

Introduction

Humanitarian crises are increasingly compounded, interconnected, and underfunded, stretching the limits of traditional, siloed response models. In this context, national localisation networks are increasingly positioning themselves to shape how aid is delivered and governed, reflecting a broader shift towards a more equitable and locally led humanitarian system.

Such networks convene local and national civil society organisations committed to shifting power in the aid system and strengthening context-driven leadership. While some operate as platforms for coordination, joint advocacy or capacity exchange, innovative locally led networks have also demonstrated capacity to respond at scale, absorb significant humanitarian funding, and meet quality standards.

Response-focused local networks and consortia demonstrate an impactful approach for coordinating a range of diverse actors around shared goals and real-time information. They leverage their often-unparalleled access to affected areas to challenge inequities of the international aid system and substantially shape programming.

These networks emphasise collaboration, coordination and decentralised decision-making. When well designed and appropriately supported, these networks can improve speed, reach, and relevance of assistance, while amplifying local leadership and enabling collective problem-solving.

This learning brief provides a summary of, and learning from locally led response networks in Indonesia, Kenya, Myanmar and Somalia.

Highlights

Locally led humanitarian response networks have been recognised by the humanitarian sector as models that support quality locally led humanitarian responses.

Through their membership and response actions, response networks can support inclusive local leadership.

Because of the varied technical expertise and geographical presence amongst members, locally led networks are exceptionally well placed to work effectively across the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace nexus.

Diversity between members should be recognised and celebrated.

Members of response networks will sometimes collaborate on joint complementary responses while competing at other times, for example on funding opportunities.

Partnering with response networks requires agencies to reimagine their humanitarian operations and ways of working beyond individual partnerships to enabling, and not impeding, the autonomy and strengths of local or national collectives.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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HST-LHL
Humanitarian System Transformation through
Local Humanitarian Leadership


Purpose

Networks of local and national humanitarian actors are not only shaped by (the operational challenges in) the context in which they operate, they also shape and strengthen the systems in which they work. Locally led response networks have demonstrated their ability to meaningfully support community-driven response initiatives and invest in inclusive, lasting solutions that respond to the unique challenges faced by the communities they serve – while also serving as a platform for accountability, joint learning and mutual capacity strengthening.

This learning brief is developed as part of the [Humanitarian System Transformation through Local Humanitarian Leadership \(HST-LHL\) programme](#) funded and supported by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and facilitated by Oxfam in partnership with ODI Global, the Response Innovation Lab (RIL) and more than 30 local partners across 7 countries. It explores how four locally led networked response models in Asia and Africa function in practice, the conditions that enable them to operate effectively, and the key emerging insights that can inform (international) humanitarian actors to strengthen collective and complementary action in future emergencies. The brief unpacks learnings around how governance, decision-making and sustainability of the case study networks have evolved over the years. It also examines how international NGOs (INGOs) - including Oxfam - can better support and partner with locally led response networks.

Oxfam acknowledges its historical relationships with the four networks discussed, as well as its ongoing engagement on humanitarian response and aid reform. The descriptions and experiences as included in this learning brief therefore stem from our combined experience. This joint history and the ongoing relationships have provided valuable contextual insight but may also introduce unintentional biases in the text. Other organisations may have differing or complementary experiences than those included in this learning brief.

1. Indonesia: Jejaring Mitra Kemanusiaan

	Name: Jejaring Mitra Kemanusiaan (JMK)	Purpose: Strengthening humanitarian efforts in the country by building a network and knowledge hub. It promotes local humanitarian leadership, capacity building in emergency response and evidence-based advocacy – with a focus on gender, social inclusion, disaster risk management and community resilience.
	Country: Indonesia	Number of members: 25
	Founded in: 2017	Find out more: JMK

About the network

JMK was first initiated to support joint learning and sharing of good practices among Indonesian civil society organisations (CSOs), strengthen humanitarian advocacy, and influence policy in humanitarian response, and community and local government disaster preparedness. JMK was initially established as the “Humanitarian Knowledge Hub (HKH)”, however later changed its name to Jejaring Mitra Kemanusiaan (Humanitarian Partners Network) to better represent its members’ experience in responding to small scale disasters across Indonesia, and its ability to deploy to provide disaster relief. JEMARI Sakato, an NGO based in West Sumatra, provided the coordination function for JMK, supported by Oxfam in Indonesia. JEMARI Sakato signed Standby Agreements

with six member local NGOs with emergency response capacity across the country, agreeing to maintain preparedness and mobilise rapid response efforts in the event of disaster.

