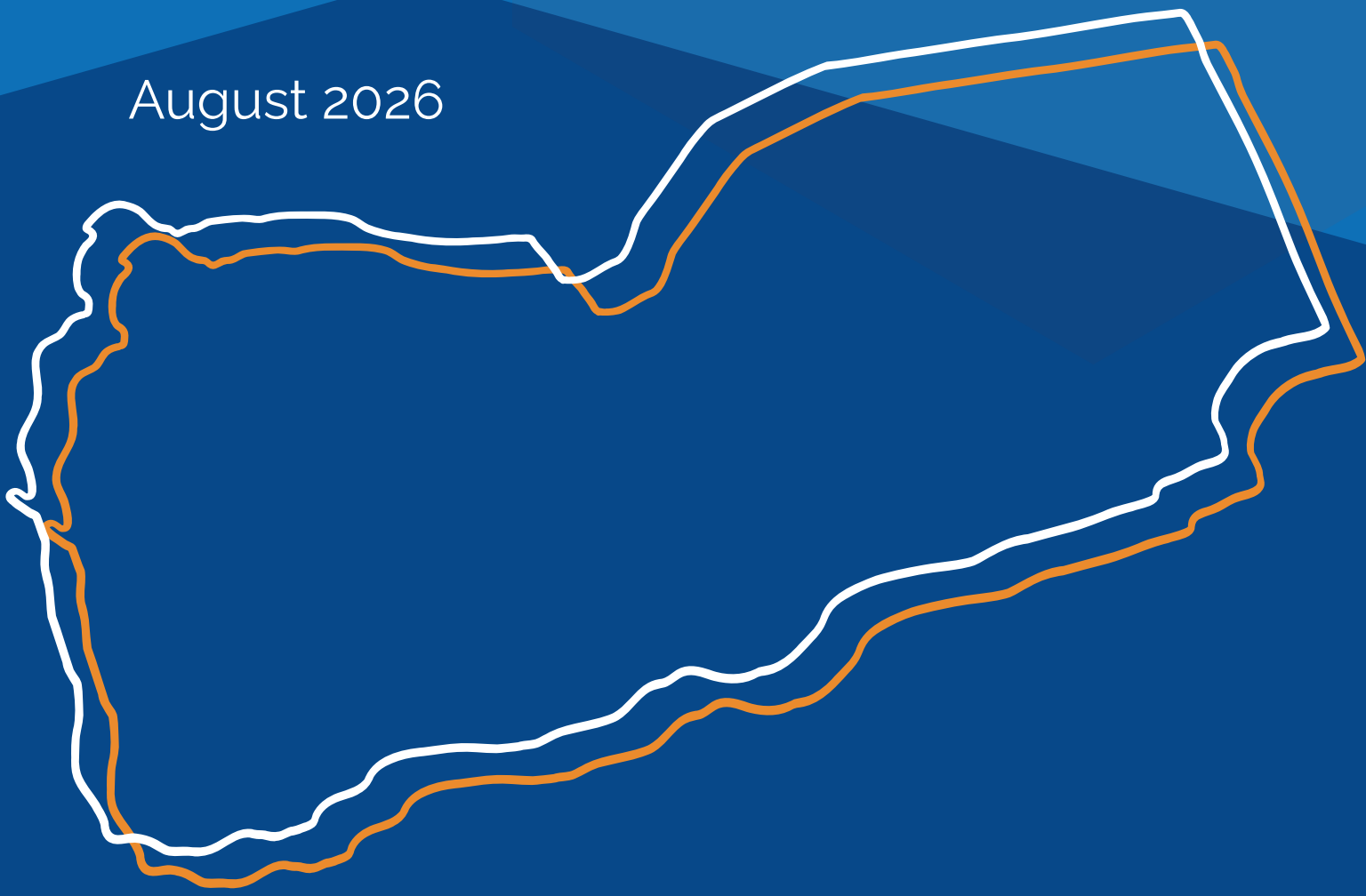
Bridging Principles and Practice: Local NGO Strategies for Sustaining Humanitarian Action in Yemen

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ICVA
A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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About ICVA

The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) is a global network of over 200 non-governmental organisations whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice.

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About the study

This study is part of a joint ICVA–International Rescue Committee (IRC) project aimed at strengthening the leadership, learning and sustainability of local civil society organisations (CSO) in Yemen. Building on ICVA's 2023 study, 'Measuring Humanitarian Localisation in Yemen', the initiative seeks to address key capacity and coordination gaps among Yemeni local actors and NGO Fora.

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BRIDGING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Executive Summary

In Yemen, local and national NGOs (LNNGOs) are on the frontline of the humanitarian response. They maintain access to the most marginalised communities and continue to deliver where international organisations have reduced or withdrawn their presence. Yet they remain largely excluded from the funding, decisions and protection that shape how that response operates. Drawing on 26 key informant interviews across the humanitarian system, this study finds that the gap between localisation commitments and practice is not a series of isolated shortcomings but the product of three interlocking dimensions of structural inequality. Reforms that address only one will leave the underlying power structure intact.

Key Messages

- LNNGOs sustain Yemen's response but are largely excluded from the funding, decisions and security supports that shape it.
- Greater representation in coordination structures has not translated into meaningful influence.
- The system shifts operational risk onto local actors while withholding equivalent protection and duty of care.
- The Humanitarian Reset risks entrenching this imbalance unless it redistributes power, resources and risk, not just delivery.

Three interlocking dimensions of inequality

1 Operational risk and protection asymmetry

Local actors continue to provide humanitarian response where international organisations have reduced or withdrawn their presence. They are equally committed to upholding humanitarian principles as their INGO counterparts, but carry higher operational and security risk with fewer resources and without the security support, insurance, duty of care or diplomatic protection routinely extended to INGO staff. When funding is cut they cannot simply leave: communities and authorities hold them to account for decisions taken elsewhere.

2 Power, participation and decision-making

Localisation has increased representation: LNNGOs now hold six seats on the Humanitarian Country Team, up from three, and co-chair the Localisation Task Force. But presence is being counted too heavily as progress. Funding dependency discourages local actors from challenging international perspectives, and they remain excluded from key forums such as the Humanitarian Access Working Group. Representation has not become influence over priorities, planning or resource allocation.

3 Resource and funding inequality

Most LNNGOs remain financially dependent on intermediary partnerships, positioned as sub-contractors rather than partners. Despite the Grand Bargain target of channelling 25% of funding "as directly as possible" to local and national actors, most funding in Yemen still reaches them only as subgrants.[1] Restricted overheads create a "starvation cycle" that erodes the staff, systems and safeguards on which programme quality depends.

> *"Localisation can shift the nationality of the gatekeeper without dismantling the gate itself.*
>
> **LNNGO respondent**

Three dynamics that compound the problem

1 **"Local actors" are not one group.** Access to funding and influence is concentrated among a small number of larger national NGOs, while smaller community-based organisations, women-led organisations (WLOs) and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) remain marginalised, and often invisible in aggregate reporting.

2 **What looks like resilience is often survival.** Under prolonged funding cuts, adaptation increasingly means unpaid staff, leadership burnout and, in some cases, closure, a cost rarely recognised in localisation policy.

3 **Responsibility for change is diffused.** LNNGOs point to INGO conditions, INGOs to donor requirements and a UN-centric architecture, and incentives reward the number of partnerships over their quality, so no actor feels able to shift the system.

