

LOCALISATION CASE STUDIES

Case studies prepared by national and international organisations to share their experiences of consciously promoting locally led humanitarian action through equitable partnerships. These case studies were prepared as part of efforts to raise awareness of [DG ECHO's localisation guidance note](#) published in March 2023. The examples shared in these case studies are funded by a range of different donors.

INTERSOS's Localisation Strategic Initiative

A case study describing a global project to fast-track the development of strategic and equitable partnerships with local and national partners. Reflecting on experience in countries across Africa and the Middle East, the case study highlights the focus the project put on **mutual capacity strengthening** of both local/national actors and the international partners and offers some recommendations to other organisations wishing to learn from this experience.

Background

For the past 3 years, INTERSOS, in partnership and with the support of SV (Stichting Vluchteling), has been leading a global Localisation Strategic Initiative (LSI). The programme was launched in July 2021 targeting 3 pilot countries - Chad, South Sudan, and Lebanon - aimed at developing strategic and equitable partnerships with national and local partners, while strengthening internal policies and tools able to support a more bottom-up approach to local collaborations. In 2022, the LSI was extended to Colombia, Burkina Faso and Central African



CONSORNOC and INTERSOS teams working together in the joint workshop on Access through Community Acceptance, part of the Bilateral Capacity Strengthening Plan. Chinácota, Norte de Santander region, Colombia.

Republic, while ensuring a new national and global focus on capacity strengthening. Organisational development of selected partners was promoted through need-based and demand-driven empowerment plans. In June 2023 the LSI was further extended to Mali and Yemen to pilot innovative and participative approaches to crisis response in very hard-to-reach areas.

Through the LSI, and as part of its localisation strategy, INTERSOS has developed strategic partnership models that are long-term, independent of specific grants and do not necessarily involve immediate joint implementation activities. Local and National Actors (L/NAs) possess valuable knowledge,

¹ DG ECHO's guidance note [Promoting Equitable Partnerships with Local Responders in Humanitarian Settings](#), March 2023

experiences and skills and should not be viewed solely as recipients in capacity strengthening planning. Emphasising reciprocity can foster more equitable partnerships while harnessing valuable resources and perspectives from both parties. In line with this principle, INTERSOS strategic partnership models are aimed at strengthening equitable relationships for future collaborations, and include *mutual capacity strengthening of both the INTERSOS Mission in the country of operation and the local partner*, ranging from the exchange of tools, information and contacts to more structured initiatives associated with organisational empowerment (training, mentoring, support in policy/tool development...).

How it works

Through the support of the initial joint assessment, the local partner organisation identifies specific goals for enhancing its organisational capacity. For each goal, specific action points, with corresponding timelines and designated individuals are assigned, thereby distributing responsibilities and costs between the partners based on available resources. A similar process is undertaken for INTERSOS' Mission in the country of operation, according to which the partner

organisation then provides tailored support to address INTERSOS priorities, by leveraging its own skills and unique expertise.

The localisation strategy employed by INTERSOS adheres to principles of equality and complementarity, with the ultimate aim of strengthening collective

“I would say the initiative had 3 levels of impact: first at organisational level, then on our expertise and ability to read the situations, and finally on impact we have on the community, as the various capacity strengthening sessions allowed us to respond more effectively to population’s requests.” *Florentin Eymard, Director, VERCA (Vision Enfant République Centrafricaine)*

capacity to address the needs of affected populations. Within this framework, the Bilateral Capacity Strengthening Plan (BCSP) facilitates the recognition and utilisation of local skills and resources. Involving not only local and national NGOs, but also informal community organisations which possess invaluable expertise in terms of local knowledge, access and behavioural change practices. The BCSP is needs-based and demand-driven, methodologies for skills-sharing are discussed together, preferring modalities aiming at empowering systems and structure, instead of individuals.

In **Burkina Faso**, INTERSOS signed a strategic collaboration with the local NGO AMMIE. The MoU included capacity strengthening initiatives organised by INTERSOS, related to Security management, Safeguarding and Finance. At the same time, the AMMIE provided a very insightful training on sustainability, peace and social cohesion for the INTERSOS team in Ouahigouya.



