCA which included the promotion of locally-led solutions in their 2023-2026 strategy and have worked in partnership with IHSCO in a three-year project building their mine action capacity (Wilkinson et al., 2023.) This is also true in the case of mine action in Iraq, as localisation was included in the national mine action strategy as set out by national authorities.

The benefits of involving local actors:

As mentioned above, local actors bring competitive advantages to humanitarian sector; and localisation, therefore, acts as a tool to strengthen the humanitarian system. Localisation can offer benefits from a cost-effectiveness perspective, and “can help reduce costs related to implementation, staffing, transactions, and management through all stages of humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery” (ICVA, 2018). Another benefit is an increased sense of local ownership, whereby communities are empowered through participation in decision-making, planning and execution of humanitarian activities (Rose and Elbaaly, 2024), which in turn contributes to the acceptance of humanitarian initiatives, especially peacebuilding where top-down approaches can face resistance and have been ineffective in the past (Emery, 2022). Local ownership supports sustainability of humanitarian activities (OECD, 2017; Van Brant and Patel, 2018; Barakat and Milton, 2020 and Roespstorff, 2020 in Barbelet, Davies, Flint and Davey, 2021.) Localisation can increase the cultural sensitivity of humanitarian responses, further adding to acceptance (ICVA, 2018).

Challenges and Barriers for Localisation globally and in Iraq

Challenges and Barriers for Localisation in Iraq:

It is worth noting at a first glance that studies about localisation in Iraq are scarce. Meanwhile, this project and report is unique research that studies localisation in HMA in Iraq on empirical bases. In November 2018, an IFRC Field Mission investigated the current state of play of localisation in Iraq, and was able to identify a variety of challenges and barriers. The mission identified different understandings of localisation; for some, it speaks to improving cooperation between the international and local, for others it is a way to transform the humanitarian system, whereby local actors lead emergency response, requiring sustainable humanitarian capacity in Iraq. Language barriers were identified as a barrier to the full engagement of local organizations, specifically the use of jargon and understanding of specialized terminology. The mission found a low level of awareness of the Grand Bargain across different stakeholder groups. For some international actors, localisation was part of their exit strategy, acting as a way to gradually shift responsibilities to local actors as international involvement decreases, with an assumed sustainability alongside it. (Mahmood *et al*, 2018).

International actors reported reservations about directly supporting local actors due to concerns about a perceived lack of neutrality, fiduciary risks, and doubts about the ability of local actors to align with Humanitarian Resource Plan objectives (Mahmood *et al*, 2018). “We observed that local actors did face challenges in upholding humanitarian standards, but the Iraqi reality was much more nuanced and complex than the way in which the issue is often portrayed in headquarters debates.” (Mahmood *et al*, 2018).

Local actors reported that capacity constraints affected participation in leadership roles in programming, in addition to seeking longer-term, strategic partnerships with international organizations, as current relationships tend to be short-term and project-specific. Furthermore, organisational development – namely developing organisational governance, finance, IT systems, and fundraising capacities for sustainable, unrestricted income – was highlighted as a capacity development need for many local organisations. Transparency in funding decisions was a notable concern, with local organizations often feeling uncertain about the reasons for proposal rejections or receiving no feedback at all (Mahmood *et al*, 2018).

Lastly, coordination structures in humanitarian efforts were described as ‘dominated’ by international organizations, posing challenges for local engagement, namely language barriers, agendas prioritizing international organization needs, and complexity within the coordination system, such as heavy use of acronyms (Mahmood *et al*, 2018).

Localisation within the mine action sector specifically faces the challenges associated to the technical nature of the field and associated work. International operators often benefit from increased experience and familiarity with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) designed to keep deminers safe in their work. National actors whose organisations are less mature, or are relatively new to the mine action sector may be perceived to be less safe or efficient when competing with such operators.

The Grand Bargain

The Grand Bargain agreement, which underpins international commitment to localisation, launched in 2016 during the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), bringing together donors and international humanitarian organizations in a pact to pursue localisation with the view of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2023). The Grand Bargain followed the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, as a proposition to channel more resources into the hands of people in need and affected communities. The Grand Bargain currently has 66 signatories, including Member States, UN Agencies and NGOs.

The Seven Dimensions of Localisation

In 2018, the 'seven dimensions' framework for Localisation was introduced, based on feedback from local and national organizations. This framework emphasises the empowerment and involvement of individuals affected by crises in humanitarian efforts, while drawing from various commitments in the Grand Bargain in the hope to advance the Localisation agenda (Van Brabant, 2020). The Framework includes the following seven dimensions:

Relationship Quality

Local and national actors, increasingly seek authentic and fair partnerships in humanitarian efforts, including a shift from the role of sole implementer towards decision-making partners (Van Brabant, 2020). Relationship quality and partnership entails respectful communication, transparent principles for partnership, reciprocal evaluations, ensuring whistleblowing procedures are included in partnerships and avoiding unnecessary due diligence.

A 'Participation Revolution'

The 'participation revolution' advocates for crisis-affected individuals to have more of a role in shaping relief efforts seeking to support them (Van Brabant, 2020). Despite their resilience, crisis and conflict affected communities are often depicted as helpless. This connects to the use of needs assessments in the humanitarian sector to guide decision-making, and the implementation of feedback mechanisms for affected communities, however, true participation in decision-making remains limited. Community-led relief efforts are an example of such participation, alongside improvement of the inclusion of national and local actors in the humanitarian sector. Participation in the design and implementation of interventions is empowering for local populations, feedback and response mechanisms set up with communities, community and survivor-led funds are utilised, crisis-affected populations are included in the design phase, reviews and evaluations.

Funding and Financing

As stipulated in the Grand Bargain, the commitment in funding aims to ensure that a minimum of 25% of international funds reaches local actors with minimal intermediaries, alongside other indicators such as the quantity of funding and reduced earmarking (IASC, 2023). Challenges arise for local actors when co-funding conditions are imposed, particularly in competition with INGOs, alongside the competitive presence of international agencies in emerging markets. Local and national actors receive appropriate funding to attract and retain qualified human resources, existing organisational structures are reinforced, international agencies enable direct contact between donors and local and national actors, budget

transparency, fraud and corruption risks on all sides are acknowledged and managed and financial autonomy and sustainability of local and national actors is a strategic objective in partner relationships. However, globally, there is a decreasing level of funding to local actors from 3.8% in 2019; 3.4% in 2020; 2.3% in 2021; down to 1.8% of global funds in 2022 while the Grand Bargain target is 25%.