Priority recommendations

1 ### Reform funding structures, starting with overheads

Donors and intermediaries should ensure equitable, consistent provision of indirect costs to local partners, expand direct and flexible funding, and establish dedicated windows for smaller organisations, WLOs and OPDs, including through the Yemen Humanitarian Fund.

2 ### Share risk and extend duty of care

UN leadership and INGOs should embed equivalent duty-of-care provisions, including security training, insurance and psychosocial support, in partnership agreements. They should include LNNGOs in access forums such as the Humanitarian Access Working Group.

3 ### Disaggregate "local actors"

Donors and coordination bodies should report localisation targets and funding flows by type of organisation. Donors should require implementing partners to report localisation data disaggregated by type of local actor, including WLOs, OPDs and smaller organisations, so that aggregate "national NGO" figures no longer mask who is and is not being reached.

4 ### Move from representation to influence

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) should establish regular, structured briefings on key strategic processes (e.g. Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) priorities, humanitarian reforms, localisation progress), clearly showing how inputs from LNNGOs, including WLOs and OPDs, are reflected in decisions. Qualitative indicators on participation quality and partnership equity should be integrated into performance monitoring.

5 ### Use the Reset deliberately

Without intentional course correction, the Reset risks becoming system contraction that shifts delivery without shifting power. Reform must redistribute authority, resources and risk, not merely responsibility.

Full recommendations by actor are available below.

SECTION 1

Introduction

Yemen's protracted humanitarian crisis is rooted in more than a decade of conflict, political fragmentation, and economic collapse, impacting millions of people that continue to face dire humanitarian conditions, struggle to meet basic needs, and access essential services[2].

The humanitarian response has adapted over time, with LNNGOs playing an increasingly central role in maintaining access, delivering aid, and engaging affected communities.[1] Yemen's civil society sector is large but highly fragmented, encompassing roughly 13,000 registered organisations[3] today as compared with around 8,000 organisations formally registered in 2011 prior to the conflict.[4]

Many local actors, particularly community-based and grassroots organisations, operate in some of the most remote and hard-to-reach areas[5] yet remain largely invisible within the formal humanitarian system, with limited access to coordination platforms or partnership opportunities.[1] The Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) 2026 lists 177 partners (116 NNGOs, 52 INGOs, and 9 UN agencies)[2] engaged in the international humanitarian response, underscoring a significant gap between the number of LNNGOs in the response and the overall number of local actors.[6, 7]

The NGO ecosystem is heavily shaped by Yemen's divided governance system.[8] Civil society organisations operate across the country, but governance fragmentation and the presence of competing authorities have created very different operating environments.[8] LNNGOs often maintain operational presence in areas where international actors face greater constraints and rely on local partners to reach communities.[9] In recent years, access dynamics have been further complicated by political and regulatory developments, including the US Government's designation of Ansar Allah as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO)[10, 11] in January 2021, which was revoked shortly after, and their re-designation in March 2025.

Policy commitments to localisation have been a consistent feature of the humanitarian response in Yemen, grounded in the recognition that local actors bring contextual knowledge, community trust and long-term presence that are essential to effective humanitarian action. However, existing analysis continues to highlight persistent gaps between localisation commitments and practice, particularly in relation to funding, decision-making authority, leadership and risk-sharing.[1]

These unequal dynamics constrain the autonomy of LNNGOs and shape the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, particularly in highly insecure and hard-to-reach areas.[12] Recent funding cuts in 2025 have further intensified these pressures, exposing the limits of a system in which local actors are central to delivery yet remain largely excluded from decision-making.

SECTION 2

Objectives, Methodology and Limitations

This report examines how structural inequalities and power asymmetries shape the experiences of local actors in Yemen. It focuses on the constraints and adaptive strategies identified by LNNGOs, their participation and influence within humanitarian coordination structures, and how these dynamics compare with those affecting INGOs. It also considers the implications for the sustainability of local organisations in an increasingly constrained financial and operational environment.

The analysis highlights the diversity of Yemen's local NGO ecosystem, including differences in organisational size, mandate and positioning within the humanitarian system. It explores how socio-cultural factors, particularly gender and disability, intersect with institutional constraints to shape differentiated experiences among local actors, as well as inequalities within the ecosystem itself. It further examines how organisational culture, leadership norms and perceptions of responsibility influence localisation in practice. In the context of shrinking resources and growing reliance on local actors, the findings aim to inform policy and operational discussions among donors, UN leadership in Yemen, INGOs and LNNGOs.

The research was co-led by ICVA, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Yemeni National NGOs Forum. It is based on a qualitative methodology combining desk review and 26 key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders across the humanitarian system, including LNNGOs, INGOs and UN agencies, with a deliberate emphasis on local perspectives.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS BY AGENCY TYPE

ORGANISATION TYPE	LNNGO	INGO	NGO NETWORK/ALLIANCE	UN	GRAND TOTAL
Value	12	6	6	2	**26**
Percentage	46%	23%	23%	8%	**100%**

All interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical research standards, including informed consent, data protection, and confidentiality safeguards. All contributions are anonymised. No quotations or insights are attributed in a manner that would allow identification of individuals or specific organisations. Given the sensitivity of the operating environment in Yemen, particular care was taken to ensure that critical reflections could not be traced back to identifiable actors.

Constraints

The study was conducted within a limited timeframe and reflects the views of a select group of stakeholders. Ongoing discussions within the UN system on the Reset limited engagement with UN representatives, while the remote methodology constrained consultations with smaller NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) outside major coordination hubs.

SECTION 3

Key Findings

The findings are organised around three interconnected dimensions of structural inequality that together explain the gap between localisation commitments and practice in Yemen:

1 **Operational risk and protection asymmetry**

The unequal distribution of security exposure, access constraints, and duty-of-care arrangements across the humanitarian system, which leaves local actors carrying disproportionate operational risk while remaining under-supported and under-protected. This is examined in detail in 3.1 Navigating Humanitarian Access and Principled Humanitarian Action.

2 **Power, participation, and decision-making**

The structural conditions — including funding dependency, coordination architecture, and organisational culture — that prevent LNNGO representation in coordination spaces from translating into meaningful influence over strategic decisions. This is examined in detail in 3.2 Power, Participation and Decision-Making in Yemen's Humanitarian System.

3 **Resource and funding inequality**

The persistent concentration of direct humanitarian funding with international organisations, which positions LNNGOs as sub-contractors rather than partners and constrains their organisational autonomy, adaptive capacity, and long-term sustainability. This is examined in detail in 3.3 Funding Inequality across Actors: Constraints and Adaptation Strategies.

These three dimensions are not separate problems. Funding inequality shapes operational risk exposure: local actors fill gaps left by international withdrawal, often without equivalent resources or protection. Both constrain political agency: organisations dependent on INGO sub-grants and bearing disproportionate operational risk without institutional backing are poorly positioned to challenge the system in coordination spaces. Localisation reforms that address only one dimension will leave the underlying power structure intact.

An important note on terminology and the framing of local actors

For this report, the following terms are used:

National Non-Governmental Organisations (NNGOs) refer to Yemeni organisations that operate at multi-governorate scale in the North and/or South, often with formal registration and established engagement in national-level coordination mechanisms.

Local Non-Governmental Organisations (LNGOs) refer to organisations that operate primarily in a single governorate across multiple districts or communities. This category includes community-led organisations that are deeply embedded within specific localities and often rely on volunteer networks or project-based funding.