As of early 2026, JMK consists of 25 members – of which six were newly added in late 2025. Criteria for membership include having legal registration and an institutional address, demonstrated commitment to uphold and adhere to HKH-JMK values and principles, and a recommendation from (at least) 2 existing JMK members. Members are diverse in (technical) background, but the main reason for expanding the network is to further localise Indonesian response capacities and expand geographical reach and representation. Leadership and governance are discussed in a congress every three years, while JMK's day to day work is led by a management team consisting of one overall coordinator and three pillar leads: humanitarian response, advocacy, and governance and sustainability.

Humanitarian response

Building on its members' experiences in responding to small scale disasters across Indonesia, the 2018 Lombok earthquakes became a practical learning opportunity for member organisations to model a joint deployment and response as JMK. The scale of the subsequent earthquake and tsunami in Central Sulawesi, coupled with strict government regulations that limited direct international response and required foreign aid to be channelled through Indonesian actors, further strengthened the experience and joint response model of the JMK. It also impacted its positioning with INGOs who increasingly relied on Indonesian CSOs able to legally operate and comply with government requirements. This contributed to a shift in leadership to Indonesian actors.¹

Over the years, JMK has demonstrated strong leadership in coordinating and delivering humanitarian actions across Indonesia. In 2021, JMK led response efforts during the Mamuju earthquake in West Sulawesi and later the Cianjur earthquake in West Java, along with several other emergencies up to 2025.



Figure 1 JMK earthquake response in Cianjur in 2023

¹ See for example: [DEC Collective Initiative: Measuring Localisation in the Central Sulawesi Earthquake and Tsunami Operation \(2020\)](#).

When disaster strikes, JMK activates its network and response mechanisms, with operational leadership taken by the JMK member closest to the affected area. Practically, this means that the nearest JMK member conducts a rapid situation update and shares it with the network. The JMK management team then collectively reviews the information and provides strategic leadership in determining whether the situation meets the threshold for mobilising a humanitarian response. If so, JMK ensures effective and accountable coordination of the assessment process, guides emergency response activities, and oversees the transition into recovery efforts. JMK takes on a role as enabler: strengthening the leadership of local actors, facilitating capacity exchange, and ensuring high quality response activities, rather than acting as a single response entity.


The 2018 Sulawesi response built the foundations for the networked way of working in JMK. When the Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami hit, other local organisations (not-JMK members) operational in the affected areas were brought into the response structure with JMK and Oxfam. Staff from JMK members who had responded to the earlier Lombok earthquake were deployed to support initial assessments. The Sulawesi-based CSOs joined the network and led the response, supported by the staff deployed from other JMK members and the JMK management team. A joint decision-making structure was set up, bringing together the JMK members, the additional CSOs, and Oxfam as INGO-partner and broker to donors.

This flexible approach has remained at the core of JMK's ways of working: when disaster strikes in locations where no JMK members are operational, existing members utilise their networks of community-based organisations to respond. These locally rooted organisations often do not have (sufficient) response capacity and learn while doing with complementary expertise and technical know-how from other JMK members. JMK retains the original ambition to share capacity as a network of CSO members, while continuing to evolve a networked response approach that prioritises efficiency, sustainability and learning by centring the capacity of actors local to the affected areas. This was demonstrated recently in the 2025/2026 Sumatra floods and landslides response.

Key lessons learned:

1. JMK started as a humanitarian knowledge network of organisations who partnered with Oxfam in in different provinces. A number of members signed Standby Agreements with JEMARI Sakato to respond to emergencies. While strategic at the start in bringing together response capacities and experience of 6 member organisations, other members also were interested and had capacity.
2. JMK is careful not to impose humanitarian work or mandate on locally based organisations whom they respond with, while intentionally supporting and complementing their leadership on responses in their contexts, thereby furthering the localisation agenda within its networked approach.
3. To further grow as a response network, JMK hopes to establish their own contingency fund, grounded in transparent and accountable governance. This will allow JMK to conduct rapid assessments, deploy staff and relief items, and start responses more autonomously.

2. Kenya: ASAL Humanitarian Network

	Name: ASAL Humanitarian Network	Purpose: Advancing locally led action in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts with the aspiration of convening, connecting, and representing to ensure that communities in northern Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) counties shape the systems meant to serve them.
	Country: Kenya	Number of members: over 30
	Founded in: 2019	Find out more: ASAL Humanitarian Network

About the network

"Before the AHN network, the humanitarian support system in the ASALs worked in an ad hoc manner and took time to respond to humanitarian needs. These challenges encouraged 30 humanitarian organizations to come together to form the network to respond to, and advocate for, the needs of ASAL communities at a higher level."
 - Ahmed Ibrahim, AHN Coordinator.

