



CENTRE for BASIC RESEARCH

# Repositioning Uganda's CSOs in the Grand Bargain Process, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda

Towards a Local Research Agenda

Sense-Making Background Paper

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## Abstract

This paper - "*Repositioning Uganda's CSOs in the Grand Bargain Process, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda: Towards a Local Research Agenda*," examines the changing landscape of humanitarian and development financing and how it affects Ugandan civil society organizations (CSOs). Uganda has a vibrant CSO sector with approximately 4,000 operational organizations that play a crucial role in creating awareness, delivering services, advocating for policies, and contributing to the economy. However, the sector faces significant challenges, especially in terms of financing, which is largely foreign, conditional, and inflexible.

Global initiatives such as the Grand Bargain, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda are aimed at promoting effective local responses to these financing challenges. This paper delves into the relevance of these initiatives for Ugandan CSOs, which often operate in complex, resource-constrained environments. When

Ugandan civil society engage with these global frameworks, they can better position themselves to take advantage of opportunities, strengthen their capacities, and enhance their impact.

The Centre for Basic Research is leading this exploration, focusing on fundamental research and thought leadership. This paper suggests a research agenda to support the localization agenda, providing evidence-based insights to guide the sector's strategic positioning. Through a series of sense-making seminars, CBR aims to kick-start and foster a deeper understanding of these global initiatives and how they could potentially transform the operational landscape for Uganda's CSOs.

## **1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Context**

Uganda has a rich history of civil society organizing, which has played a crucial role since the country gained independence in 1962.<sup>1</sup> Since 1986, the number of NGOs has significantly increased, with approximately 14,000 registered organizations currently and about 4000 operational ones.<sup>2</sup> These organizations create awareness, deliver social services, contribute to policy processes, and create employment, also contributing to the growth of the economy. A recent study estimated that the NGO sector in Uganda contributed approximately UGX 4.7 trillion to the national economy in 2017.<sup>3</sup> However, one of the critical challenges that is facing the sector is financing which is mostly – foreign, conditional, and with limited flexibility.

While several efforts have been made over the years to create financial sustainability in the sector, most of them have largely been donor-centric and anchored in the organizational practices of the global north. Global initiatives such as the Grand Bargain, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda that have emerged to reshape the humanitarian and development financing landscape are therefore important initiatives that promote the practices and idea of localized and effective responses to financing. These initiatives are especially relevant for Ugandan CSOs, which often operate in complex resource-constrained environments.

This background paper explores these efforts with a view of undertaking a series of ‘sense-making seminars’ that will support the thought-leadership and roll-out of the localization agenda in Uganda. The Centre for Basic Research, as a think-tanks that invest in foundational research is leading this effort working closely with other partners both in the international and local NGO sector in Uganda.

### **1.2 Purpose of the Paper**

This paper aims to provide a synoptic analysis of the Grand Bargain process, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda, and their implications for Uganda's CSOs. By understanding these concepts and their interconnections, Ugandan CSOs can better position themselves to leverage opportunities, enhance their

capacities, and improve their impact within the context of these areas of engagement. The paper also proposes a research agenda that will accompany the localization agenda with a view of providing evidence-based thought leadership for the sector.

## **2.0 Overview of the Initiatives**

### **2.1 The Grand Bargain**

The Grand Bargain emerged from the recognition that the global humanitarian system was facing significant challenges in addressing the increasing scale, frequency, and complexity of crises worldwide.<sup>4</sup> This realization was especially pronounced in the wake of major humanitarian emergencies such as the Syrian refugee crisis, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa.<sup>5</sup> These events highlighted systemic inefficiencies, fragmented responses, and a growing gap between humanitarian needs and available resources.

At the World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul in May 2016, the international humanitarian community convening under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General, brought together governments, humanitarian organizations, private sector representatives, and other stakeholders to develop a more effective and responsive humanitarian system.<sup>6</sup> The Grand Bargain was one of the key outcomes of this summit.

While the Grand Bargain is primarily designed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian interventions, its principles and commitments have broader implications and potential benefits for the wider civil society sector, including those organizations not directly involved in humanitarian aid. The broader civil society can leverage the Grand Bargain's focus on efficiency, transparency, local empowerment, and participatory approaches to strengthen their own operations and advocacy efforts.