Throughout the report, the terms "LNNGOs" and "local actors" are used as shorthand to refer to the collective of local and national non-governmental organisations within the Yemeni humanitarian ecosystem. While this approach obscures the rich variety of the NGO landscape in Yemen, it serves to protect confidentiality by avoiding attribution to particular organisational categories or specific organisations for quotes due to the small sample size.

It is important to note however, that across the study, both international and local actors raised concerns of the use of a broad category of "local actors" in key humanitarian planning, funding and reporting documents. Framing all national and local actors as "local" obscures important differences within the category of "local actors": While efforts have been made to improve the visibility of women-led organisations (WLOs) as a distinct actor category, organisations led by people with disabilities (OPDs) often remain invisible – see case study for further details. It also masks inequalities in how resources and influence are distributed: when increases in funding to "local actors" are reported without disaggregating which organisations receive resources. As one informant observed "When donors report funding to local actors, it looks good. But it doesn't tell you who is still excluded."

Case study

Specific constraints facing Yemeni organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)

While OPDs share many of the structural constraints affecting other LNNGOs, existing evidence indicates that they experience these pressures in more acute and systemic ways.[13]

Funding. Despite rising disability-related needs linked to conflict injuries, explosive weapons and the collapse of public services, OPDs rarely access humanitarian funding directly or through partnerships. They described themselves as among the most chronically underfunded actors. Disability inclusion is widely treated as a technical add-on rather than a core humanitarian priority. This reflects broader evidence that long-term rehabilitation services, assistive support and inclusive programming remain systematically under-prioritised in humanitarian funding frameworks, including in Yemen, despite their importance for survival and recovery.[13, 14]

On top of the compliance requirements, banking restrictions and risk management challenges that constrain all local actors, OPDs also face specific funding barriers: inaccessible application processes and project budgets that routinely exclude accessibility-related costs such as adapted transport, personal assistance and accessible communication.

Participation. OPDs have limited representation and meaningful participation in coordination and decision-making spaces. In Yemen, OPDs do not participate in cluster meetings or Inter-Agency coordination discussions and their involvement in HNRP planning remains limited. This is often due to practical accessibility barriers, such as inaccessible communication formats (e.g. braille, sign language interpretation), lack of adapted physical infrastructure, and no transportation allowance to attend meetings or training.

OPDs have long advocated for meaningful participation in needs assessments and for identified priorities to be reflected in humanitarian planning frameworks — a sustained effort that points to a persistent gap between consultation and influence over key processes such as the HNRP. A lack of feedback and limited clarity on how OPDs' inputs are considered or acted upon within humanitarian planning processes was highlighted:

> *"There are no structured accountability mechanisms to ensure that OPD perspectives shape humanitarian strategies. As a result, the priorities of persons with disabilities, including rehabilitation and inclusive service delivery, remain siloed or treated as secondary rather than lifesaving."*

The 2025 cuts have also eroded the few structures designed to address this: the inclusion taskforce has been "suspended or deprioritised", reducing structured spaces for advancing disability inclusion at system level.

Attitudes. Attitudinal barriers reinforce the exclusion of OPDs. OPDs are sometimes perceived as "too small" or "too technical" to partner with, or their representatives being treated primarily as people in need of assistance rather than partners. As one OPD respondent noted: "Sometimes international actors don't see us as leaders. They think that because we are persons with disabilities, we cannot manage projects or represent organisations properly."

In this context, the 2026 HNRP reflects a more explicit commitment to disability inclusion within the humanitarian response. The plan integrates disability inclusion within its planning framework, with persons with disabilities representing 15% of people in need, people targeted, and people prioritised.[2] It also emphasises increased support to OPDs, strengthened disability-inclusive programming, improved use of disability-disaggregated data, and greater engagement with OPDs.

These priorities were informed by consultations convened by OCHA, which helped highlight key gaps. However, key informants reported that these consultations were not always experienced as fully inclusive or meaningful by all OPDs, and persistent funding shortfalls continue to constrain implementation. As a result, a gap remains between the strengthened representation of disability in the HNRP, and the realities reported by partners on the ground.

KEY FINDINGS 3.1

Navigating Humanitarian Access and Principled Humanitarian Action

The operating context in Yemen

Humanitarian access in Yemen remains highly constrained, shaped by fragmented authority, administrative restrictions and ongoing insecurity, with significant differences between the north and south.[8]

In the north, regulatory pressure is more centralised and politically sensitive: LNNGOs require frequent administrative approvals, are scrutinised over interventions, particularly protection, rights, and gender, and pressed to visibly align with authority expectations. Following the re-designation of Ansar Allah by the US Government as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO), several INGOs suspended or reduced operations in the north. Some agencies relocated to Aden or restructured partnerships and implementation modalities. These changes reduced exposure for INGOs, but they redistributed operational risk to local actors.

In the south, the operating environment has been shaped by rapidly shifting political and security dynamics, including the expansion in late 2025 of the Southern Transitional Council, followed by its military rollback and loss of territorial control.[15] Regulation is more fragmented due to multiple and sometimes competing authorities. The relocation of international actors has increased competition for projects and added complexity to negotiations with local authorities.

Shared principles, unequal conditions

INGOs and LNNGOs are equally committed to humanitarian principles; what differs are the conditions they work in and the backing the system gives them:

INGOs typically work remotely and operationalise humanitarian principles through formal policies, donor compliance frameworks, and high-level negotiations with donors and national authorities. Their approach to principled action is shaped by legal, reputational, and compliance obligations, which can limit flexibility and encourage more risk-averse programming decisions. Several agencies noted that these constraints influence how principles such as neutrality and independence are interpreted and applied.

LNNGOs negotiate the same principles daily, in person, and bear the direct consequences. Embedded in the communities they serve, they are often the primary negotiators of principled access. Decisions on who receives assistance, how programmes are designed, and how to engage authorities are routinely subject to local scrutiny and pressure. For local actors, being seen to align with international partners — accurately or not — can itself restrict access, as authorities and communities question their neutrality. Several respondents described local leaders requesting relatives be included among programme participants, framed as a matter of fairness. Refusing such requests could result in delays, restricted access, or broader tensions affecting programme delivery, and even organisational continuity. As one organisation explained: "We apply humanitarian principles, but we also need to survive."

This tension between upholding principles and maintaining operational continuity in deeply challenging circumstances is not a failure of local commitment. It is a product of how the humanitarian system distributes risk, resources and protection.

A humanitarian system that transfers risk and withholds protection

Risk in Yemen's humanitarian response is not evenly distributed. It is closely shaped by partnership models, funding access and the organisation of aid delivery. Partnership arrangements frequently shift operational and security risks onto local partners, who continue to deliver assistance where international actors will not, with fewer resources and without equivalent protection or duty-of-care arrangements.[1, 16, 17] Similar disparities appear within INGOs, where national staff are often treated differently from their international counterparts.[16]

When funding is cut, local actors stay – and answer for it

Shrinking resources due to major funding cuts in 2025 have increased tensions with both communities and authorities.

As one local actor noted, "communities don't blame donors. They blame us." One WLO representative reported being investigated following the suspension of activities due to funding cuts, a stark illustration of how unevenly accountability is experienced.

> *"Local organisations cannot simply leave when funding ends. I am being investigated for projects that stopped due to international funding decisions.*
>
> **WLO representative**

Partnership and funding models that transfer risk

Sub-contracting models and grant requirements can affect principled humanitarian action: Several NNGO respondents noted that short funding cycles and rigid compliance requirements can prioritise project deadlines over the careful negotiation of access, on which safe and principled humanitarian response depends.

