



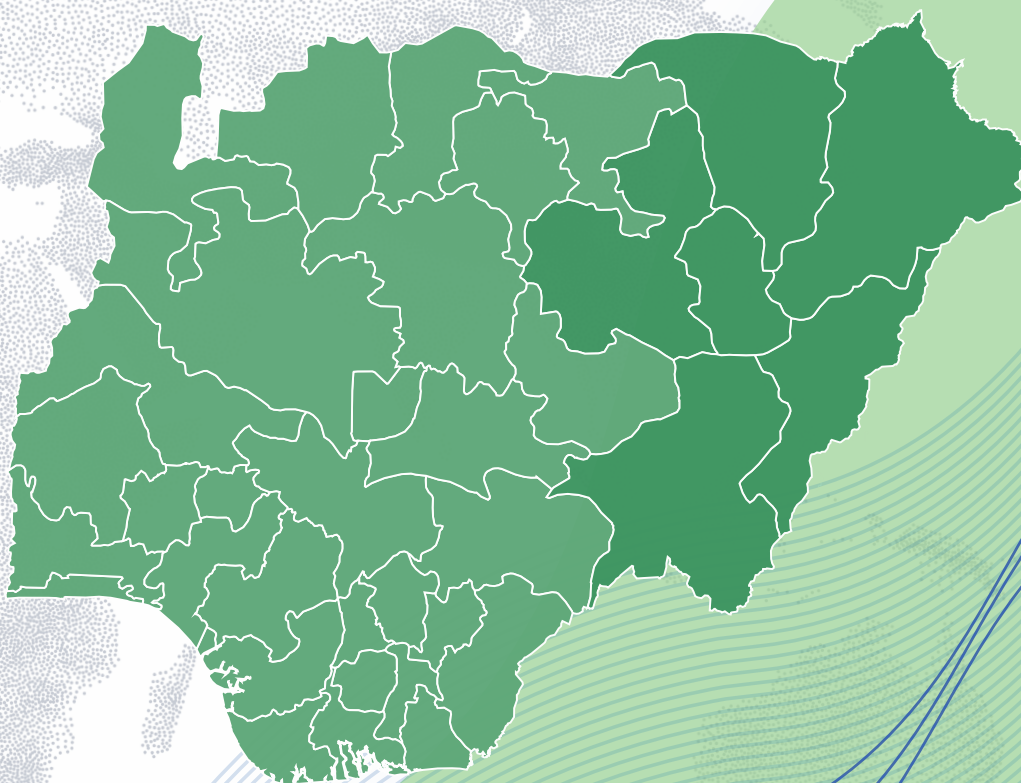
COLUMBIA | MAILMAN SCHOOL
OF PUBLIC HEALTH



Nigerian National Non-Governmental Organisation Consortium

**Case Study Documenting the
Successes and Challenges of
Implementing a Consortium Model
in North-East Nigeria**

MAY 2021



BACKGROUND

Local actors¹ and national organisations in the Global South are often excluded from decision-making mechanisms in international humanitarian responses.² This exclusion, coupled with limited funding and resources for local organisations, perpetuates longstanding power imbalances and mentalities often critiqued as “neocolonial” and paternalistic. The Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility’s (CP AoR) Localisation Initiative has committed to implementing the Grand Bargain, which aims to shift power and resources into the hands of local actors and improve local capacities in humanitarian response.³ To better understand the experiences of local actors who have engaged with the international humanitarian response, the Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network and the CP AoR have committed to documenting several localisation initiatives, highlighting promising practices and lessons learned from approaches to localisation, as well as suggesting alternative methods for those approaches that did not evolve fruitfully.

The first initiative documented in this series is the Nigerian National Non-Governmental Organisation (NNGO) Consortium (“the Consortium”, hereafter), which was established in February 2019 and relaunched in July 2020 in north-east Nigeria. The Consortium is a local initiative with a mission to support Nigerian organisations and to increase the presence of local NGO representation within the aid coordination structure in north-east Nigeria. The founding members of the NNGO Consortium are from the Grow Strong Foundation, Green Concern For Development (GREENCODE), Hallmark Leadership Initiative, and Restoration of Hope Initiative.

“We have a vision and mission. We want to see every [local] organisation grow, want to see them because we know that they are locals. They know the land better, they know the work better, they know the nooks and crannies better, they know how to relate with the beneficiaries better.”