Prior to AHN's official launch, the networked response approach had already started taking shape in Kenya with organisations exchanging staff capacity and adopting innovative, locally led approaches to crises. Over time, this informal collaboration evolved into a more structured, evidence-driven and trigger-based response architecture. In addition to mobilising their networked response capacity to respond to the needs of crisis-affected communities, AHN has become a key actor in shaping the humanitarian agenda in Kenya. This is done, for example, by capturing ground-level realities in assessments and publishing trend analyses and reports, translating field-based evidence into actionable recommendations for humanitarian policy and practice.

Between 2021 and 2025, AHN evolved from a governance-heavy model that centralised brokering of partnerships and funding allocations for AHN members, to a more facilitative coordination platform that shares analyses and profiles member organisations with INGO, UN and donor partners. While retaining operational surge capacity across its membership, the network has increasingly positioned itself as an analytical, convening and system-shaping actor.

In the course of 2026, AHN is poised to become a network of 45 members to ensure geographical presence and representation in all ASAL counties. This geographical focus, rather than across *all* of Kenya, was chosen because of the concentration of humanitarian crises in the ASAL region, coupled with limited resources and attention from government actors.

AHN strengthens the coherence and legitimacy of localised response while reinforcing the value of community-driven leadership. It operates through a member-led governance system and a dedicated secretariat that ensures strategic leadership, coordination and accountability. Practically, this means:

- the AHN General Assembly, comprising of all Executive Directors and CEOs of member organisations, serves as the highest authority and supreme decision-making body;
- the AHN Board, a 10-member body drawn from across ASAL counties and reflecting gender equity, provides strategic oversight and policy guidance, anchoring the network in shared accountability and collective leadership. The appointees for the Board Chair, Secretary and Treasurer roles come from different regions in the ASAL counties to ensure diversity in official roles;

- the AHN Secretariat serves as the operational engine, and is led by the AHN Convenor role and supported by a team of three thematic leads: advocacy and policy; media and communications; and gender and protection. The secretariate is supported by administrative, finance, logistics, and grant management roles from AHN member organisations. The Convenor also represents the network in external engagements.

AHN's county chapter (hub) structure remains a critical operational innovation. It serves as the link to County Governments, National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) coordination systems as well as sector platforms, ensuring local leadership and subsidiarity in decision-making. In early phases of the AHN, internal allocation decisions at county level at times generated competition between members operating in the same area. This experience informed the shift towards facilitative matching of AHN members with INGO, UN and donor partners for response rather than centralised control of allocating partnerships, projects and funding, thereby allowing AHN to maintain neutrality and cohesion among members.

The network (through the Secretariat and county chapters) takes decisions based on consensus.

Humanitarian response

The AHN's potential, and the power of locally led collective humanitarian action, was demonstrated during the drought in the ASALs in 2021. In July 2021, a comprehensive multi-actor drought needs assessment was issued as AHN-product, capitalising on its members' geographical presence across drought affected counties. It significantly increased visibility for local actors, and AHN specifically, positioning them strategically as information providers and responder organisations in humanitarian decision-making spaces, partly because it was published before the declaration of the national state of emergency in September 2021. This period also marked the formal testing of AHN's Disaster Severity Index (DSI), a trigger-based model which aggregates Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) data, NDMA early warning indicators, short rains analyses, and members' field information to rank counties by crisis severity. The DSI became a foundational pillar of AHN's evidence-based activation model.

Between 2021 and 2023, a governance-led network allocation model was in place in which the AHN Secretariat convened the members of the affected county/counties to jointly agree on which organisations were best placed to respond, based on their presence and technical expertise. There were two possible outcomes: AHN members agreed on one organisation that was best-placed, or AHN members agreed to take a networked approach and complement each other (geographically or technically). While technically sound and evidence-driven, this allocation-centric model revealed structural tensions. When multiple capable organisations operated in one county, governance-heavy deliberations slowed agility and introduced internal competition.

Since then, the governance model evolved to focus more on the AHN sharing severity analyses and brokering information about AHN members' profiles and responses, enabling direct partnering with INGOs and other funding partners. INGO partners conduct due diligence, provide guidance and technical support, and participate in decision-making as holders of the grants to donors. In this new model, a key role of the AHN is to coordinate capacity sharing among members through the AHN Rapid Response Team (RRT), which is composed of professionals from different member organisations. This localised, multi-partner approach allows for pooling of resources, expertise and networks to effectively respond to crises. The formation of this team contributed to AHN's overarching goal of strengthening local capacities to address crises as they unfold, enabling communities to rely on immediate, context-specific responses rather than waiting for external assistance. The RRT also mobilises and deploys capacity *across* counties, from members in other counties to

members in the affected counties. These teams operate under 'host' arrangements, which has further strengthened solidarity and shared ownership within and across the network.