Security and duty of care: the overlooked needs of local actors

Local actors report that their security needs are routinely overlooked and the risks they face underestimated. A common assumption persists that local actors operate under lower levels of risk than INGOs or are better placed to manage it. These perceptions shape how security costs and support needs, including training, insurance, evacuation mechanisms and psychosocial support, are assessed and prioritised.[16] As one representative observed: "We are described as 'sons of the country' by some UN agencies and INGOs. This is then used to justify why national NGOs do not receive the same security measures or duty-of-care support as INGOs."

This gap between responsibility, perception and protection has direct consequences on staff safety.

Case study

Beyond gender norms: How the humanitarian system fails women-led organisations (WLOs)

WLOs in Yemen operate in one of the most restrictive environments for women globally. However, the barriers WLOs face are not attributable to context alone. The humanitarian system, both through its funding priorities and risk management approaches, has reinforced rather than countered that exclusion.

While gender norms emerged as a cross-cutting factor shaping access, leadership and programming, particularly for WLOs, their impact varies depending on organisational size, positioning, geography and access to influence: Several larger WLOs acknowledged the impact of patriarchal norms, but emphasised that structural factors, particularly funding access, organisational positioning and donor relationships, are often more decisive. One WLO highlighted, "For us, the main challenge is funding and access, not being women-led."

Leadership space and informal power: WLOs described barriers linked to informal, male-dominated networks that influence relationships with authorities and donors, as well as constraints affecting recruitment, mobility and leadership visibility.[18] These challenges were described as most acute for smaller or grassroots organisations with limited institutional support.

Gender constraints and gender-based violence (GBV) programming: Gender-related constraints were particularly evident in GBV and protection work, especially in northern Yemen.[6] Respondents reported heightened scrutiny from authorities, mobility restrictions linked to mahram requirements, and resistance to rights-based approaches. As one WLO respondent noted: "When you work in livelihoods or food security, it is easier. When you work in protection or GBV, every word matters."

Funding cuts have compounded these pressures. As donors prioritise narrowly defined lifesaving interventions, WLOs reported reduced support for GBV and protection programmes.[6, 19]

How local actors sustain access and principled action

Faced with these constraints, local actors have developed sophisticated strategies to maintain programme delivery and protect the people they serve. These adaptations are evidence of skill and commitment. They are also evidence of burden: they exist because the system forces them, they carry real cost and risk, and they are not a substitute for adequate funding, protection and duty of care.

Negotiated acceptance: access built on relationships and trust

LNNGOs rely heavily on long-standing relationships with communities and authorities to maintain access. Particularly in the north, access is rooted in years of engagement, which enables organisations to continue operating under restrictive conditions. Acceptance is continuously negotiated, and access is built and sustained through trust and sustained engagement.

This requires significant investment including regular communication with authorities and community leaders to explain projects, prevent tensions and resolve disputes through case-by-case negotiation. Managing perceptions of neutrality and impartiality is central to maintaining access and security.

Practical adaptations to sustain operations included:

- Deploying local volunteers when staff movement is restricted
- Mobilising personal networks to negotiate access when approvals are delayed
- Adjusting logistics such as rerouting deliveries to avoid checkpoints or tensions
- Using locally accepted language to explain their work, emphasising shared objectives such as livelihoods rather than emergency assistance

Adapting and reframing GBV programming

Adaptation has been most visible and most consequential in the delivery of GBV prevention and response services, particularly in northern Yemen. Adjustments to programme design and delivery approaches to reduce risks for both survivors and staff include:

- Shifting to remote or radio-based support
- Postponing activities during periods of increased insecurity
- Adjusting the timing of interventions to reflect political conditions
- Modifying outreach methods to minimise exposure

> *"If we followed the original workplan, we would have exposed women to harm.*
>
> **LNNGO respondent**

A particularly important form of adaptation is presenting GBV activities in ways that reduced political and community resistance. Several organisations reported integrating GBV components into broader programmes such as livelihoods, health, and family wellbeing, and adapting terminology to align with culturally accepted language.

KEY FINDINGS 3.2

Power, Participation and Decision-Making in Yemen's Humanitarian System

Localisation is often discussed in terms of representation and participation. However, respondents consistently emphasised that questions of influence and decision-making are equally important. While local and national actors have gained greater visibility within Yemen's humanitarian architecture, many interviewees questioned whether this has translated into meaningful influence over priorities, policies and resource allocation.

Representation has increased, but influence remains limited

Efforts to advance localisation in Yemen have led to increased representation of local and national actors in humanitarian coordination spaces. LNNGOs now hold six seats on the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) as compared to three previously[20], while the Localisation Task Force, formally activated in 2025, is co-chaired by an NNGO.[2] Despite these developments, UN agencies and INGOs continue to occupy the majority of coordination positions, and increased representation has not consistently translated into meaningful influence. This growth in seats marks real progress, but representation alone is not sufficient. Without sustained support to engage, contribute and shape outcomes, seats at the table risk becoming symbolic.

A key finding of this study is that actors interpret participation and influence differently depending on their positions within the humanitarian system. Some international respondents pointed to increased LNNGO representation as evidence of progress, pointing to quantitative indicators such as the number of seats occupied or funding levels. However, these metrics do not capture whether local actors are able to actively shape discussions or influence outcomes.

For Yemeni organisations, presence does not equate to influence. LNNGO key informants consistently distinguished between representation, participation and decision-making power. As one LNNGO leader explained, the issue is less about participation itself and more about whether local perspectives and operational realities influence strategic decisions, including humanitarian planning and prioritisation processes.

While practical barriers, including language and accessibility constraints remain a challenge, respondents emphasised that attitudinal and structural factors play a greater role. These include funding dependencies, which can discourage open disagreement. As one UN representative stated: "The issue is not whether we are listening. The issue is whether [NNGOs] are actually talking." Dismissive attitudes from some international actors also discouraged engagement, as one respondent noted: "When we speak, it often feels like you are treated as if you are wrong even when you are right."

Even where seats are available, NNGO representatives are not always equipped or supported to engage assertively. Building the confidence and advocacy skills of national NGO representatives — through mentoring, coaching or targeted training — was seen as essential to enable them to engage on equal footing and influence outcomes, rather than simply being present. Language was also raised as a practical barrier: where discussions are conducted in English, real-time interpretation and translation support was identified as a concrete enabling factor for more inclusive and meaningful participation.

Local actors also remain largely excluded from key forums, including the Humanitarian Access Working Group (HAWG). This limits their ability to influence decisions on access and principled engagement, despite their proximity to the crisis, their lived realities and the day-to-day operational constraints and risks they navigate. As one respondent noted: "We are expected to take risks and deliver where internationals can't, and yet we are not part of any forum where we can share our concerns."

Taken together, these findings suggest that creating opportunities for participation is only the first step. Effective engagement and leadership by national actors are equally important to ensuring that increased representation translates into genuine influence within Yemen's humanitarian coordination architecture.

Case study

The Humanitarian Reset: a test case for participation and power

The tensions between representation and influence became particularly visible in discussions surrounding the Humanitarian Reset.

While framed by UN leadership as a shift towards more efficient, prioritised and locally-led action[21], in Yemen, perceptions were more mixed. The Reset appears to have widened rather than reduced the gap between international and local actors.