Capacities

Capacity enhancement within the localisation agenda works on enhancing institutional strengths of local and national humanitarian actors. Misconceptions about local and national capacities, uncoordinated training efforts, and an overemphasis on specific capacities can undermine the benefits of capacity enhancement work; furthermore, capacity maintenance can be a challenge as NNGOs struggle to maintain staff (GMI, 2020). Strategic capacity-enhancing investments, capacity-strengthening efforts are need-driven not supply-driven, capacity-sharing as an underlying goal in partnerships, and role changes follow capacity strengthening.

Coordination

The coordination dimension aims to enhance the participation of national actors in humanitarian coordination mechanisms and forums, and to promote local and national actor's full participation and leadership within these. Support is provided to pre-existing local and national networks, decisions informed by in-depth situational understanding, including the views of affected population, coordination and collaborative environment in enabling for local and national actors, and the government (in principle) co-leads all coordination mechanisms.

Visibility

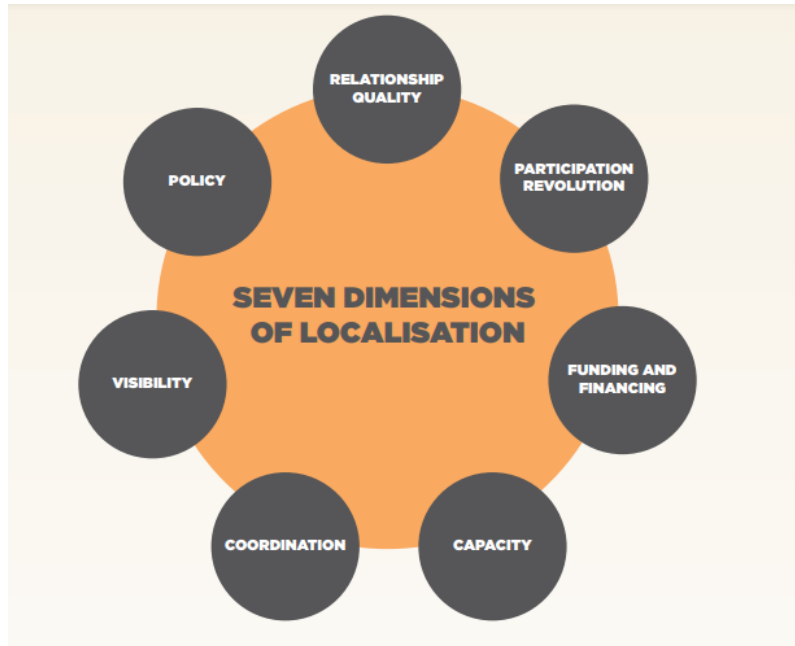
Ideas and practices developed by local and national actors are publicly acknowledged. Local and national actors need to agree on communications that put them at risk and roles, risks taken and contributions of local and national actors are visible.

Visibility work with the localisation agenda aims to improve acknowledgment and recognition of the crucial role, contributions, innovations, and accomplishments of local actors (Van Brabant, 2020). This is something that can be helped or hindered by partnership, depending on the narratives used in reporting and communications.

Policy and Standard-Setting

Local and national agencies influence international policy debates and standards discussions and stakeholders can effectively input into government policy and planning.

Local and national actors can be far removed from the international spaces where policy and standards are often set. This dimension looks to facilitate the engagement of national actors in international policy and standards-setting dialogues, so that their perspectives can be considered. National actors working to internationally defined standards can be challenging, especially for financially vulnerable local and national organizations (Van Brabant, 2020).



Brabant and Patel (2018) "Localisation in Practice: Emerging Indicators and Practical Recommendations", *Global Mentoring Initiative*, https://www.preventionweb.net/files/59895_localisationinpracticefullreportv4.pdf

Using the seven dimensions framework highlighted above, the research team asked the participants to describe the current situation of where we are now, what needs to change, alongside barriers, obstacles, and progress markers for success across each dimension of localisation. Then, the research team, using interactive analysis, went back to our participants during a learning session with problems and solutions identified during the interviews, which they then voted on the most important to focus on.

Main Findings

Stakeholder Analysis:

The following findings draw from interviews with representatives from NNGOs and INGOs to assess the significance of HMA stakeholders in localisation efforts within the HMA sector in Iraq.

The first set of qualitative data collection interviews within this Learning Trajectory was a stakeholder analysis, following initial discussions on stakeholders between INGOs and NNGOs during our initial co-creation workshop. The project team used the Power/Interest Matrix tool for Stakeholder Analysis method. We asked participants to rank the interest in and power over localisation of various HMA and non-HMA stakeholders in the context of Iraq three months after the workshop to compare changes in perceptions over time.

Donors:

Perceived interest: Output-orientated, Preference to capacity building; Preference to INGO-NNGO partnerships over directly working with NNGOs.

Perceived power: Ability to fund/pull resources; Ability to set pre-requisites in contracts/grants.

How they can further localisation in HMA in Iraq: Influence over Government; Advocacy with National Authority; Understand context-specific challenges; Include localisation requirements in grants and contracts.

Donors were consistently ranked as high in interest and power. Participants described a perceived preference for INGO-NNGO partnerships over direct collaboration with NNGOs, which participants believed stemmed from donor's currently having a higher degree of trust in INGOs. Moreover, participants identified a lack of financial trust in the context of Iraq, alongside shifting donor priorities in line with new humanitarian crises. Donors enable Iraqi HMA staff to work and provide the only means for organizations to obtain essential equipment such as heavy machinery, and ambulances. Donors' primary strength lies in coordination and influence over governments and incorporating localisation project tenders and requests for proposals. Participants highlighted the value of donors discussing the benefits of localisation with the Iraqi DMA, which participants felt could be swayed by the donor community. Interviews also identified a communication gap between NNGOs and donors. Again, this was connected to DMA and the Ministry of the Environment, who participants felt should facilitate the NNGOs by linking them with the donors.

The Directorate of Mine Action and the Ministry of Environment:

Perceived interest: Preference to INGOs; Competing priorities.

Perceived power: Ability to grant permissions; Responsible for demining in Iraq; Government representatives; Ability to finance their own demining operations.

How they can further localisation in HMA in Iraq: Support NNGOs' demining operations; Advocate the Iraqi Government for localisation; Enhance NNGOs' visibility; Facilitate accreditation of NNGOs.