A critical component of this has been the establishment of the technical working groups within AHN, covering areas such as Response Preparedness and Funding, Governance, Advocacy, and Finance. These technical working groups have fostered a more structured and coordinated approach to crisis management, enabling AHN to act with precision during emergencies.

In addition, AHN has prioritised capacity strengthening through a learning and training programme for members, focusing on core humanitarian competencies, safeguarding, gender in emergencies, and geographic information systems (GIS). This training ensures that AHN members and the RRT are not only equipped to handle immediate needs in emergencies but also prepared for future challenges.

AHN has also been a driving force in developing Anticipatory Action (AA) triggers and thresholds in the Kenyan context. As AHN matured, preparedness shifted from reactive coordination towards anticipatory, trigger-linked activation – aligned with potential financing from county disaster risk management budgets.

Key lessons learned:

1. Investing flexible reserve funds into early 'no regrets' response actions helped AHN (in partnership with Oxfam) to be recognised as key (first) responder in the 2020 locust invasion and the 2021 drought. Such early actions proved vital in raising additional funds for expanded responses as well as shaping the local government's and the internationally coordinated response.
2. AHN brings together large Kenyan NGOs with a wide range of expertise and experience and smaller, grassroots or specialised Kenyan organisations, including organisations focused on women's rights and youth engagement. This diversity is key to its success, requiring a mindset focused on complementing each other, collaborating, and joint learning.
3. Layered financing, combining multiple complementary financing instruments to respond to different levels of disaster or crisis risk, has increased AHN's ability to respond to shocks of varying severity than reliance on a single donor or financing stream allows. For AHN this includes anticipatory/early action funding, members' (pooled) contingency funds, alert-based cash instruments, and larger grants and multi-partner funding consortia. To date, directly accessing pooled and multilateral funding has remained a persistent challenge for AHN.
4. Coordinated interventions, unified situation reporting, and layering of financing mechanisms has increased AHN's resilience and impact. However, fragmentation across diverse partner and donor reporting systems is a challenge, surfacing the need for integration of systems and harmonised MEAL frameworks. AHN has started issuing a single collective situation report (sitrep) per response, and is now looking to strengthen the MEAL and reporting capacities and systems of member organisations, empowering members' MEAL teams to lead more substantially at county level.

3. Myanmar: Local Intermediary Actor (LIA) Network

Name: Local Intermediary Network	Purpose: Act as local intermediaries to support grassroots organisations and channel donor funding to them. Through an approach of accompaniment, mentoring and coaching, LIA Network contribute to building, nurturing, and strengthening local civil society capacities, systems, and networks.
Country: Myanmar	Number of members: 14 of Myanmar’s largest NGOs.
Founded in: 2022	Find out more: no website or logo at time of publication.

About the network

The network was founded in the aftermath of the coup and therefore in a context of access restrictions and increased reliance on local groups to reach communities in need. With international agencies facing significant restrictions from the military junta, like-minded national NGOs increasingly repositioned themselves as intermediaries channelling donor funding to smaller, local groups. The LIA Network, with members working in different geographical areas and with different sectoral expertise across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, focuses on strengthening the role of *local* intermediary agencies in promoting genuine and sustainable localisation while also implementing directly as and when appropriate.

The LIA Board of Executives comprises seven representatives: chair, co-chair and five members. Together, they are responsible for ensuring that members and other stakeholders collaborate effectively in achieving the network’s objectives. Board members are elected through a voting process, which takes place during the General Assembly. Each board-member serves a two-year term. After this term, three board members remain in position through re-election while the remaining four board members are replaced by new members, elected from the remaining eleven network members. No board member can serve more than four consecutive years.

The Board of Executives appoints the LIA Secretariat team, which is composed of six salaried staff dedicated to LIA Network operations. They work under the guidance and support of the Board of Executives, ensuring efficient coordination and communication, implementing the annual plan and enhancing fundraising efforts, amongst other responsibilities. Secretariat team members are contracted on an annual basis, and are at times extended if in line with LIA’s strategic activities.