Several national and international NGO respondents described the Reset primarily as a response to funding cuts rather than a deliberate effort to rebalance power within the humanitarian system. This perception, echoed in broader analysis, has raised concerns that reform priorities are not grounded in a shared vision for restructuring the system.

A recurring theme was the lack of clarity regarding the Reset's scope, objectives and implementation. Limited communication and uneven engagement across actors have contributed to differing interpretations of what the Reset entails in practice. Similar concerns have been raised at the global level, with NGOs pointing to the absence of a clearly articulated framework and uncertainty around how reforms will be operationalised.[22]

For many LNNGOs, the Reset remains a largely top-down process with limited transparency and few opportunities to influence its direction. Several NNGO key informants noted that discussions have taken place primarily within UN and INGO coordination spaces, with insufficient engagement of local actors. This reflects wider findings that local actors have had limited involvement in shaping the Reset, with consultations often perceived as insufficient or constrained by time and access.[23]

While localisation is positioned as a central component of the Reset, respondents questioned whether this would translate into meaningful changes in practice. Some pointed to increased reliance on local actors for programme delivery as evidence of progress. However, others emphasised that this shift has not been accompanied by corresponding changes in decision-making authority, access to funding or risk-sharing.[23]

Discussions around financing reforms, particularly the proposed expansion of pooled funds, were met with cautious optimism. While such mechanisms are often seen as facilitating more direct funding to local actors, several respondents raised concerns about accessibility, compliance requirements and the concentration of funding among larger organisations.[24, 25] Analysis of pooled funding reforms similarly highlights that scaling these mechanisms raises important questions around governance, absorptive capacity and equitable access for smaller actors.[26]

More broadly, respondents expressed concern that, in the current context, the Reset risks reinforcing existing inequalities. While international actors may reduce their operational footprint in response to funding cuts, LNNGOs are expected to maintain delivery under increasingly constrained conditions. These dynamics mirror wider concerns that the Reset may become a process of system contraction rather than structural transformation, with reduced resources driving prioritisation rather than enabling a rebalancing of power.[26]

Some stakeholders also raised concerns about potential changes to coordination structures under the Reset, including cluster simplification or leadership transfers. Without corresponding resources and institutional support, such shifts could place national organisations in positions of responsibility without the tools or backing required to effectively fulfil these roles. Some international stakeholders further cautioned that the Reset risks becoming a form of "nationalisation of localisation" where decision-making shifts geographically without fundamentally altering power relations within the humanitarian system.

Localisation within localisation: power and exclusion among local actors

As highlighted in Section 3, localisation narratives often treat "local actors" as a single category, obscuring significant differences in power, access and influence within the local NGO ecosystem.

Complexity and fragmentation of the local NGO ecosystem

Yemen's humanitarian landscape is highly stratified. Access to resources and decision-making spaces remains concentrated among a relatively small group of large, well-established national NGOs. Several international and national key informants noted that localisation initiatives often engage the same actors, raising concerns that shifting funding from international to national organisations does not necessarily broaden inclusion within the local ecosystem.

The category of WLOs further illustrates this complexity. Definitions vary across donors or coordination platforms, and organisations may be classified as women-led based on varying criteria, creating ambiguity in an already complex landscape and incentivising organisations to adopt WLO identity markers in response to funding opportunities. At the same time, smaller grassroots groups, which are often founded and led by women at community level, remain less visible within formal coordination and partnership.

These dynamics were sometimes described as "elite capture", where access to funding reinforces visibility, coordination participation and leadership opportunities for organisations already connected to donor systems.

> *"Localisation can shift the nationality of the gatekeeper without dismantling the gate itself.*
>
> **LNNGO respondent**

These dynamics also complicate narratives of power imbalance. While LNNGOs frequently critiqued international actors for limited consultation and opaque decision-making, some international actors raised similar concerns regarding fragmentation and limited coordination within locally-led spaces.

Networks and collective action

Networks, forums and consortia have become increasingly important within Yemen's humanitarian ecosystem. As funding pressures have intensified and localisation efforts have expanded, they have provided important platforms for coordination, information-sharing, collective advocacy and peer support among local actors. Several respondents highlighted their role in strengthening the visibility of national organisations, facilitating engagement with humanitarian decision-making processes, and creating opportunities for collective action that would be difficult for individual organisations to achieve alone.

The Yemeni National NGOs Forum has played an increasingly important role in strengthening coordination among national organisations. Some INGO and LNNGO respondents highlighted its contributions to facilitating information-sharing, convening regular coordination meetings, and supporting collective engagement of national NGOs within the broader humanitarian architecture. For example, the Forum has organised periodic coordination meetings to discuss humanitarian developments and has undertaken outreach to local authorities and NGOs to strengthen engagement and contextual understanding.

At the same time, respondents noted that the rapid growth of networks and collective initiatives has introduced new challenges. Several key informants observed that some networks have emerged in response to specific donor priorities, particularly around gender and women-led programming. While this has created new opportunities for engagement and visibility, some respondents questioned whether the proliferation of initiatives risks contributing to duplication and fragmentation.

Participation within networks and localisation initiatives was also described as uneven. Several LNNGOs noted that engagement is often concentrated among a relatively small group of well-established organisations with greater access to funding and coordination spaces.

Some key informants further raised concerns regarding transparency in decision-making processes and the concentration of influence within certain initiatives. These concerns were generally framed not as criticisms of networks themselves, but as challenges that accompany efforts to build more representative and inclusive forms of collective action within a highly constrained operating environment.

Case study

Locally-led consortium coordinated by Yemen Family Care Association: a promising initiative testing a locally-led governance and equitable partnership model[27]

A locally-led consortium pilot coordinated by Yemen Family Care Association (YFCA) offers a promising example of national NGOs designing and leading partnership models themselves, rather than participating in internationally driven structures. Developed under an innovation window linked to the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) programme, the initiative focuses on governance, accountability, and partnership dynamics, testing whether local actors can collectively manage funding and coordination responsibilities.

The consortium brings together four Yemeni WLOs, including grassroots actors, with resources distributed relatively evenly across partners regardless of organisational size. The concept originated among Yemeni organisations, which later selected an international partner to provide limited technical support. Funds are provided directly to the consortium, with the international partner playing a facilitative role and maintaining minimal overheads costs, intentionally shifting authority and resources toward national actors.

Governance arrangements are designed to promote horizontal collaboration. Responsibilities are distributed across partners, including smaller organisations, and thematic working groups are led by consortium members. As the lead organisation, YFCA coordinates but does not control implementation decisions, creating a peer-based management model that differs from conventional prime–sub relationships.

One innovative component is a locally-governed crisis modifier designed to enable rapid response within 72 hours through collective decision-making by consortium members. Although not yet activated, the mechanism demonstrates efforts to operationalise locally-led response capacity and shared risk management.

The pilot also highlights challenges, including sustaining donor confidence, managing internal power dynamics, and ensuring adequate institutional support for financial management and compliance. Nevertheless, it demonstrates how locally-led consortia can redistribute authority when design, governance, and accountability originate with national actors themselves.

Responsibility and culture

Whose responsibility is localisation?

There is broad agreement that the humanitarian system in Yemen is under severe strain and falling short of localisation ambitions. Across interviews, however, key informants consistently highlighted a lack of shared responsibility, alongside growing fragmentation and tension across the system.

> *"Everyone says the system is the problem, but no one feels they have the power to change it.*
>
> **INGO respondent**

This points to localisation as a shared responsibility: meaningful change depends not only on structural reform led by international actors, but on active engagement, openness and accountability from national actors as well.