Overall, participants ranked the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) and its parent organisation, the Ministry of Environment as low interest, but high power. They were perceived to prefer international operations stay in Iraq to speed up the land transfer, assist in its own internal capacity building, and provide local employment opportunities. They

recently finalized a plan with GICHD; working with NNGOs is easier for them, however, the Ministry of Environment's new regulations, such as the access letters are challenging for NNGOs. There was a perception that conflicting priorities interfere with its demining mandate, such as the absence of accreditation for NNGOs and insufficient support for QA. These actors facilitate execution of localisation through facilitating demining operations, provide guidance to funders and INGOs, finance their own demining operations and grant relevant permissions to NNGOs and INGOs. They are responsible for all matters related to demining including certification and access, and have the ability to exert control over INGOs, alongside access to their own financial resources.

The DMA incorporates NNGOs in various endeavors, fostering inclusivity. Despite some preference for INGOs, advocacy for localisation as a strategic government priority, financial justification, and reputation development showcases the DMA's commitment to creating a supportive environment, alongside efforts to enhance NNGOs' visibility, value continuous learning, and acknowledge local non-profit organizations.

The Directorate of Non-Governmental Organisations:

Perceived interest: Capacity-enhancement of NNGOs; Mandate to assist NGOs in navigating government processes.

Perceived power: Involvement in registration; Facilitate access to resources; Authority to halt mobility/activities; Lack of involvement in accreditation.

How they can further localisation in HMA in Iraq: Share lessons learned; Facilitate collaboration among stakeholders; Advocate for localisation with the DMA.

The Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations (DNGO) emerged as a key stakeholder, with mixed perceptions of high and low interest but seen as high in power. Participants described the DNGO's focus on capacity-enhancement of NNGOs, however they also described a lack of support for NNGOs gaining accreditation. The DNGO holds the authority to halt the activities and mobility of NGOs, and their involvement in the registration process (as a conduit between NGOs and Ministries), ability to facilitate access to resources, and role in sharing experiences, lessons learned and , enhancing collaboration among stakeholders suggests they are able to support an enabling environment for local actors.

NNGOs:

Perceived interest: Localisation would increase NNGO's role.

Perceived power: Through their work; Collective power through collaboration and advocacy.

How they can further localisation in HMA in Iraq: Increase NNGO coordination; Showcase their successes.

NNGOs were ranked as high in interest and power, as they are fundamental to achieving localisation. Despite funding challenges, participants identified a significant opportunity for NNGOs to enhance their capacity. Participants raised the difference in funding allocation for INGOs and NNGOs, as INGOs received most of the funding while NNGOs – in the context of implementing partners – primarily conduct delivery. When describing NNGOs' role in localisation, participants spoke about organizational growth, mandate, and local employment, while highlighting a mutual interest in collaboration. Participants also identified the potential for NNGOs to collaborate more with each other, and through sharing lessons

learnt, showcasing their successes to international donors and developing clear pitches for funding, and continued active participation in the HMA sector, NNGO's can promote localisation in HMA in Iraq. Furthermore, advocacy can strengthen this impact.

INGOs:

Perceived interest: Connection between localisation and funding; More active operators support mandate of an EO free Iraq; Competition for funding.

Perceived power: Relationship with donors; Collective power to pressure the DMA; Partnerships with NNGOs.

How they can further localisation in HMA in Iraq: Advocacy with donors and national authorities; Provide capacity enhancement for NNGOs; Include NNGO partners in donor meetings/communications.

Participants described INGOs with mixed reports of high and low interest, but high influence over localisation. They spoke to donor interest in localisation, and how INGO participation in capacity enhancement partnerships supports their reputation with donors. INGO's pre-existing relationship with donors was highlighted as their main source of influence on localisation, in addition to the collective potential to influence national authorities and government agencies.

Seven Dimensions of Localisation

The following findings draw from interviews with representatives from NNGOs and INGOs, the DMA, IKMAA and three representatives of the Donor community to understand the current state of play of localisation of mine action in Iraq across each dimension, alongside obstacles and potential solutions, using the Seven Dimension Framework.

Relationship quality:

Key Findings:

Interviews indicated that collaboration between NNGOs and INGOs was positive, and led to capacity sharing. This equality facilitated cooperative efforts across diverse geographic regions, and freedom of movement allowed both local and international entities to operate effectively in various locations, enhancing the overall reach and impact of their initiatives. There is still a need for NNGOs to be treated equally to INGOs.

“I think that decision making power is really critical. I know there's been a lot of conversations and research around this as well and basically like if we really want to honor the Grand Bargain and move this localisation agenda forward it's kind of time that your local partner organisations are also [have a] signature, for example of your contracts.” – INGO 4 interview

“The local should be parallel to the international, and we consider the local with the same budgetary palm as a subcontractor... the partnership must be balanced.” – NNGO 5 interview

Interviews with INGO participants observed that NNGOs sometimes struggled to meet reporting requirements and had a lower ability to absorb shocks and stresses, as typically smaller organisations, although this was still a challenge for INGOs as well.

An NNGO participant highlighted that INGOs hold a financial advantage, and that their relative financial stability stemmed from their experience and established networks. An INGO representative spoke from their example of a capacity building partnership, where the INGO partner was the budget holder for the project, as the NNGO partner could not meet the financial reporting requirements of donors independently. This led to limitations in what they could prove from a financial management perspective throughout the project.

“International donors need to, it's not so much relax their requirements when it comes to who they partner with, but they need to understand for example, some of the national partners don't have all the financial records that [are] required.” INGO 3 interview

Despite this, a participant highlighted that NNGOs contribute valuable experience, although limited interactions between local and international entities prevent the full use of this collective knowledge.

Participants from two NNGOs flagged that the level of coordination and communication affected the quality and success of partnerships. An INGO participant spoke to the importance of clear expectations at the beginning of partnerships, and how this led to them

changing partner early on to an organisation that showed strong understanding and buy in to the steps needed within capacity development.

“Joint work is followed by good coordination and communication. We had a weakness in coordination, communication and that led to have weak partnerships.” – NNGO 4 interview

“From the get go it was evident that not only did [the NNGO partner] understand nationalisation, but they understood how we really get there in terms of the steps that we have to go through.” – INGO 3 interview

Two NNGO interviews flagged that unrealistic requests put a strain on partnerships, highlighting the importance of clear communication.