The Grand Bargain was driven by several key considerations. Firstly, there was a consensus that the humanitarian system needed to become more efficient by reducing administrative costs, minimizing duplication of efforts, and streamlining processes to ensure aid reached those in need more effectively. Secondly, the Grand Bargain sought to shift more support and funding to local and national actors, recognizing their role as first responders in crises and their ability to provide sustainable and culturally appropriate responses. Thirdly, enhancing transparency in the flow of funds and accountability mechanisms was crucial for building trust among stakeholders and ensuring responsible use of resources. Additionally, the Grand Bargain emphasized the importance of involving affected communities in decision-making processes, aiming for more responsive humanitarian responses. Lastly, it recognized the need for better integration between humanitarian and development efforts to address immediate needs while also building long-term resilience and reducing vulnerability. In essence the Grand Bargain represented a comprehensive effort to reform the international humanitarian system by addressing its most critical shortcomings.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.2: The Charter for Change**

The Charter for Change, initiated by a group of INGOs in 2015, aims to reshape the humanitarian system to grant local and national actors a more prominent role.<sup>8</sup> This response was prompted by critiques highlighting the excessive centralization of the international humanitarian system and its failure to sufficiently utilize the capacities of local organizations. The Charter outlines eight key commitments, including an increase in direct funding to national NGOs, reaffirmation of partnership principles, transparency in resource transfers to national actors, and the cessation of activities that undermine local capacity.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, the Charter for Change seeks to address the power and resource imbalance between international and local actors. Adherence to these commitments can ensure that local and national organizations receive better resources, are more involved in decision-making processes, and are duly acknowledged for their contributions to humanitarian efforts.

The Charter for Change therefore seeks to address the imbalance of power and resources between international and local actors. By adhering to these commitments, INGOs and other international agencies can ensure that local and national organizations are better resourced, more involved in decision-making, and recognized for their contributions to humanitarian efforts.<sup>10</sup>

The Charter for Change collaborates with local partner NGOs to support the Grand Bargain efforts on localization. Both initiatives work together to advance the localization agenda, ensuring that development finance is more responsive to local needs and contexts. In a nutshell, while the Grand Bargain sets broader goals for humanitarian aid, the Charter for Change specifically advocates for localization and stronger engagement of local NGOs in the process.

## **2.3 The Localization Agenda**

The localization agenda prioritizes shifting power in humanitarian aid and development work to the countries and communities where it is implemented.<sup>11</sup> This approach emphasizes that aid efforts should be locally led, with communities becoming the driving force behind programs and services that address their own needs. By challenging the dominance of Western donors and international organizations, it aims to reduce neocolonialism and enhance effectiveness. In essence it is an exercise towards decolonising the aid and development industry through clear and conscious mechanisms. This can lead to increased efficiency, greater accountability, and improved sustainability, as local organizations are better equipped to understand community needs.

However, despite the benefits, turning the concept of localization into action remains a challenge. The 2016 Grand Bargain aimed for at least 25% of humanitarian funding to go to local and national responders by 2020,

but progress has been slow. Obstacles such as decision-making power, funding allocation, and defining what constitutes a "local" group continue to impede the full implementation of the localization agenda.

Indeed for the international stakeholders, the Localization Agenda requires a shift towards more supportive and enabling roles focusing on partnership and capacity building rather than direct implementation. For local stakeholders, it presents an opportunity to assume greater leadership and responsibility, while also advocating for more equitable resource allocation.

### **3.0: Interconnections between the Grand Bargain, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda**

The Grand Bargain, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda are interrelated initiatives that aim to reform the humanitarian and development sectors by enhancing effectiveness, promoting local leadership, and ensuring more equitable distribution of resources. These initiatives share several common objectives and principles. They create a synergistic framework for supporting local and national actors.

#### **3.1 What are the common objectives?**

Enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian and development aid is a key objective of all three initiatives. They strive to improve efficiency and responsiveness, ensuring that aid reaches those in need more quickly and effectively. The Grand Bargain focuses on reducing overhead costs, streamlining processes, and enhancing transparency. The Charter for Change emphasizes the importance of direct funding to local actors, reducing bureaucratic layers that can slow down aid delivery. The Localization Agenda promotes context-specific solutions and the utilization of local knowledge to enhance the relevance and impact of humanitarian interventions.

Each initiative encourages the use of evidence-based approaches to assess needs and measure impact. The Grand Bargain calls for improved joint and impartial needs assessments, while the Charter for Change and Localization Agenda advocate for participatory methods involving local communities. CBR as an institution whose core work focuses on research, we see the critical role to be played by working with local partners to improve their capacity and competencies in the area of research, documentation and knowledge management.