These dynamics are not unique to Yemen. Recent analysis reflecting on ten years of the Grand Bargain[28] highlights a persistent gap between policy commitments and operational change across the humanitarian sector. Sudden and drastic funding cuts have intensified this gap. International organisations in Yemen have faced mounting pressure to prioritise scale, speed, and institutional survival, reinforcing existing power asymmetries within the system. At the same time, these pressures have limited both the space and the willingness for honest and open discussions on power, incentives and accountability, and weakening opportunities for collective problem-solving.

This pattern of divided responsibility reflects both the positions actors occupy within the system and their perceptions of roles and authority. Local organisations frequently described themselves as constrained by the expectations of INGOs, perceived primarily as donors setting conditions, timelines and compliance requirements. Many respondents also pointed to the persistence of a system largely designed and led by international actors. Some INGO representatives, in turn, emphasised that their own room for manoeuvre is constrained by donor requirements and by a coordination architecture perceived as heavily UN-centric.

These dynamics are further compounded by a lack of clearly defined and mutually agreed expectations between local and international actors. This can lead to misaligned expectations around participation and influence, contributing to frustration across the system. As a result, no single group of actors feels fully able to influence outcomes, reinforcing perceptions that the system is unresponsive despite ongoing efforts at reform.

Culture and leadership

Several respondents emphasised that localisation challenges are deeply rooted in organisational culture and leadership practices. Power redistribution therefore requires shifts in mindset across the humanitarian system. As one INGO representative commented: "Localisation must be embedded as a shared organisational culture across all levels, rather than treated as the responsibility of a few individuals or functions."

At the same time, existing incentives are widely perceived as reinforcing the opposite behaviour. Pressure to demonstrate compliance, combined with performance metrics focused on delivery rather than partnership quality, continues to shape organisational norms. An INGO key informant explained that "international organisations are ultimately judged on what they deliver and how many local organisations they partner with, not the quality of the partnerships."

Some NNGOs at the forefront of localisation initiatives also reflected on the historical dynamics shaping current leadership practices. Years of struggle for recognition, visibility and access to funding and coordination spaces have influenced organisational behaviour. In the current funding environment, these protective instincts can become more pronounced, limiting space for critical reflection on emerging power dynamics within the national NGO ecosystem.

> *"We have spent years trying to prove their legitimacy and gain access to decision-making spaces. That experience shapes how large NGOs behave today. There is sometimes a tendency to protect the space that was so hard to obtain.*
>
> **LNNGO respondent**

NGO coordination structures were also cited as reinforcing fragmentation. Coordination currently operates through separate platforms for international and national organisations, which some respondents felt limits opportunities for frank conversations and joint advocacy.

For many key informants, the humanitarian system in Yemen is at a critical juncture. Advancing localisation will require actors to question assumptions about power and leadership and reflect on their own roles within the system. Greater collective and self-reflection will be essential to building more complementary partnerships between national and international actors.

KEY FINDINGS 3.3

Funding Inequality across Actors: Constraints and Adaptation Strategies

Humanitarian funding in Yemen is distributed unequally. These inequalities are evident both between international, national and local actors, but also among LNNGOs themselves: Larger national organisations have a significantly higher ability to acquire funding than local grass roots organisations, women-led organisations (WLOs) and organisations of people with disabilities, despite the latter often being best positioned to reach specific communities and geographies. The organisations that find it hardest to get funding are also the least able to absorb financial shocks when funding declines.

> *"Adaptation is a privilege. Not everyone has it.*
>
> **LNNGO respondent**

Limited direct funding entrenches imbalanced power dynamics

LNNGOs in Yemen have few sources of funding.[1] Despite the Grand Bargain target of channelling 25% of humanitarian funding "as directly as possible" to local and national actors,[29] most funding in Yemen continues to be directly allocated to international organisations, reaching LLNGOs as subgrants.[1]

These arrangements shape power within partnerships: LNNGOs described being positioned as "sub-contractors" rather than equal partners. They pointed to funding systems designed around international standards[6, 7], rigid budgets and shorter project cycles, and their limited influence over programme design and operational decisions. Several respondents noted that these dynamics have sharpened as funding has contracted. This has direct operational consequences, limiting the ability of local actors to adapt programmes to evolving needs, respond to access constraints, and ensure continuity of assistance.

> *"As long as donors do not fund local actors directly, power will remain with international actors. Localisation cannot happen without money.*
>
> **LNNGO respondent**

Overheads: a clear illustration of funding asymmetries

Although the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has issued guidance[30] encouraging UN agencies and INGOs to ensure that local partners receive adequate overheads funding, LNNGO respondents in 2026 still point to unequal access to overheads. Despite a proliferation of overhead policies across the sector, practice has not caught up: donors continue to restrict overhead funding, intermediaries are left to subsidise their partners' indirect costs from stretched budgets, and the share reaching local actors routinely falls short of what is needed.[6, 7, 31]

Respondents described this as a major threat to organisational sustainability, contributing to what a key informant referred to as a "starvation cycle" that limits their ability to retain staff, maintain systems and invest in compliance, safeguarding or security, with direct implications for programme quality.

Several INGOs framed overhead allocation as a wider system challenge linked to donor ceilings and value-for-money pressures. However, LNNGOs framed the issue differently: Overheads are not surplus costs; they are essential for safe and accountable programme delivery.

Unequal access to funding opportunities and visibility

Access to funding opportunities is shaped by proximity to donors, access to information, and participation in coordination spaces. Although this varies depending on their size, INGOs' presence in regional and global donor spheres and dedicated teams often allows them to engage earlier on funding priorities and foster relationships with donors. By contrast, smaller organisations, including WLOs and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), reported more limited access to information about grant opportunities, and fewer opportunities for direct dialogue with institutional donors.[6]

Larger NNGOs acknowledged their advantage in accessing funding and policy influencing opportunities such as speaking on regional or global panels and engaging in key policy processes such as the Yemen Humanitarian Senior Officials Meetings, although they describe these opportunities as occasional in contrast to INGOs' ongoing engagement.

Case study

The Yemen Humanitarian Fund: an important direct funding pathway for local actors but reflects funding access inequalities

Established in 2015, the Yemen Humanitarian Fund (YHF) is a rapid and flexible humanitarian pooled funding mechanism. Its allocations to national NGOs have been significant in comparison to humanitarian financing in general: 44% of total allocations ($37.9 million) in 2023, rising to 70% in 2024, before falling to 59% in 2025.[32, 33]

While the YHF has expanded access to direct funding for national actors, local actors and some INGOs highlighted persistent limitations: the concentration of grants among larger national NGOs, compliance requirements that smaller actors, including WLOs and OPDs, struggle to meet, and limited influence over thematic and geographic priorities despite strong contextual knowledge.

Progress is now further jeopardised by severe funding cuts, shorter project durations and tighter geographic targeting. As one key informant observed, support is increasingly focused on maintaining basic operational continuity rather than building long-term sustainability.

Adapting to funding cuts

> *"Before, we were adapting. Now, we are just trying to stay alive.*
>
> **LNNGO respondent**

Funding cuts have affected all humanitarian actors in Yemen, but their impacts have been profoundly unequal. INGOs have faced significant consequences, including programme closures and staff reductions. However, diversified funding portfolios, institutional reserves, global operations and greater access to private funding have generally provided them with greater capacity to absorb shocks and adapt.