“What makes successful partnership? I think having a common goal that is transparent and clear from the beginning, I think, helps to set the tone”- INGO 4 interview

Lastly, another key theme, reflected in both NNGO and INGO interviews was the theme of trust. Trust was described as essential for fostering a supportive environment, building the foundation of effective collaboration, and that there’s more to be done to cultivate trust between NNGOs and INGOs, especially in the context of Iraq, due to perceptions of corruption. Less scrutiny of national actors, alongside more decision making autonomy were suggested as signs of improved trust.

“There must be trust in the organisation first, then support through support in the field.” – NNGO 1 interview

Acknowledgement of and support for newer NGOs was highlighted as crucial for inclusion and promoting a more equitable collaboration environment. The establishment of equal partnerships, trust-building through proper reporting and monitoring, and active inclusion in policy discussions were identified as key markers of progress and success. Challenges such as the perception of INGOs treating NNGOs as subcontractors were seen to affect participation, and as grants are not given directly, this added to the distance between local actors and project design spaces.

Furthermore, three NNGO interviews highlighted that partnerships should move beyond collaboration at the proposal submission stage and involve regular meetings and resource sharing. The due diligence process was identified as a barrier, alongside recognising administrative costs and needs, in a fuller understanding of the needs and requirements of NNGOs beyond project delivery. Communication gaps due to the need for translation or remote working from INGOs was another barrier to quality relationships, alongside the time needed for initial inception – one INGO suggested a built-in inception phase to projects could be beneficial, as NNGOs are often restricted in resources and staff available.

Flexibility to allow for adapting to changing circumstances was seen as a feature of a more resilient partnership, alongside a move to sustainable, long-term partnerships.

What would success look like? “If rights and duties are equal as partners and on the same level” – NNGO 5 interview

Analysis of relationship quality in HMA partnerships in Iraq:

The theme of trust (including financial trust), quality communication, equality, balanced efforts and increased recognition of national organisations capacities in general were raised when asked about this dimension. Yet, there are still some shortcomings in terms of more capacity enhancement required in different aspects of finance, administration and due diligence. Partnerships are not strategic and are mainly project-based, which can be terminated any time by intermediaries. Power-imbalance between NNGOs, on one side, and intermediaries, on the other, is prevalent. Intermediaries are perceived as the representatives of donors and, being the budget holders, they have the upper hand. All these factors contribute to sidelining NNGOs from active decision-making processes and sound relationship among all parties involved: NNGOs, intermediaries (UN and INGOs) and donors.

Interactive Analysis:

Our interactive analysis (whereby participants voted on key problems and solutions drawn from NNGO and INGO interviews) highlighted the following key problems and solutions:

Key problem: Our participant vote was evenly split between inequality of partnerships and limited recognition of newer national organisations.

Key actions/solutions: Increased recognition of newer NNGOs was highlighted as an area to improve relationships in the mine action sector in general. Key solutions within partnerships identified local organisations having an active role in decision making processes, alongside pursuing regular meetings within partnerships to facilitate open communication.

Participatory Approach:

Key Findings:

Interviews revealed that the development of strategies is predominantly led by international organisations (within partnerships) with local organisations playing a limited role, or exclusively the DMA. Furthermore, limited information sharing around changes to policies was highlighted by one NNGO participant who said that they often find out that criteria has been changed when reapplying for accreditation.

“Strategies are usually developed by international organisations, and most local organisations do not participate in them, relying on international organisations in coordination with government departments.” – NNGO 2 interview

Interviews flagged that more NNGO participation was needed in both project development and at national level to national authorities, namely the DMA, although some NNGOs spoke to their participation in project design. Local organisations should have increased opportunities for input and should be considered during project design, especially as this is an opportunity to raise cultural differences for a more inclusive approach.

“The NNGOs have context[ual] understanding so their opinion should be taken into consideration while designing the project.”- NNGO 6 interview

“I can speak about my experience with our existing partner (an example from Iraq) I see that we are not too far with them, we are so behind in terms of national actors being involved in strategy planning, proposals and project designs. They are not to the level where they can give their proposals directly, rather we ask them to do this and that.”- INGO 2 interview, referring to a partnership outside of Mine Action

Improving the participatory approaches taken by national authorities and INGOs can lead to clear criteria for evaluating organisational performance during field visits and provide support for improvement. Furthermore, improved communication channels and a more inclusive decision-making process between NNGOs and INGOs aids collaboration.

The time needed for participation was identified as an obstacle, as initial consultation requires time and human resources. However, effective participation was seen to promote ease and flexibility in project implementation. An INGO described a three-year capacity enhancement scheme in Iraq where levels of participation changed over time, increasing year by year.

When describing what successful participation would look like, participants described trust in NNGOs demonstrated through financial delegation under INGO supervision with proper reporting and monitoring, inclusion of organisations in policy discussions and NNGO participation in donor meetings alongside INGOs and having an active voice within this.

Analysis of participation in HMA in Iraq:

The findings emphasise the need for ongoing efforts to enhance collaboration, communication, and inclusivity between NNGOs and INGOs in order to facilitate participation in projects, and between national operators, national authorities and governmental departments. Generally speaking, NNGOs still have no say in project designs, which is a top-down approach exercised by intermediaries.

Interactive Analysis:

Key Problem: Our participant vote identified limited involvement of NNGOs in decision making as a key problem in participation, alongside limited local participation in strategy development in general.

Key Actions/Solutions: Our participant vote showed that equal partnerships, transparent communication and active NNGO involvement in planning and execution of mine action projects are key to improving participation.

Funding and financing:

Key Findings:

Interviews indicated that no national actors primarily accessed funding through donors although two organisations were receiving direct funding from the UN having completed a UNMAS led capacity development partnership model grant. Mine action funding is traditionally institutional, and shifts in global humanitarian priorities have led to organisations in Iraq receiving less funding, mentioned by several participants. Within this context, local

organisations are grappling with significant difficulties in obtaining funding. Donors primarily provide funds through partnerships with UN agencies and international NGOs, and not all INGOs have partnerships with NNGOs, further limiting NNGO access to funds. An INGO participant described partnerships as dependent on INGO pitches to donors, which is increasingly challenging in a climate of reduced funding. One NNGO highlighted that they had been working for free on one project.