LIA members, in their role as local intermediaries, are partners, mentors, and coaches for smaller local and national actors. In addition to helping civil society groups comply with international aid bureaucracy, LIA members accompany their partners to grow on their own terms – by quickly answering specific support requests and by helping them build what they need to access and manage donor funding themselves. LIA members have, for example, provided support to partners on proposal and report writing, advocacy and MEAL. Priorities are jointly agreed on and captured in long-term organisational development plans. By prioritising ‘capacity to grow’ over ‘capacity to comply’, the LIA Network enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of local actors and frontline responders.

Membership is open to locally grown organisations experienced in managing grants and acting as an intermediary between local actors and donors. Members should have been operational for at least five years and be committed to the localisation agenda. New members should be recommended by two existing LIA Network members. They do not necessarily have to be legally registered.



Figure 2 LIA earthquake response in 2025

Humanitarian response

Through a sub-granting mechanism, LIA member organisations commit to providing 50-70% of their total grants received through the LIA Network to local civil society partners. By providing small grants to CSOs, they become change agents able to implement projects and solve problems within their own communities.²

When a new funding opportunity arises or a call for proposals is issued, the LIA Board of Executives notifies the network. Interested members can apply and the Board of Executives decides which member(s) will receive the funds and implement on behalf of the LIA Network. When individual LIA members are contacted by a donor about a funding opportunity under LIA's name, they are expected to inform the LIA Network Board of Executives and Secretariat, with course of action jointly decided, to maintain transparency and accountability.

When coordinated through the Board of Executives, the selected LIA member organisation invites civil society organisations to submit a proposal based on a restricted, invitation-only call for concept notes. Selection criteria for sub-grants typically include experience, familiarity with the local context, alignment with the project's objectives, inclusion and gender responsiveness, and overall cost-effectiveness. Over time, LIA members have become a "hub" for civil society networking. Some members, for example, have over 1,500 CSOs "under their umbrella." Sub-grants provided to CSOs differ per member but can range, for example, from USD 2,000 to USD 50,000. Sub-grants are provided to both registered and non-registered organisations.

In 2026, LIA is developing a local pooled funding mechanism which is expected to help LIA members provide support and funding for frontline CSO partners more effectively and efficiently. In addition to enabling (small) CSOs to indirectly access international funding, LIA members provide CSO leaders and staff with support for

² Myanmar Research Network, University of Melbourne: Localising aid and the role of Local Intermediary Actors in Myanmar (2023).


developing their organisational systems, as well as the knowledge and skills of their staff. Over time, this meant that CSOs have gained recognition and trust from international donors, in turn enabling them to access more (direct) international funding and grow further as an organisation.

Key lessons learned:

1. Being part of a networked response can create opportunities for members' smaller civil society partners to demonstrate their expertise and the value they add under the protection of a national organisation, while strengthening their experience and capacity to implement self-designed humanitarian responses. It allows them to demonstrate their capacity to manage donor funds and enter into partnerships with international agencies which might result in additional (direct) funding in the future.
2. Providing opportunities to and bolstering 'second line' leaders (especially women) - mid-level leaders just below top leadership who translate strategy into action by managing teams and coordinating operations - has proven key for the sustainability of the network, and was noted as an area where INGOs can play a role in assisting.
3. In restrictive operational environments like Myanmar, locally led networks have a strong added value in supporting a flexible and low-profile humanitarian response across hard-to-reach areas, which is often not possible for international agencies,³ and which has helped attract direct funding for LIA from various large donors.
4. Having four LIA members in the Myanmar Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) has enabled them to influence the HCT's localisation strategy. Their role in coordinating the Myanmar National Reference Group (NRG) of the Grand Bargain has allowed them to influence global aid reform conversations. Both have given extra weight and respect to the wider LIA Network.

³ Décobert, A. and T. Wells (2023) 'To help tackle aid inequality, support Myanmar's local intermediaries' The New Humanitarian.

4. Somalia: NEXUS Consortium

	Name: NEXUS Consortium Somalia	Purpose: Deliver integrated responses under the triple nexus approach – humanitarian, development, peace - and shape the future of aid from the ground up.
	Country: Somalia	Number of members: 15
	Founded in: 2019	Find out more: NEXUS

About the network

The NEXUS Consortium Somalia (referred to as NEXUS) initially brought together eight pioneering Somali NGOs and two international partners; Save the Children and Oxfam. It was hosted by Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) but became an independent legal entity in 2023. Since then, it has since transitioned from an INGO-supported model to a fully Somali-led and Somali-owned platform and network.

The initial idea emerged as a response to a challenge posed by donors during a localisation workshop after the World Humanitarian Summit (2016), looking at ways for donors to fund local and national actors (more) directly. Three organisations initially came together, envisioning a locally led consortium as a new intermediary model, allowing Somali NGOs to collaborate on localisation advocacy and to showcase their collective implementation strength covering South-Central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland. Other Somali NGOs were invited to join, and the participation of at least one INGO was requested to broker and channel funding, and strengthen the consortium’s credibility in the start-up phase.