THE CONSORTIUM’S GOALS ARE:



To **promote localisation** and ensure that the Grand Bargain is implemented across north-east Nigeria



Institutional **capacity building** of Nigerian NGOs (Administrative and Programming)



Connection with donor community to **access funds**

The Consortium has Terms of Reference that include the vision, mission, goals and objectives, key functions, and membership criteria. Membership for the Consortium is open or by invitation; however, organisations should be members of the sector coordination group in Nigeria. There is a statement of commitment for interested members to sign. Because membership is voluntary, organisations are able to withdraw at any time. In the original Terms of Reference, membership was limited to 15 organisations. This number was found to be too large to manage initially, so Consortium leaders reduced membership numbers in the July 2020 relaunch. The Terms of Reference also indicated that members would meet on a weekly basis, Saturday mornings, for the first six months of the formation of the Consortium. Because the meetings are self-funded by the Consortium members and are facilitated internally, such frequency was not feasible. Therefore, in the updated relaunch, members agreed to meet monthly on the last Wednesday of each month. From July 2020 until the interviews in November 2020, the Consortium met three times.

1 Local, here, refers to actors originating from the country of focus.

2 See assessment commissioned by the CP AoR and conducted by the CPC Learning Network at Columbia University, Envisioning the Grand Bargain (2020). https://www.cpaor.net/CP_AoR_approach_to_localisation

3 CP AoR (2020). Localisation. <https://www.cpaor.net/node/666>

METHODOLOGY

At the end of 2020, the CPC Learning Network, with the support of the CP AoR's Localisation Initiative, utilised qualitative methods to document the successes and challenges of implementing a consortium model in north-east Nigeria. A desk review of relevant literature was conducted with several documents and qualitative data were collected from five interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to understand the background, structure, and challenges implementing the initiative in Nigeria. Opening questions focused on member selection and accountability, and included questions on mechanisms for gauging the appropriateness and responsibilities of potential members. The guide also included questions about the advantages of working in a consortium model. Closing questions focused on lessons learned from the first round of the initiative and recommendations going forward.

FINDINGS

Though the Consortium was established to ensure that the Grand Bargain is implemented across north-east Nigeria and that local NGOs are able to access funding and build up their capacity, there were constraints in the first phase of implementation. The critical themes that surfaced from the analysis of the written documents and interviews are broken down as follows: (1) Obstacles to **funding**; (2) Imbalance of **power** and the need to leverage the **collective voice**; and (3) Importance of and challenges with **capacity building**.

Obstacles to Funding

Funding remains concentrated within a handful of large international humanitarian organisations and UN agencies, a finding that resonates strongly with the global literature on the failure of localisation initiatives to push funding into the hands of local actors and national organisations.^{4 5} Local organisations continue to face substantial barriers to accessing funds within this system, so one of the key goals of the Consortium was to pool skillsets and resources to be able to access funds, specifically large grants, within the humanitarian system. One member explained the challenges with competing against large international humanitarian organisations that have the capacity to apply for and implement projects that span multiple sectors:

"The only way to compete with other partners that have this experience and expertise within them as a single organisation is for us to come under a single umbrella that is in the form of consortium to share our experiences and expertise in order to access a more consolidated and multi-dimensional or multi-sectoral funding that would give us an opportunity to implement projects that...do not have a singular thematic focus..."

The competitive nature of the funding within the humanitarian system and challenges of accessing large grants were a recurrent theme among the interviewees. Therefore, one of the key intentions behind the Consortium model was to convene a group of local leaders from NGOs to share expertise and develop proposals jointly. Combining their capacities as a single body would ideally give them a better chance to access international funds.

Power & Voice

The Consortium was also established to enable local NGOs to have a consolidated voice, which would lead them to having more power and say in the decision-making processes. The members saw an imbalance of power between local and international actors and they felt that their coming together would give them more leverage, indicating that this Consortium approach sought to bolster local agency through collective action. Securing a seat at the table, not only as beneficiaries but as partners and leaders, has required collective effort on the part of Consortium members. To participate in some of the international conversations, the Consortium focused on sharing relevant information among the members. One member emphasised that this information-sharing was a successful outcome in the first phase of the Consortium:

"One of the best things that worked in the Consortium is the peer learning process that we did, like the learning from each other, weaknesses, as well as the strengths, to strengthen our own system...another lesson that we learned is the issue of information dissemination among ourselves."

4 The Humanitarian Economy. IRIN. <http://newirin.irinnews.org/the-humanitarian-economy>.

5 Thierry, M., Strømme, A., and Williamson, K. (2020). Still Unprotected: Humanitarian Funding for Child Protection. The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, CP AoR, Save the Children International, UNHCR. https://www.cpaor.net/still_unprotected_2020report.

The Consortium members shared operational information with each other (e.g. structure of the humanitarian system, number of sectors, etc.) so that they could more actively participate in the sector meetings. In addition to experiencing an imbalance of power between themselves and international actors, local organisations have come across challenges accessing support from their government. However, the Consortium members emphasised that local organisations contribute knowledge and expertise to the field that would otherwise be a significant gap:

“When you come to the table with the ministry...[they] want to know, ‘what have you brought for us?...Are you going to be providing us with any support because we don’t have the funding?’...the government doesn’t perceive [local NGOs] as strong actors because they don’t come with money, but they have more than money. They have the local knowledge. They have the local expertise.”