“It is not permissible to obtain external financing without the presence of an INGO”- NNGO 5 interview

NNGOs’ inability to obtain funding without an international intermediary was seen as a formidable challenge. A recurring barrier is the perception of corruption, and therefore a sense of financial risk of directly funding NNGOs. Furthermore, a lack of domestic funding further detracts the financial situation of HMA operators in Iraq, highlighted by both national and international actors in Iraq.

“I feel like there's donor interest, it's just the risk transfer that is occupying that space. Financial trust is a huge issue when it comes to partnering.” – INGO 2 interview

“Funding is reducing. But at the same time, the Iraq government is not really trying to backfill the funding gap themselves.” – INGO 3 interview

An NNGO participant suggested increased financial capacity development for NNGOs that are in need of this, namely coaching finance staff. However, even NNGOs with a strong financial management system face barriers, as the use of international organisations as intermediaries prevents NNGOs from proving their financial management capacities. This leads to NNGOs being trapped in the role of subcontractor. This coincides with other barriers, such as donor requirements, namely registration outside of Iraq, which is unachievable for most Iraqi NNGOs.

“I'm just trying to raise a voice, a message from local NGOs that I've heard before... they feel like they're not trusted to receive funding, but how are they supposed to prove that they can manage funding and implement good programming if they don't receive funding? Or they don't receive enough funding, whereby, they're not able to resource the organisation enough to meet the demands” – INGO 4 interview

Interviews recommended an increase to the proportion of funds allocated to NNGOs to allow them to attract experienced staff and retain talent, with improved considerations of the needs of NNGOs in contracts and sustainability as an indicator of success. Promotion of local organisations within the international community was seen as a route to changing this.

Lastly, interviews across INGOs and NNGOs flagged the Government’s role in funding, highlighting that ministries should take ownership, and that national authorities, such as the DMA could itself become a donor.

“Successful financing should be local, sovereign and under the supervision of the DMA.” – NNGO 4 interview

An interview with a participant from a national authority spoke to their current funding situation, at the time of the interview although the NMA had a budget for internal expenses they did not yet have a budget for projects. When asked what needs to change, they raised that each governorate affected by explosive contamination should have a dedicated budget for removing war remnants. They invited the central government to allocate funding for this and continue to do so on an annual basis. They also suggested advocacy and increased coordination with the international community as a route for strengthening financial security for Iraqi demining.

Another national authority interview raised that more funding was required for projects, although they spoke to successful fundraising in 2022. They highlighted the Iraqi involvement in the Ottawa Convention as a positive step.

An interview with a donor organisation spoke to restrictions around Iraqi funding, and a preference to contracts over grants, for which NNGOs would likely struggle to compete with over commercial operators.

“Recently we’ve had indications that [the government] do not like it when we issue grants, which is an absolute condition to be able to provide funding for localisation, they rather see it as contracts and rather see it as the recipient is doing a specific number of square meters, so out-put based basically and not outcome based implementation...In terms of government funding there is absolutely no chance of the government providing any funding for localisation of for local NGOs unless its under a contract. Iraqi legislation does not allow for it”- Donor 1 interview

Furthermore, interviews with donor organisations highlighted the barriers they face towards directly funding NNGOs. The capacity needed to manage grants with NNGOs directly can act as a barrier, alongside language barriers, particularly for donors with smaller embassies in country. One donor described that the majority of the funding within one of their portfolios goes to UN agencies and INGOs, however they encourage localisation through including the requirement to partner with local NNGOs.

“We try to work on localisation by ensuring that those partners have local organisations that they work with, and then also especially in the phase of developing a new programme that they also put this organisation in the driving seat, set the agenda, to really be able to direct the way the programme should go.” – Donor 2 interview

Another donor spoke to their model of funding mine action through a global programme, which would require national operators to bid through consortia. They spoke to the challenges national operators face competing for international funds, as due diligence on both ends can be more challenging, operating at scale is a challenge due to the expenses required for assets and staff involved. Furthermore, international organisations that are older may have more experience with standard operating procedures, giving donors confidence in deminer safety, alongside their familiarity with safeguarding and fraud prevention mechanisms, which were highlighted as key to this donor in particular.

Analysis of funding and financing in HMA in Iraq:

One of the common themes which emerged was a significant reliance on international organisations for financial support for NNGOs, with limited opportunities for direct funding to national actors, exacerbated by shifting global priorities. Financial trust, and the mechanisms around this, were also present as a key theme. Donors still do not seem encouraged or prepared to support NNGOs directly. Funding for HMA in Iraq, even through intermediaries, is dwindling to critical points. Quality and flexible funding for NNGOs are key for well-resourced and good capacitated organisations that can be sustained and qualified for accessing direct funding from donors, when available.

Interactive Analysis:

Key Problem: Our participant vote showed that reliance on INGOs for funding and inequality in the distribution of funding across national actors was a key challenge.

Key Actions/Solutions: Advocacy for transparent fund distribution and fair partnerships was highlighted as a key solution.

Capacity Enhancement:

Key Findings:

Participants highlighted the national capacities that currently exist in Iraq, one stating that most NNGOs have required experience and knowledge. Despite this, NNGOs face challenges, as they do not have access to heavy equipment, which limits clearance capacities, and their ability to take on larger projects, as well as wider organisational areas, namely in retention of staff and for some, financial reporting, proposal writing and fundraising capacities. One participant suggested proposals be jointly written by NNGOs and INGOs within partnerships, and training to navigate jargon and technical terms used in business proposals.

“Most of the NNGO[s] [have] good capabilities and experience but what ruined this is the unsustainability. The good employees leave the NNGOs and work with the INGOs due to the higher payment...” – NNGO 6 interview

Interviews showed a disparity around capacity-enhancements efforts, where some organisations had received capacity enhancement support while others had not. An NNGO shared that within their capacity enhancement partnership, they did not receive a strategic plan from the international partner, and suggested that transparency could foster more effective coordination in partnerships. Relevance of trainings provided was also raised as an area for improvement, alongside the time needed for technical capacity development, due to the nature of the mine action sector.

“I think it happens too many times ... we're going to give this type of training to a partner, but then this is just not relevant for a partner or it's something that they've already received. So, any type of capacity enhancement I think really needs to be kept broad until decided jointly with a partner.”- INGO 4 interview

When asked about success in relation to capacities, participants spoke about sustainability. An INGO participant described similar capacities to lead programming and gain funds, while an NNGO participant described a more rounded approach, including from a policy perspective. Training of trainers was also seen as an indicator of success, as well as application of knowledge gained in training.