Yemeni organisations have been disproportionately affected.[34] Their experiences demonstrate how existing funding inequalities shape organisations' ability to adapt when resources decline.

Cutting back to survive

Funding cuts have triggered widespread internal restructuring across LNNGOs. Organisations reported downsizing, restructuring internal functions, reducing costs, and increasing reliance on unpaid or underpaid labour. However, the extent of these measures varied significantly depending on organisational size and funding diversification:

Larger national NGOs with diversified funding portfolios described strategic restructuring rather than organisational crisis. Adaptation measures included merging departments, reducing management layers to maintain technical staff, sharing costs across multiple donors to reduce overheads ratios, and investing in digital systems to increase efficiency. While these organisations acknowledged significant pressures, they were more likely to describe adaptation as organisational recalibration rather than survival.

Medium-sized organisations dependent on one or two funding streams described far greater precarity, with some losing most operational income almost immediately and others reducing staffing to minimal levels just to maintain legal registration.

Smaller organisations experienced the most severe impacts. Many reported increasing reliance on unpaid labour and volunteer contributions. Respondents recognised this growing "volunteerisation" as a transfer of financial risk onto individuals and a trend that threatens operational sustainability, accountability and staff wellbeing.

> *"People are working because they care, not because they are supported.*
>
> **LNNGO respondent**

Programme contraction and misalignment with community needs

Reducing footprint and changing programme focus emerged as another common adaptation. Several LNNGOs scaled back geographic coverage and concentrated on sectors most likely to attract funding, a trend many respondents described as "following the money." What initially seemed a necessary adjustment was often experienced as an ethical dilemma, with some key informants noting a growing gap between assistance available and locally identified priorities and raised concerns about accountability to affected populations.

Looking for new sources of support

Some LNNGOs have sought to diversify their funding sources to reduce reliance on UN agencies and Western donors. Larger national organisations in particular pursued alternative channels, including Gulf-based donors (notably Qatar, and Saudi Arabia), religious giving mechanisms such as zakat and waqf, and private sector partnerships.

Access has been uneven. Larger organisations were consistently described as better positioned to engage Gulf donors and regional foundations due to their established networks, visibility in coordination platforms, and in some cases a regional presence. Smaller organisations reported far fewer opportunities to access these funding spaces.

Concerns were also raised about funding sources, including the potential political affiliations of some donors, differences in administrative standards, and possible implications for perceptions of neutrality. Operational constraints were also noted, such as strict geographic requirements or procurement and transport costs that had to be absorbed within fixed grant budgets.

Alongside donor diversification, some national NGOs described efforts to develop income-generating activities to secure more flexible funding, although the ability to pursue these approaches depended largely on existing assets and organisational capacity.

What helps organisations survive?

While funding inequalities shape vulnerability, respondents also identified factors that helped organisations withstand financial shocks. Leadership, collective action, and supportive partnerships emerged as particularly important.

Leadership: a decisive factor in how organisations survive

Leadership emerged as a decisive factor in how LNNGOs navigated funding cuts. While structural constraints define the parameters, leaders determine how contraction unfolds internally, who is retained, how restructuring takes place, and whether organisational identity is preserved.

Several LNNGOs described leadership less as managerial efficiency and more as ethical decision-making under crisis, with leaders under extraordinary pressure to sustain organisations without institutional reserves.

Clear and transparent communication with staff and communities is critical to preserving trust: "If we hide the situation, we lose credibility. We have to explain why projects stop." One WLO representative described convening staff after funding collapsed and presenting them with a stark choice: "We explained the situation honestly. We told them we cannot pay salaries for now. They agreed to continue without pay until we find funding." The decision was framed as collective survival grounded in trust between leadership and staff, rather than a cost-cutting measure.

Leadership is also deeply personal. Unlike many INGOs whose senior leadership may operate remotely or rotate internationally, LNNGO leaders remain embedded in the communities where decisions unfold. As one key informant noted: "We stay here. We face the consequences directly."

Leadership capacity influenced how organisations adapted. Larger national organisations, often with more experienced leadership and familiarity with donor systems, were generally better positioned to restructure, retain core staff, and maintain relationships with donors and authorities. Smaller organisations described decisions shaped by immediate survival pressures, leaving little space for longer-term planning. Several LNNGO respondents cautioned against framing continued operations as a sign of resilience without recognising the strain it places on organisations and staff.

> *"People think we are strong because we continue. But continuing does not mean we are not exhausted."*
>
> **WLO representative**

Leadership during funding cuts reflects strong commitment and accountability to communities but also growing strain and personal risk. However, as noted by an NNGO representative, this leadership dimension in times of crisis is rarely recognised in localisation policy discussions.

Collective adaptation: networks and consortia

Beyond internal organisational adjustments, LNNGOs have pursued collective strategies to navigate funding contraction and structural constraints. Participation in networks and consortia emerged as an important mechanism for sustaining visibility and accessing resources.

For some organisations, consortium arrangements provided opportunities to access funding that would otherwise remain out of reach, particularly where donor requirements favoured larger institutional structures or international intermediaries.

However, the ability to benefit from collective mechanisms was uneven. Participation often depended on prior relationships, institutional capacity, and proximity to coordination structures, meaning that better-established organisations were more likely to access consortium opportunities. Smaller organisations and grassroots actors frequently remain excluded from these arrangements, reinforcing stratification within the local ecosystem.

The role of supportive international partnerships

Some INGOs made deliberate efforts to remain engaged with local partners during the funding crisis, seeking to understand impacts, maintain relationships, and identify practical forms of support. LNNGOs identified several forms of support that were particularly valuable:

- Use of surveys, meetings and workshops to better understand the impacts of funding cuts on local partners and their projects, including risks related to organisational closure and loss of critical personnel
- Creating space for dialogue, joint problem-solving, and identifying ways forward and support measures
- Maintaining relationships with affected partners, helping preserve trust and collaboration during a period of disruption
- Facilitation of access to duty-of-care resources to support local partners' wellbeing
- Supporting coordination efforts led by national civil society networks and clusters to document consequences and identify response options
- Temporary extension of affected projects under alternative funding streams to help mitigate disruption, including for smaller WLOs

While these examples were ad hoc responses to funding cuts, some partnership models have sought to address structural power imbalances more systematically and collaboratively, such as the Yemen Joint Response outlined in the case study below.

Case study

Promising practice of equitable partnership: the Dutch Relief Alliance's Yemen Joint Response[27]

The Yemen Joint Response (YJR), implemented under the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), provides an example of how consortium governance and funding arrangements can support more equitable partnerships between international and national actors in Yemen. The consortium brings together international, national, and local organisations, including smaller community-based actors alongside established national NGOs, intentionally promoting a diverse and inclusive partnership model.

Localisation was embedded from the design phase with the consortium coordination unit playing a facilitative role: coordinating activities rather than controlling implementation or budgets. This approach signals trust in partners' capacity to deliver programmes, manage resources, and contribute to strategic decisions.

Several governance features support more balanced power dynamics:

- **Shared decision-making structures:** Local and national organisations participate in the consortium's Response Task Force, which holds authority over major decisions, including budget allocations and activation of crisis modifiers. Local actors have voting rights within these structures.
- **Leadership roles for local actors:** Working groups are led by national organisations, and local representatives participate in alliance-level advisory mechanisms with compensated time and direct engagement with donors.
- **Flexible funding arrangements:** Budget flexibility allows national organisations to adjust activities based on contextual changes, recognising their proximity to evolving needs and operational realities.