The Consortium members highlighted several times that they have knowledge of the local environment and it is critical for child protection in humanitarian action. Current power dynamics and financial models that support and protect the role of large international humanitarian organisations and UN agencies in the humanitarian response continue to limit the role and leadership of local organisations.

Capacity Building

Though “capacity” could be operationalised in many ways, it was often described as organisations having both technical and administrative proficiency. This organisational capacity is then typically used as a measure to grant resources:

“I think that the humanitarian world has failed and is failing to address, which is making sure that national organisations or local organisations have the operational capacity to pass what we may call ‘due diligence test’ to receive funding.”

One of the main reasons the Consortium was launched was to develop this operational capacity. Among the Consortium members, there was a belief that local actors are limited in their capacity (to pass the ‘due diligence test’ to obtain funding, as defined by the international community), particularly in comparison to international actors. As one member shared:

“You know, we don’t have the technical knowledge, but our strength is, we are on the ground. We are the first responders. We know the context. And we give the needed impact compared to the international community. So, in that regard, we can have somebody cover this weakness of not having a technical approach to the management. That is where we say let’s recruit and learn from that very person.”

As noted above, emphasis is on the value of mutual learning, rather than unidirectional capacity building. In order to develop their operational capacity, the Consortium focused on internal mentorship in the first phase of the Consortium:

“What we do is look for organisations that are struggling, that have never gotten funds or if they have gotten funds just once. So, we try to see that their capacity is being built up. We take them through...We sit them down, we inspect their office, we check the finance, we check their programs, we check their M&E, where they are lacking. And we try to see that we mentor them and strengthen their capacity.”

In addition to the sharing of technical and operational knowledge, the Consortium also served as a platform to convene a larger pool of local staff to tackle required tasks, particularly around applying for funding. Consortium members spoke of combining not only expertise, but creating a larger human resource base where the burden of submitting large grant applications could be split among multiple members.

CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to address the contextual barriers that may impede the progress of localisation in north-east Nigeria. We break down our recommendations based on actor: (1) **Consortium**; (2) **International NGO and UN community**; and (3) **Funding community**.

NNGO Consortium

As the Consortium has reinitiated in July 2020, there is a revived opportunity to garner the voices and capacities of members to positively impact the humanitarian landscape in north-east Nigeria. Based on the challenges and lessons learned from the first phase of the Consortium, we recommend that the Consortium members take time to reflect on how they could maintain engagement. Below we list several challenges that emerged, along with recommendations to address the challenges.

1. Review the purpose and goals of the Consortium when setting the agenda.

- The three goals of the Consortium are to promote localisation to ensure that the Grand Bargain is implemented across north-east Nigeria, build institutional capacity of Nigerian NGOs, and connect with the donor community to access funds. Returning to these original goals, it appears as though efforts were centered on the latter two (capacity building and funding) in the first phase of the Consortium. However, the discussions did not focus as much on how the Consortium could promote localisation. This could be an area for further attention as the Consortium continues to move forward.

2. Define and agree on clear selection criteria for Consortium membership and establish an accountability mechanism.

- Initially, the Consortium did not have formal criteria for membership, instead making ad hoc determinations based on certain measures, such as the areas in which members operate, the connections to potential partners and current funding, and the policies at the organisations. The Consortium left membership open because members wanted to have as many hands-on-deck as possible. The absence of strict selection criteria led to a large number of members initially, which was challenging to manage. Attendance also tended to decrease over time, particularly when other commitments appeared to be more important than actively participating. Several members expressed a desire for a more selective, committed membership.
- There seemed to have been the expectation that members would receive more from the Consortium than they contributed and there was a desire to see immediate benefits; when those benefits were not visible, commitment waned. A suggested way to retain membership is to structure the Consortium in such a way where members feel engaged. Assigning specific responsibilities may create a space where members feel their contributions are important.

“How do you make the Consortium? How do you build it in such a way that all the members feel like they’re contributing to something? There has to be some organisation at the helm, but then you form committees or you have to give people specific responsibilities of what to do.”

3. Establish and agree on a structure and clear standards and policies at the outset.

- It may be beneficial to plan more strategically around how the organisations that are a part of the Consortium are working together. Questions that could be asked include: Are there ways that the organisations could collaborate on program implementation? What systems are in place to track success? How can these systems be put into place for all members of the Consortium?
- The lack of a well-defined structure and reporting mechanism for the Consortium has been a barrier to applying for funds, as donors want to be able to review how funding is spent, administered, and how it will be reported. Members found that most donor agencies have not wanted to support the Consortium to date.