“Each NNGO should have their own policies, code of conduct, and SOPs. That’s a clue that the NNGO can survive as an independent entity, and have vision and manage any project directly without INGO support.” – NNGO 6 interview

One INGO spoke about the promotion of national staff to leadership positions within their organisation as a move towards increased capacity recognition, and described capacity investment in the form of international training. Another INGO described the results of their capacity-enhancement partnership:

“When we first started our partnership with SHO, they were a very small organisation doing limited risk education within some of the IDP camps. Today they now have three manual clearance teams. They have a mechanical team and they have considerable EORE teams doing not just the camps but also doing EORE in the villages.” – INGO 3 interview

Funding was also raised in connection with capacities. A decrease in partnerships can lead to reduced capacities due to the associated reduction in funding. Furthermore, INGOs supporting the development of NNGO capacity requires finance and questions whether they should prioritise this over investing in the capacities of national staff within international organisations.

“What needs to change is think about managerial or organizational capacity. But that's going back to funding, even INGOs do not have the financial capacity to support national NGOs.” – INGO 2 interview

An interview with a national authority highlighted the strength, skill and experience of Iraqi staff in demining, highlighting challenges they face in their work, such as flooding and working in mountainous areas. The interview suggested that increased demining staff would support the national capacity, highlighting the lack of funding for training, discovering additional contamination alongside the need for victim assistance support – specifically support to a prosthetics centre.

“Our staff working in the fields are doing very well regarding facing the difficulties, they have the required skills and experience in removal. Our problem is in the number of experienced staff - the number of staff working in mine action is very low.” NA 1 interview

Another national authority described their own internal capacity, and how they pride themselves in being self-reliant. When asked what capacity building activities are necessary, they raised new methods/technological training, proposal development and resource mobilisation, challenges to achieving these were a lack of international partners and financial constraints.

Analysis of capacities and capacity enhancement in HMA in Iraq:

Overall, the success of capacity enhancement which has already taken place in HMA in Iraq is clear, alongside learnings. Capacity enhancement should go beyond operational and aim to facilitate the full participation of NNGOs in the sector, including support in developing the sector-specific language skills, financial management and proposal writing alongside management and organisational capacity and can be seen as successful when national organisations are sustainable.

Interactive Analysis:

Key Problem: The key problem identified was a lack of time and funds needed for successful capacity building processes, followed by employee turn-over in NNGOs preventing skills retention and affecting organisational capacity, and the distance between NNGOs and donors leading to a dependency on INGOs.

Key Actions/Solutions: Our participant vote highlighted two key solutions to focus on: showcasing successful examples of national capacity and a focus on the retention of employees within NNGOs with competitive compensation and career development. These were followed by joint proposal writing between NNGOs and INGOs within partnerships and collaborative decisions in initial capacity-building partnerships for required training.

Influencing coordination and contextual policies and standards

Key Findings:

The main finding repeated across interviews was weak coordination for HMA in Iraq since the closure of the UN led cluster system². The absence of reported meetings, as indicated from both NNGO and INGO interviews, highlights a critical issue. Participants called on national authorities, such as the DMA, to take a proactive role in coordinating HMA activities. One participant flagged that infrequent gatherings weakened the voice of local organisations. Coordination that does take place is dependent on relationships. Interviews also showed that previous coordination mechanisms had been led by international entities.

“There’s been no coordination amongst the national NGOs or international mine action NGOs here after the UN.” – INGO 4 interview

When describing successful coordination, participants spoke to communication and working complementarily through incorporating the strengths of local organisations. Establishing direct and efficient communication with various stakeholders, including international organisations, higher authorities, and government departments was highlighted as essential for any coordination mechanism that would be put in place.

² This refers mainly to clearance and survey, quarterly EORE meetings are held by the DMA to coordinate EORE activities in Federal Iraq

What would success look like? “Through joint work where the strengths and weaknesses of local organisations are effectively highlighted and addressed through collaboration with international organisations.” – NNGO 1 interview

I/NNGO interviews highlighted the value of increased input on contextual policies and standards, namely as a route to adjusting SOPs to align with on the ground realities.

An interview with a participant from a national authority highlighted their coordination with donors at a regional level, referring to a specific regional centre, through reporting, meeting with embassies and monthly media visits. Another national authority participant raised the successful coordination between the DMA and IKMAA during the development of both a National Strategic Plan and National Victim Assistance Standards.

Analysis of HMA coordination and contextual policies and standards:

The need for increased coordination within the mine action sector in Iraq was one of the main themes discussed in interviews. Furthermore, participants highlighted the role national actors can have in this.

Interactive Analysis:

Key Problem: Our participant vote was split between two main problems, the lack of face-time and communication between operators and coordination mechanisms being led by international entities. This was followed by a lack of mine action coordination meetings.

Key Actions/Solutions: Improved representation of NNGOs in coordination mechanisms, for example in the capacity of board members, was highlighted as a key solution. This was followed by DMA/IKMAA led Mine Action coordination meetings and both INGOs and NNGOs having active roles in coordination mechanisms.

Sharing credit and giving visibility

Key Findings:

One finding indicated that visibility of organisations fluctuated across different NNGOs, furthermore, visibility to communities was highlighted over donor/international visibility. The closure of NNGOs due to financial instability was connected to lower visibility of NNGOs in general.

“The NNGOs some of them are weak, they [have] one or two projects, the others are visible to the communities [but this] depends on the number of projects they [have] and still having funds” – NNGO 6 interview

Among the key findings there was a sentiment from NNGOs that their work was not adequately represented in reports submitted by INGOs to donors, as indicated by three participants. This connects to the sense that NNGOs often act as implementers and INGOs take a more donor-facing role within partnerships. This can also correspond to unclear expectations at the beginning of partnerships, as highlighted by one INGO participant,

speaking to the beginning of their capacity building partnership where INGO staff members managed NNGO demining teams. One NNGO participant appealed to other national organisations to come together in order to strengthen their voices.