AMMIE and INTERSOS finance team at a budget training session in Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso

“When we did the initial joint assessment we were also asked what we wanted (for the development of our organisation), and it’s on this basis that priorities were established together! (The work done) is really based on our real needs. INTERSOS asked us to train their personnel and this was a first in a partnership: an international partner who supports us, then asks us to train its staff! It was a training on sustainability, peace and social cohesion. We were very happy that our skills were considered. We carried out the training and there was satisfaction on both sides. Really... we are not beneficiaries anymore, we are partners.”
Cécile Belloum, Director, AMMIE

“The Capacity and Risk Assessment was an important occasion to jointly discuss and analyse the internal strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunity that the daily collaboration may represent to strengthen them, filling our current gaps and share our knowledge of the context.” *Mrs. Manal Fawzy Shabib, Director, Sufra’ al-Atta Charity CBO*

Using initial experiences from the pilot phase, INTERSOS capitalized on the Strategic Localisation experience and have adopted the BCSP approach in other contexts. For example, in **Jordan**, through a project funded by the DG-ECHO, INTERSOS is currently partnering with the local NGO Forearms of Change Center to Enable Community (FOCCEC) and has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with eight Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), one in each Governorate of the action. The collaboration with the L/NAs includes Bilateral Capacity Strengthening Plans (BCSP) carried out through a coaching and shadowing approach and based on a Joint Capacity and Risk Assessment. INTERSOS developed a specific assessment model tailored for CBOs, with a strong focus on governance and community engagement capacity.

The CBO mentoring support, intended as a project direct cost, is conducted at the technical level (including protection risks and incident mitigation) and operational support level (including logistics, finance, and logistics management), and the methodology encompasses the co-working of INTERSOS and the L/NAs staff within the CBOs premises, enabling a bi-lateral daily interaction on specific topics.

Lessons learned and recommended actions

- 1) **Dedicated funding for institutional capacity strengthening (ICS) is essential to facilitate real capacity sharing in the partnership framework.** The LSI allowed INTERSOS to integrate a dedicated envelope to capacity strengthening, shared among partners. This amount (between 2,000 and 6,000 euros) and flexibility in eligible costs, really facilitated a need-based approach.

Recommendation: Allocate a dedicated envelope for ICS in project budgets

“The complementarity of the skills and resources is the successful element of the partnership: the collaboration has allowed reaching underserved and vulnerable groups with a technical synergy that has represented the added value of the response” *Abdallah Hanatleh, Executive Director, FOCCEC*

2) **Sharing responsibilities, efforts and costs:** INTERSOS initially experimented with various models, including allocating 100% of ICS funding directly to local partners. However, L/NNGOs often opt to hire consultants for tasks like policy

development and internal systems revision due to the lack of time and technical knowledge required for ICS. While external services can be helpful, they may not always yield the expected impact if not combined with a collective effort. Achieving genuine organizational empowerment entails ownership, reflection, adaptation, and widespread adoption of new practices. Most effective was to share the ICS budget and responsibilities between INTERSOS and its partners. This allows INTERSOS to support the entire process, reducing the ICS burden and sharing expertise. Arrangements regarding responsibilities and costs must be carefully negotiated and communicated with the donor.

Recommendation: Hold joint discussions to establish roles and responsibilities. If needed, share ICS financial resources among partners. Include as eligible costs for ICS the payment of additional staff who can facilitate the implementation of new practices from both sides.

3) **Diversify capacity strengthening models and ensure mentoring costs.** While training can provide valuable learning opportunities, they usually require substantial time-investment and may be too focused on individual staff strengthening rather than on system empowerment. Mentoring, shadowing, and secondment of staff are effective and appreciated alternative ways to support capacity sharing. Unfortunately, until now costs related to these approaches, such as additional coverage for mentoring INGO staff, have been more difficult to financially approve than training expenses. As a result, mentoring risks being perceived as an additional challenge by country teams already dealing with heavy workloads and tight budgets in emergency contexts.

Recommendation: When there is a structured need-based and demand-driven ICS plan involving mentoring and/or shadowing, related costs (including salaries) should be considered as eligible and direct costs, because they contribute to programme quality. This



In Jordan, a workshop where Araqat alatafila CBO shares best practices and valuable insights with fellow CBOs. The focus is on enhancing organisational sustainability through livelihood activities.

is the case in the DG-ECHO funded Jordan localisation programme and the results are remarkable.

- 4) **Flexibility in timeline and expected outcomes for capacity strengthening is key.** While ICS is meant to support L/NGOs, it can also easily become a burden if planned without considering existing limitations in resources (human, financial, logistics). Even with jointly planned calendars and objectives, sometimes the initial Bilateral Capacity Strengthening Plan (BCSP) can be overly ambitious or not ambitious enough. Remaining flexible in adjusting deadlines, expected outputs, and outcomes is crucial for maintaining an equitable relationship.

Recommendation: Do not link ICS objectives to project objectives, as local partners should have the freedom to make changes.

- 5) **Bilateral capacity strengthening model, joint workshops and training sessions, as well as peer-to-peer learning opportunities are essential elements for improving the quality of the partnership.** “If there is one thing I have appreciated, it’s the transparency of the communication. INTERSOS never behaved as a chief who gives orders and guidance to subordinates, but as a partner, through equality and fluid communication.” *Florentin Eymard VERCA Director (Vision Enfant République Centrafricaine)*

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