“Right from the beginning we could have developed the logical framework of how we will be running the Consortium... Rather, we just called for partnership and then organised this rather than having a very good framework that we would be implementing so it wouldn’t allow us to really continue to sustain the Consortium.”

- There may have also been a lack of clear understanding around the concept of a consortium. Although there was a memorandum of understanding, some members did not sign it, while some may have signed it but did not completely understand what they committed to. In the second phase of the Consortium that launched in July 2020, the members shared that they were more intentional about stating the purpose with prospective members.
- There appeared to be some competition among the members and a clear leadership structure did not exist in the first phase of the initiative to manage disagreements. However, members discussed how this issue is not unique in the field and that international communities of practice also experience issues when it comes to leadership and decision-making.

4. Review and optimise the time commitment for membership.

- Because Consortium membership is voluntary, conflicts had arisen with work requirements and responsibilities. The Consortium had tried to establish peer learning communities, where organisations within the Consortium could mentor each other and visit each other's sites, but they couldn't sustain the effort due to different engagements of the organisations. One member suggested involving an independent individual that could help manage the Consortium, as members already have full plates.
- It may also be helpful to think creatively about ways to reduce demands on members' limited time, such as identifying priority areas of focus, reducing the Consortium's scope, engaging with a central coordinator, or having a rotating roster.

5. Consider connecting with mentor(s).

- Consider connecting with mentors who have supported or run a successful consortium in another region. The Consortium should stay in the hands of local actors, but mentorship support could be available to troubleshoot issues that may arise, as well as to support any training needs.
- Ensure diverse representation of mentor(s) and members, including gender balance.

"All the members don't really understand the concept, how a consortium really functions... maybe your expression of interest comes out, that is when we will come to say, 'OK, here we are, Consortium members, let's apply.' But from my lesson learned, I said this is not the right way to manage the Consortium. For a consortium, you have to be together. You have to implement one project... You have to agree on common terms. You have to have a way of working before you even say that, 'Yeah, we are Consortium members.'"

International NGO and UN Community

The international community must commit to respecting local voices and including them at all levels of the decision-making process. Below we list several recommendations for the international NGO and UN community to promote localisation.

1. Urgently implement the Principles of Partnership⁶ and update them for more current needs.

- The partnerships should incorporate bi-directional exchanges of skillsets, including capacity building for national NGOs as defined by their own identified learning needs.

2. Consider how you currently partner with national organisations to implement programming and reflect on how the international community supports local organisations' existing programs.

- When appropriate, consider using international resources to support the work of local organisations. Local consortia can and should be consulted prior to program implementation.

3. Reflect on how programs are designed, as well as how they are implemented.

- International programs that local NGOs implement should be designed in partnership with local NGOs, and not pre-fabricated by the international community to be implemented by local actors.

4. Be mindful of the language used when speaking about national actors.

- Language asserting that local organisations "do not have the capacity" perpetuates power imbalances in the field. Often,

⁶ See Principles of Partnership: A Statement of Commitment (2007): <https://www.icvanetwork.org/principles-partnership-statement-commitment>

when the child protection community says that local organisations “do not have the capacity”, they are not referring to the ability to design and implement interventions, but rather to adhering to the operational requirements put in place by the international community, which are skills that are easily built.

International Funding Community

Local organisations are invaluable to humanitarian work as they understand the context and can help build and sustain locally relevant initiatives. Below we list several recommendations for the donor community to support locally-relevant and sustainable work.

1. Set aside funding for learning communities and local consortia. Building consortia and communities for peer-to-peer learning and mentorship requires time and investment.

2. Earmark larger amounts of funds for local and country-level organisations.

- Access to funding has been and continues to be one of the biggest barriers to local organisations advancing their work. If the child protection community is truly committed to localising efforts, it must set aside dedicated funds for local organisations. Consider reviewing internal policies that complicate efforts to disburse more funds into the hands of local organisations. Donors should consider both funding program models that prioritise principled partnerships with local organisations and shifting funds to the national or local community.
- The international NGO and UN funding community should also consider mobilising the private sector to donate to local groups.

3. Work with the humanitarian coordination structure in north-east Nigeria to support the institutional capacity development of national NGOs, as defined by their internally identified growth needs.

- Technical and operational capacity remain obstacles to accessing international funds, and radical shifts in this structure are unlikely without an intentional strategy.

CONCLUSION

The Consortium is an opportunity for local actors to come together with a strong, collective voice. This voice is absolutely critical to the success of the child protection field, and there needs to be greater investment in supporting local learning communities. Ensuring that greater efforts are made to distribute funding, resources, and power to local actors would promote the Grand Bargain implementation, a commitment made in 2016 and a continued priority for the CP AoR.