“Although the INGOs have a strong role, the implementation is mostly on the NNGO, but the visibility is mostly for the INGO.” – NNGO 6 interview

“We only send reports and they only change the logo and there is no mention of the level required for our efforts and [UN Agency] receives reports from INGO and not local organisations.” – NNGO 4 interview

“The biggest obstacles is over claiming what you’ve done. So, for example, with [NNGO partner] when we first started [the INGO partner] managed the clearance teams. We agreed that actually because they were ultimately going to be [the NNGO partner’s] teams that [the NNGO partner] claim the clearance. [The INGO partner] could have turned round and said, right until such time as you take ownership of those teams and you manage them yourselves, [the INGO partner] will claim all of the clearance stats, et cetera” – INGO 3 interview

INGO interviews highlighted their reporting and communications in support of visibility of NNGO partners, however reporting duties were identified by one participant to contribute to a power imbalance between partners, alongside a lack of partnerships being seen to contribute to reduced visibility for national actors. NNGO attendance at donor meetings, alongside donor visits to the field were highlighted as areas to improve NNGO visibility.

“I don't think anyone would resist sharing credit... Speaking from experience, there aren't enough local partnerships there.” – INGO 2 interview

“I think there's definitely a power imbalance there that plays in between if it's an international organisation who is the one faced to the donor and writing the report compared to the local organisation.” – INGO 4 interview

INGO, NNGO and donor interviews highlighted improving NNGO online presence – both through websites and being active on social media – as a route to improving NNGO visibility. This would reduce dependency on international actors’ communications. One INGO participant highlighted a disparity they observed between online communications and on the ground observations.

“I go on social media and I see big operators, and I'm not naming names here, but big, big operators with local actors doing the legwork on the ground and there's little, actually no visibility or credit sharing here. And the way I see it also, I only hear about local organisations when I'm on the ground because then we see they're actually working” – INGO 2 interview

“The local NGOs should have strong website[s], and that is effect[s] its visibility to INGOs and donors.” – NNGO 3 interview

Interviews showed that other dimensions of localisation affected visibility, such as coordination, as an NNGO participant highlighted that the national authority’s relationship

with donors affected the visibility of national organisations. Furthermore, one participant raised international participation as a link to NNGO's visibility.

"There is no communication between local authorities and donors" – NNGO 5 interview

"The local organisations also don't tend to have kind of offices or people in other locations outside of Iraq, so that also could reduce their visibility, so I think that is also a challenge." – INGO 4 interview

Lastly, an interviewee raised low visibility of challenges and needs in Iraq internationally and in the wider public. Another interview with a participant from a national authority highlighted the need for more media attention for Iraqi demining to attract donors, suggesting the government push for the production of a documentary.

Donor interviews also shed light on the challenges in connecting to NNGOs, such as security issues and language barriers. Two donor interviews highlighted reaching out to embassies in-country as an avenue for NNGOs to increase their visibility with donors, and another suggested involvement in a joint coordination mechanism.

"It really helps to know organisations because then you can keep them in the back of your mind when you talk to other donors that might have funding opportunities opening up or to a partner organisation that's looking for an implementing partner somewhere, or to foster those linkages. So maybe it's just an encouragement then to proactively reach out to us." – Donor 2 interview

"So I noticed that there are some national NGOs participating in The Humanitarian Coordination Team in Iraq. So I think if there is any opportunity to engage in such forums, which also include donors in addition to the UN agencies and international organisations, so maybe taking the opportunity to be part of such initiatives." – Donor 1 interview

Analysis of visibility and credit sharing in HMA in Iraq:

Interviews showed that NNGOs remain less visible than their INGO counterparts. The key themes across this dimension including the potential for social media, interactions with embassies and project reporting were all highlighted as avenues available to enhance NNGO visibility. A lack of transparency in reporting to donors is evident, with NNGOs feeling that their work is under-represented in reports submitted by intermediaries. There is a perception that INGOs often take credit for work that involves significant efforts from NNGOs. This raises issues of ownership, credit sharing, trust and the need for a fair representation of contributions. The perception of reluctance to highlight the role of local organizations, possibly to maintain control over grants, is acknowledged as a challenge.

Interactive Analysis:

Key Problem: Our participant vote highlighted that INGOs often having a more donor facing role in partnerships as the key challenge for visibility. This was followed by a communication

gap between national authorities and donors affecting the visibility of the national actors in the sector as a whole.

Key Actions/Solutions: Our participant vote was split between two main solutions, namely NNGOs attending donor meetings alongside INGOs and transparency within reporting.

Influencing international policy and standards:

Key Findings:

Interviews highlighted that NNGOs did not have much influence at the international level, including limited influence on international policies. This was linked to attendance at international events, such as mine action conferences in Geneva, which both NNGO and INGO participants identified as limited for national actors – with only one Iraqi NNGO highlighted as attending such events. This was connected to participant calls to raise the issue of explosive contamination in Iraq on the international stage, alongside fundraising efforts for demining in Iraq. INGO participants highlighted that NNGOs fundraising and influencing at the international level is a major step towards independent implementation of mine action activities. Success was described as a continuation and increase of NNGO presence at key international events.

NNGO interviews highlighted that international influence can raise the profile of national actors and increase the recognition of their work and the role of national actors, although their ability to do so depends on their existence and survival.

“The NNGOs should have presence. Most of the NNGOs are facing close down.” – NNGO 3 interview

The flexibility of international policies NNGOs work under was raised during interviews, although this could be more reflective of the ways of working within the humanitarian sectors as a whole opposed to solely the mine action sector. Many of the national organisations within this research work across multiple sectors, and the examples cited in interviews and follow on workshops were from other sectors, namely a failed mixed-gender education project, and the distribution of blue clothing in displacement camps after the Daesh conflict, a colour forbidden in the religion of the target population. Nonetheless, lack of national influence on international policies and the need for flexibility within implementing these on the ground was highlighted in NNGO interviews, and discussions in a follow-on workshop spoke to the challenges in meeting one example of these: the 50:50 gender split in deminer teams, described as achievable in some regions of Iraq, but not for others. An NNGO participant highlighted that successful progress in this dimension would enable national organisations to better influence internationally set policies. It should be noted that as many NNGOs work in partnership with INGOs, the term ‘international policies’ also spoke to the policies of INGOs in-country.

“Because we are a NNGO we don’t have the power to change the international policies.” – NNGO 6 interview

“They are the leaders and we are the followers.” – NNGO 6 interview

Lastly, in-country coordination between national operators and national authorities was connected to the international dimension, as national authorities represent the country internationally and therefore have an ability to enhance the voice of national actors at the international stage.

Donor interviews also spoke to the international dimension, highlighting virtual participation, and engagement with embassies in country as a route to increasing their influence on the international community. One donor participant highlighted the example of the CEO of a national organisation addressing the UN Security Council, stressing the importance of having national actors in a speaking role.