At the time, Oxfam and Save the Children were approached to provide mentoring and technical support during the initial three-year phase, after which responsibilities have been gradually transitioned to NEXUS national NGO members. At the start, Oxfam and Save the Children support focused on:

- Fund Manager (Oxfam): managing donor funding, partner contracting, reporting, and financial compliance
- Learning and Innovation Team (Oxfam-led): capturing lessons on consortium operations and promoting the localisation agenda, in collaboration with core members.
- Organisational Development Lead (Save the Children): supporting capacity strengthening and systems development of core members, based on organisational assessments and tailored development plans.

Since then, INGO roles have become supportive, rather than managerial, and NEXUS now increasingly secures and manages direct funding, operating with strengthened internal systems and governance.

NEXUS member organisations bring together programmatic and policy expertise covering peacebuilding, conflict resolution, protection and GBV, health services, youth engagement, WASH, livelihoods, cash transfers, education, and many more areas. This enables the consortium to facilitate integrated and coherent programming that links immediate relief with longer-term resilience and peacebuilding. NEXUS works in partnership with the Somali government, the private sector, the Somalia NGO Consortium and other (international) partners, providing thought and practice leadership on a locally-driven agenda for change.

The NEXUS Secretariat leads day-to-day coordination, facilitates strategic alignment, manages communications, supports fundraising, and drives the implementation of consortium-wide priorities. Since

2025, the Secretariat structure has matured and grown institutionally: they now operate under a formal governance framework including an Executive Director, a Board of Directors and a Steering Committee – which oversees the Secretariat. In addition to the Executive Director, there are three salaried staff members: a programme development manager, a programme support officer, and a finance manager.

Humanitarian response

Early in the NEXUS Consortium's work, funding for response actions and small projects came from varied sources, including small amounts from an institutional donor, seed funding from one of the NEXUS INGO members and financial contributions from each Somali NEXUS member. Beyond funding relationships and response partnerships, a large survey conducted by NEXUS at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic informed debates on the health and economic impact of COVID-19 within the Ministry of Health and on advocacy on encouraging remittances from Somali diaspora around the world, demonstrating the potential influence of collective locally led advocacy.

NEXUS members also recognised the drawbacks in the COVID-19 WHO-led information campaigns, which omitted to recognise the important roles of imams and religious leaders in uptake of public health information and guidance. Subsequently, NEXUS members used their wide-ranging networks and connections to religious leaders to produce and disseminate videos that spoke to Somali socio-cultural and religious realities, increasing the uptake and effectiveness of information campaigns.

Building on these early successes, the NEXUS Consortium utilised the distinct capabilities and roles of the members to support and scale locally led humanitarian response. NEXUS leveraged its members' presence, reach and networks to deliver integrated programming that centred community needs and aspirations, particularly of marginalised groups, such as women, minority clans and people with disabilities. Key components of NEXUS' approach developed over the years are to restore government services for communities, including their links with local and national authorities, proactively engage with the private sector to cultivate inclusive economic growth, and reduce aid dependency. Programme implementation has been led by the Somali NEXUS members, with oversight from the NEXUS Steering Committee, and supported by the NEXUS Secretariat, and Oxfam as the NEXUS Fund Manager when needed, while also managing direct funding itself. NEXUS as an entity does not implement joint programming but rather enables its members to position themselves, access funding, and respond to crises.

To further increase autonomy and rapid assessments and response, a NEXUS Anticipatory and Emergency Response Fund was established, hosted by one of its members for all NEXUS members. The Fund's ways of working were designed to enable timely, community-informed action ahead of and during climatic shocks, meet needs pre-emptively, and support rapid local responses. The consortium uses its strong grassroots presence as the starting point to identify warning signs, using external data sources to triangulate alerts brought forward by communities. In doing so, it connects (often missed) local and indigenous knowledge with cutting-edge and data-driven early warning systems.

Funds committed to the Fund are provided by Oxfam to NEXUS, with NEXUS members leading on decision-making on allocations to anticipatory actions within the funding mechanism. The Fund increasingly also receives direct funding from various sources, but maintaining a reliable flow of funding has been noted as priority for the network.