The consortium has also demonstrated stronger risk-sharing practices. During a banking crisis that froze approximately €700,000 for Yemeni partners, a joint solution was negotiated involving pre-financing through a crisis modifier, temporary financing from the international partner, and donor contingency mechanisms. This prevented local organisations from bearing disproportionate financial risk and ensured programme continuity.

Adaptive partnership arrangements have also been applied when international organisations were unable to operate in northern areas due to regulatory restrictions. Activities were transferred to Yemeni partners rather than relocated geographically, maintaining assistance while strengthening local leadership roles.

While stakeholders note that the model remains dependent on donor flexibility and does not fully eliminate structural barriers such as banking constraints and compliance requirements, the YJR illustrates how consortium design, governance mechanisms and donor engagement can support a more equitable distribution of authority, resources and risk.

SECTION 4

Recommendations

As the humanitarian system undergoes reform through the Reset, and both local and international actors face increasing pressure to sustain assistance, this moment offers an opportunity for collective reflection across the humanitarian ecosystem in Yemen. While funding remains a key driver of power, meaningful change will depend on building trust, strengthening mutual accountability and creating space for more balanced partnerships. Achieving this will require rethinking systems and processes historically shaped by international actors and taking deliberate steps to transform them.

1 Strengthen meaningful, inclusive participation and influence

HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP (HC/HCT/OCHA)

- Establish regular, structured briefings on key strategic processes (e.g. Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) priorities, reforms, localisation progress), clearly showing how inputs from LNNGOs, including women-led organisations (WLOs) and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), are reflected in decisions.
- Plan and deliver meetings in accessible formats, including real-time interpretation/translation, timing and modality, and ensure transparent processes and safe spaces that enable meaningful participation.

YEMENI NATIONAL NGOS FORUM AND INGO COORDINATION GROUP

- Convene bi-annual forums with Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), with agreed follow-up actions and accountability tracking.

YEMENI NATIONAL NGOS FORUM AND IRC

- Organise a joint reflection roundtable with the HCT, Yemeni National NGOs Forum and INGO Coordination Group members to review findings and agree concrete follow-up actions, including through the HCT Localisation Working Group.

INGOS

- Actively reinforce local actors' contributions in coordination meetings (e.g. referencing their analysis, inviting them to present), including in HCT meetings.

- Establish regular, structured reflection spaces with LNNGOs to discuss power dynamics, risk distribution and barriers to principled action, with clear follow-up actions and accountability.

INGOS

- Translate localisation commitments into organisation-wide practice by embedding equitable partnership requirements across internal systems, policies and tools, including programme design, compliance processes and partnership agreements.
- Ensure organisation-wide ownership of localisation, with responsibility shared across all teams (programme, operations, compliance, leadership), rather than limited to focal points or partnership units.

DONORS

- Fund and ensure that accountability mechanisms for localisation commitments, including transparent tracking of funding flows, partnership practices and qualitative indicators are delivered by implementing partners.
- Support initiatives that promote dialogue, learning and trust-building across international and national actors.

3 Make the diversity of local actors visible in humanitarian frameworks, strategies, funding monitoring and reporting

ALL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

All humanitarian actors involved in the response should move beyond treating "local actors" or "national NGOs" as a homogenous group in strategic documents, coordination frameworks, reporting, research, policy and advocacy. This includes explicitly recognising and reflecting the diversity of local actors, including OPDs, smaller community-based organisations (CBOs) and networks.

DONORS AND INTERMEDIARIES

- Systematically disaggregate localisation targets, funding data and partnership reporting by type of local actor, including WLOs, OPDs and smaller organisations. Reporting on localisation progress should go beyond aggregate figures for "national NGOs" to assess how resources and opportunities are distributed across different actors.

4 Operationalise principled humanitarian action and risk-sharing

DONORS AND INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES

- Facilitate regular dialogue with international, national and local partners to jointly assess risks and identify practical measures to improve risk-sharing and management within partnerships.

UN LEADERSHIP

- Co-develop with LNNGOs and communicate clear, context-specific guidance on common humanitarian dilemmas (e.g. access constraints, interference), and ensure it is applied consistently across international agencies.
- Include LNNGOs in discussions on humanitarian access and principles (e.g. Humanitarian Access Working Group (HAWG)) to reflect frontline realities.

INGOS AND UN AGENCIES WITH LNNGO PARTNERS

- Provide safe spaces for local partners to raise concerns and experiences on security risks and address misconceptions.
- Ensure that partnership agreements include equivalent duty of care provisions for local partners, including access to security training, insurance, and psychosocial support.

5 Reform funding structures that reinforce dependency and unequal partnerships

DONORS AND INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES

- Develop and implement policies to ensure equitable and consistent provision of overheads costs to local partners.
- Increase direct and flexible funding opportunities for LNNGOs, including smaller and specialised actors such as WLOs and OPDs.
- Establish funding windows specifically designed for smaller or emerging organisations and for locally-led consortia/partnerships.
- Consider targeted support for income-generating initiatives or diversified funding models, where appropriate and feasible, potentially in collaboration with specialised organisations.

THE YEMEN HUMANITARIAN FUND

- Prioritise accessibility and flexibility, including simplified procedures and funding windows adapted to smaller organisations, WLOs and OPDs.
- Ensure transparency around allocation criteria – including break down by type of local actor (e.g. local, national, WLO, etc.) and that decision-making processes are strengthened to build trust and accountability.

INGOS AND UN AGENCIES

- Support local partners to develop resource mobilisation strategies, including identifying diverse funding opportunities beyond individual project grants.
- Introduce periodic 360-degree partnership feedback mechanisms allowing international intermediaries and their partners to jointly evaluate partnership quality and identify areas for improvement.

6 Strengthen collaboration and leadership within the NGO ecosystem

YEMENI NATIONAL NGOS FORUM

- Identify "localisation champions" responsible for supporting smaller organisations, including WLOs and OPDs, to increase their visibility, profile, and access to funding.
- Promote mechanisms for information-sharing and contributions across the wider local NGO ecosystem including on funding opportunities, coordination developments, and collective positions on key humanitarian consultations.

THE INGO COORDINATION GROUP

- Encourage open and honest dialogue on equitable partnerships and power dynamics within the humanitarian system through dedicated and externally facilitated sessions.
- Promote peer learning among INGOs on equitable partnership practices and localisation commitments, including sharing practical examples of how INGOs can support local actors' leadership and access to funding.

THE YEMENI NATIONAL NGOS FORUM AND INGO COORDINATION GROUP

- Establish regular joint coordination meetings to exchange information on key developments in the response, funding trends, and operational challenges, and to identify areas for joint advocacy.
- Develop shared positions on priority issues affecting the humanitarian response, including funding access, partnership practices, and operational constraints, to strengthen collective engagement with humanitarian leadership and donors.

DONORS AND UN AGENCIES

- Provide targeted support to national NGO networks that strengthen collaboration, collective representation and peer learning among local actors.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organisation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HAWG	Humanitarian Access Working Group
HCT	Humanitarian Coordination Team
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
ICR	Indirect Cost Recovery
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
LNNGO	Local and National Non-Governmental Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
UN	United Nations
WLO	Women-Led Organisation
YFCA	Yemen Family Care Association
YHF	Yemen Humanitarian Fund
YJR	Yemen Joint Response

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