Analysis of influencing international policies and standards:

Overall, interviews spoke to signs of increasing NNGO engagement and influence with the international community, however this was still limited. Interviewees called for continued and increased support to facilitate this.

Interactive Analysis:

Key Problems: Our participant vote was split between two main problems, lack of access to international events and lack of coordination between national authorities and NNGOs.

Key Actions/Solutions: Our vote was equally split between three main solutions: increased NNGO attendance at international mine action events, increased coordination between national authorities and NNGOs and NNGOs' role being highlighted at the international level.

Recommendations:

Supporting equitable partnership and reciprocal relationship. Power balance and equal and equitable partnerships are key to the success of localisation.

- Improve partnership models to practice trustful, equal, transparent, complimentary and win-win relationship between intermediaries and NNGOs. The sound relationship should clearly be equal; not an employer-employee or contractor-subcontractor one. Key obstacles include perceptions of corruption in certain countries and challenges in the due diligence process. Building trust is a key success factor. There is an emphasis on the significance of a transparent common goal for success the ongoing progress needed in cultivating relationships and trust before donor engagement was noted.
- Give more space for reciprocal and mutual evaluation about the capacity and quality of relationship between NNGOs and intermediaries and share findings with donors. Clear criteria for evaluating organisational performance, increased community engagement, and improved communication channels are crucial elements for addressing challenges and fostering collaborative decision-making.
- Encourage and incentivise intermediaries to establish genuine partnerships where power is shared; not monopolised. Partnership agreements can, collectively, be agreed and counter-signed by all partners involved with full transparency. Likewise, reporting to donors can be prepared collaboratively to ensure equity and transparency.
- Appreciate non-monetary value contribution by NNGOs that are relevant and crucial to reaching the partnership and project goals and objectives. NNGO partners have many things to provide that intermediary partners may lack.
- Engage local partners in project designs, development and implementation with inputs and contributions that are reflected to donors. Intermediaries proactively engage NNGOs in the initial stages of projects to better understand their needs, rather than having preconceived and read-made recipes. Make communications very clear and open to establish constructive relationship.

Promoting direct access to donor funds by local and national organisations.

- Donors to walk the talk by changing funding policies that allows access of NNGOs to direct funding. Donors can consider the U.S. Administration experience in funding NNGOs directly. The Department of State (PM/WRA) provided bilateral funding for Afghanistan's Mine Action Program for over two decades. USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) also has rolled out a pilot project of direct funding for 30 L/NNGOs globally. There are other experiences outside the HMA sector where donor governments have been providing direct funding to NNGOs.
- Grand Bargain signatories to hold intermediaries and partners accountable to achieve the 25% funding target by establishing more partnerships and committing clear funding in project budgets to localisation.
- Allow quality and flexible funding and sharing overheads costs equally among all partners (intermediaries and L/NNGOs) to provide more resources to sustain organisational capacity and retain core staff.
- Set criteria and bench marks of the minimum accepted levels of compliance capacity of L/NNGOs in order to be able to access direct funding from donors. Despite years of capacity building, NNGOs remain unable to access direct funding without partnering with intermediaries.

Ongoing investment in strengthening NNGO capacities with needs-based interventions to meet donor standards.

- Allocate longer term funding for multi-year partnerships that can enable effective capacity enhancement of partners, on one side, and, strengthen the NNGOs capacity, on the other.
- Support NNGOs with enhancing their capacities to meet donor requirements of due diligence and compliance. This should be a tailor made relevant training and development initiative based upon evidence-based needs assessments designed collaboratively between the NNGO and intermediary. The development plan should, in addition to technical dimensions, include gaps in administration (HR, Procurement and logistics), finance management, risk management and visibility, in addition to resource mobilisation; and, any other relevant area.
- Involve existing national capacities in supporting new emerging organisations in building their capacities and providing training based on previous experiences. Provision by intermediaries can of financial expertise and coaching for local NGO finance staff is suggested to enhance financial management capabilities.
- Intermediaries to support NNGOs with retaining their staff to sustain the organisational capacity and contain national staff turnover due to pay disparity. All parties to work collaboratively to bridge gaps in salary scales and benefits.
- Give credit to NNGOs work and report to donors transparently about roles and achievements of local partners. Share achievements of partners on media and make their roles visible. NNGOs should also build and enhance their capacity to make their work visible by using different social media outlets and cost-effective tools and methods.

Propagating coordination and contribution of NNGOs to national and international policies and plans.

- Improve representation of NNGOs in coordination mechanisms. Support the establishment of a national coordination platform led by NNGOs where L/NNGOs have more space and active roles in the decision-making process and mapping exercises. Language barriers should be taken into consideration and accommodated to avoid miscommunication.
- Use more advocacy practices to raise the awareness about localisation among the authorities, donors and intermediaries.
- Allocate resources and enable NNGOs to participate in international coordination mechanisms, networks and events, and to meet with donors and have more visibility. Coordination requires time, human and financial resources beyond short-term partnerships and capacity building initiatives.
- Facilitate meetings between donors and NNGOs with or without intermediaries and encourage open discussions and debates that can contribute to changing policies and enabling localisation.

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 - NNGO 2 Interview
 - NNGO 3 Interview
 - NNGO 4 Interview
 - NNGO 5 Interview
 - NNGO 6 Interview
 - INGO 1 Interview
 - INGO 2 Interview
 - INGO 3 Interview
 - INGO 4 Interview
 - INGO 5 Interview
 - NA 1 Interview
 - NA 2 Interview
 - Donor 1 Interview
 - Donor 2 Interview
 - Donor 3 Interview
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Interviews:

Stakeholder Analysis

The order of organisations here does not correspond to the number associated to the organisations interviews

Al Ghad League for Women and Childcare
Baghdad Organisation for Women and Childcare
Al Bustan
Shareteach Humanitarian Organisation
Baghdad Organisation for Removing Mines
The Health and Social Care Organisation in Iraq
Mines Action Advisory Group
Humanity and Inclusion
Dutch Relief Council
Danish Church Aid
Foundation Suisse de Déminage

Seven Dimensions of Localisation

The order of organisations here does not correspond to the number associated to the organisations interviews

Al Ghad League for Women and Childcare
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Danish Church Aid
Foundation Suisse de Déminage
Directorate of Mine Action
Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency
The Netherlands Embassy in Baghdad
The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
United Nations Mine Action Service