To further increase their access to dependable funding and relationships with allies, NEXUS put themselves

forward for the Start Humanitarian Hub roll out in Somalia in 2023.⁴ The Somali Humanitarian Hub (SHH) now builds on the existing ways of working, positioning, and experience of NEXUS; focusing on a clear humanitarian response mandate, and channelling global Start funding to Somali humanitarian organisations with decision-making at country level. To maximise the opportunities provided by the SHH, a few governance adjustments were made to ensure clarity of roles and avoid potential conflicts of interest between NEXUS and the SHH.

Harnessing this opportunity and aligned interests has been experienced as positive so far, maximising scarce resources and offering synergies with the funding that the Somali Humanitarian Hub brings for paid positions, funding for events, amongst others.

The original eight NEXUS organisations were at times criticized for being a closed group and creating new power imbalances within the Somali NGO and CSO community. To address this, and as part of a continued growth and inclusion strategy, membership was opened up to additional Somali organisations in 2025. Seven new members were added based on a transparent process, with particular focus on geographic gaps and organisations that represent and work with minority or marginalised groups. The NEXUS Consortium now has 15 Somali members. They partner with almost all INGOs operating in Somalia.

The NEXUS Consortium now has presence spread across all Somali states and regions, and with sectoral capacity and expertise well covered among its members. In 2025, NEXUS also became the Convener of the Somali Localisation Lab (SLL) under the NEAR Network, further strengthening its leadership role in advancing localisation in Somalia. NEXUS has started to receive direct funding in addition to the funding brokered and managed via the Fund Manager (INGO intermediary) and the Somali Humanitarian Hub, meeting its original aim post-World Humanitarian Summit, to be a local intermediary model in Somalia serving the civilian population that bears the brunt of ongoing conflict, political violence, and extreme weather shocks.

Key lessons learned:

1. Because of the varied technical expertise and geographical presence amongst members, locally led networks are exceptionally well placed to work effectively across the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace nexus in contexts that face serious challenges due to hostilities, restrictions imposed by warring parties, generalised violence and extreme weather patterns.
2. The chair of the NEXUS Consortium not only rotates among consortium members but also intentionally across (divided) geographic territories, states and regions. This was important to ensure harmony between members in a context of ethnic conflict and political differences between Somaliland and Somalia.
3. Investment in maintaining members' interests over time as new initiatives and opportunities emerge require a network to have a strong offer. Meaningful and valuable engagement with network members, coordination of network activities and engagement with external stakeholders requires networks to recruit and retain strong professional staff often with very limited resources.

⁴ For more information on START Humanitarian Hubs, see here: [Start Network | A new era of humanitarian action](#).

Emerging Insights

In addition to the lessons drawn from the evolution and approach of individual response networks, a number of insights emerged from multiple or all networks' experiences. This learning brief highlights these overarching emerging insights with the aim to inform all stakeholders' efforts to collaborate with and support locally led response networks.

Gradual transfer of leadership and responsibilities

When networks newly emerge, collaboration with an internationally-recognised partner organisation can help in providing credibility and trust to attract and manage (larger amounts of) funding. Over time, the experience of these four networks shows that phased transition plans support to guide the gradual and effective shift in leadership and responsibilities to local and national network leaders. It is vital that the timeline and expectations for this transition, including how the involved INGO(s) roles and responsibilities evolve, is collectively agreed upon.

Response and/or advocacy-focused networks

Humanitarian response networks walk a delicate line, balancing the collective interest of advancing networked approaches and priorities, versus individual member's ambitions to partner with and receive funding from international actors and donors. As funding for humanitarian response is finite, and currently in decline, network members sometimes *collaborate* on joint responses based on complementarity, and sometimes *compete*. The network members informing this learning brief have shared that collective influencing and advocacy activities to local or national government, INGOs, UN agencies and donors have frequently been easier to coordinate and make collective gains on. Despite the challenges, all four networks have found ways of organising internal decision-making and governance in ways that add sufficient value for their members. All of the networks engage on coordinated, complementary and/or joint responses as well as humanitarian advocacy and policy influencing.

Internal dynamics

It is not uncommon for members within the network to have different interests or priorities. For example, being the lead of the network is often seen as advantageous because it raises the profile of the individual and member organisation, brings funds for administrative costs, gives the agency valuable experience of coordinating and convening, and allows the agency to have influence in global humanitarian fora. The networks recommend that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is drawn up which clearly outlines governance structures, inclusive and transparent decision-making processes, appropriate conflict resolution mechanisms within and between members, the roles and responsibilities of each partner/member, and ways of working aligned with good partnership principles.

In doing so, it is important to foster open and regular communication channels that build trust and address misunderstanding early, as well as recognise and celebrate diversity between members as networks often bring together organisations of different sizes and capacities. Additionally, enabling equitable participation in (rotating) leadership and decision-making helps balance differing priorities and share benefits of leading, while intentional and periodic reflection and review of the collaboration or partnership reviews support adaptation to evolving dynamics and maintaining cohesion among diverse organisations.

Long-term commitment by INGOs

Investments of flexible funding on the part of INGOs has proven critical in three of the four examples included in this brief. Investments in (self-directed) organisational development and institutional strengthening of networks have differed widely, including targeted investments of 200,000 – 300,000 EUR as part of a localisation-focused Framework Agreement, to annual commitments of 50,000 EUR from an INGOs' unrestricted funding over a 10-year period. Other investments enabled by INGO partners' flexible funding contributions include networks' organisational strategy and operational model reviews, development of growth strategies, and publications and communications resources.

Sustained commitment from INGOs' in-country leadership to locally led network response approaches is essential, as nascent or emergent local actor networks depend on trialling, adapting and demonstrating the viability, quality and impact of networked response approaches in practice. This requires INGO allies to re-model their own operations to partner with the response networks for humanitarian responses, and be prepared to invest in something that might fail. Staff turnover in INGOs' leadership roles have at times led to inconsistent levels of engagement and support, including re-prioritisation of funding in times of scarcity of resources. Institutional allyship and support to locally led response networks require INGOs' (strategic) buy-in, engagement and agreed-upon support, which should not negatively or drastically change with changes in INGOs' country or global level leadership.

Inclusive response and women's leadership

While locally led networks provide an opportunity for more inclusive responses, this is not automatically the case; with gaps in women's rights, equal representation and participation being issues that permeate all societies. The humanitarian sector's focus on scale and reach may tempt locally led networks to centre their membership on organisations well placed to provide large-scale humanitarian response and those able to surge into areas affected by crises where they do not have historical presence or relationships. However, such approaches can exclude smaller, grassroots organisations or those led by women, refugees or other marginalised or excluded groups.

The locally led response networks in this brief have shown concrete ways in which their membership and response actions can support inclusive leadership and work with different women's rights organisations (WRO), women-led organisations (WLO), and organisations that represent highly marginalised groups, differing in size, experience and expertise. All four networks include WROs, WLOs, and gender-focused organisations in their membership. These organisations provide specific expertise on gendered vulnerabilities, capacities and needs, as well as trusted community relationships and ways of working, ensuring responses address the distinct needs, barriers, and protection risks that are often overlooked in mainstream humanitarian systems.

- In Myanmar, the Gender Equality Network (GEN) is key member of the Local Intermediary Actors (LIA) Network, in turn bringing in ca. 50 specialised local or national gender-focused organisations.
- In Kenya, about one third of AHN membership are WROs. To explore and expand opportunities for women leadership in AHN-led responses, an AHN Women's Caucus was established during the 2021-2022 drought response. This Women Caucus provides a dedicated space for women-led organisations, WROs and women leaders within AHN to engage in leadership development, mutual support, strategic influence and collective advocacy. It elevates the role of women in shaping humanitarian and development policy in ASAL regions, both nationally and globally.

The role of international partners

Effective collaboration with locally led response networks requires international intermediaries / partners supporting locally led networks to provide a facilitative, collaborative and supportive role, rather than a leadership, supervisory and monitoring role. To enable, champion and support true local humanitarian leadership, international partners must ensure their staff working to support locally led networks have the necessary skillset to provide this role. This includes seeking staff prepared to step back and listen, aware of power dynamics, and ready to provide an accompanying function. Staff recruitment processes are important for this and seeking the relevant skills and attitudes includes what is written in job descriptions, how candidates are shortlisted, what is asked in interviews, and how staff are inducted. It also includes trusting and following networks' internal procedures and decision-making structures, in comparison to the direct say and control INGOs are typically accustomed to in direct implementation or bi-lateral partnership relationships or subcontracting.

Sustainability

Some networks continue to be (highly) dependent on a single or small number of INGOs and/or the relationships the INGOs hold with donors. For INGOs exploring engagement with locally led response networks, it is recommended to consider the possible implications on (financial and institutional) sustainability of networks if the initial establishment of the network is (too) closely linked to a single INGO or to INGO financial support. Plans for a transition to locally led network financial sustainability need to be jointly developed, outlining how funding - brokered institutional funding or contributions from INGOs' unrestricted funding - for response or network growth can be sustained. Networks formed without an instrumental role for an INGO, and instead jointly owned by (influential) national and local organisations, appear to have more diverse relationships with multiple funding and supporting partners, including direct donor relationships and relationships with national private and public sector actors, and are therefore less dependent on individual INGO partners in times of funding scarcity.

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