Promoting local leadership is another core principle shared by these initiatives. They all emphasize the empowerment of local and national actors. The Grand Bargain commits to providing more support and funding tools for local responders. The Charter for Change outlines specific actions for INGOs to cede power and resources to local organizations.

The Localization Agenda underscores the importance of local leadership in driving sustainable and effective responses. Building the capacity of local actors is essential for effective local leadership. The Charter for Change includes commitments to robust organizational support and capacity strengthening, while the Localization Agenda advocates for long-term investments in local capacities.

Ensuring equitable resource distribution is a shared goal. The Grand Bargain seeks to reduce earmarking of donor contributions, allowing for more flexible and needs-based allocation of funds. The Charter for Change aims to increase the proportion of humanitarian funding that goes directly to national and local NGOs. The Localization Agenda promotes funding models that prioritize local actors and reduce the financial dominance of international organizations.

Equitable resource distribution also involves inclusive decision-making processes. The Grand Bargain's participation revolution commitment and the Localization Agenda's emphasis on community engagement ensure that affected populations have a say in allocating and using resources.

### **3.2 Challenges and Opportunities in Harmonizing These Initiatives**

Harmonizing the different commitments and principles of the Grand Bargain, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda can be challenging due to varying priorities and operational approaches among stakeholders. Ensuring adequate and sustained funding for local actors remains a challenge, as donors and international organizations must balance their commitments to localization with the need for accountability and impact. Additionally, some international organizations may resist the shifts in power and resources required by these initiatives, preferring to maintain control over funding and decision-making processes.

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for synergy. Integrating the principles and commitments of these initiatives can drive holistic reform in the humanitarian and development sectors, creating a more coherent and unified approach to localization. Enhanced collaboration between international and local NGO actors can lead to shared learning, innovation, and more effective responses to humanitarian and development challenges. Emphasizing local leadership and capacity building can lead to more sustainable and resilient communities, as local actors are always better positioned to address ongoing and future challenges in a contextually appropriate manner. In countries like Uganda this is critical and indeed an area that requires to be prioritized.

### **4.0 Research and Evidence-based Localization Agenda**

The Localization Agenda emphasizes empowering local actors and therefore represents a significant shift in how aid is delivered. However, its effective implementation requires addressing several critical issues through robust research and evidence. Understanding these issues is vital for ensuring that the Localization Agenda achieves its intended outcomes of more efficient, effective, and sustainable humanitarian and development interventions. The following are some proposed areas where evidence needs to be built through research:

#### **4.1 Research in funding mechanisms and financial sustainability**

Funding mechanisms and financial sustainability are fundamental concerns in the rollout of the Localization Agenda. Research is needed to identify the most effective funding models that ensure financial sustainability for local actors. This includes examining different models of direct funding, pooled funds, and flexible funding arrangements. Comparative analysis of these mechanisms and their impact on local actors' operational capacities, along with case studies of successful financial sustainability strategies among local organizations in Uganda, are essential lines of inquiry and areas for investigation.

#### **4.2 Research on effective capacity building and institutional strengthening approaches**

Capacity building and institutional strengthening are crucial for local actors who often require support to manage increased responsibilities. Research should focus on identifying the most effective strategies for institutional strengthening, tailored to the specific needs of local organizations in diverse contexts. Evaluations of existing capacity-building programs and longitudinal studies tracking their impact over time will provide valuable insights into how best to support local actors. This will require working with organizations that support this process in a coherent and consistent manner since capacity building needs continue to evolve as institutions grow and the nature of response changes.

#### **4.3 Research in the Dynamic and Shifting Power and Effective Partnerships**

Power dynamics and equitable partnerships between international and local actors are another critical issue that requires inquiry. Shifting power involves addressing entrenched power dynamics, and research is needed to explore how equitable partnerships can be formed and sustained with the context of localization. Analyses of power relations in existing partnerships, best practices for fostering equitable partnerships and power sharing, and examples from successful cases can guide efforts to ensure that local actors are truly empowered. Power in its diversity is therefore an area to interrogate and continue to document its evolution across a diversity of sectors and organizations. Critical areas of inquiry here will be to understand the role of gender-based power, political power, social power of elite versus non-elite actors and many more configurations.

#### **4.4 Research Governance, Self Regulation and Accountability Issues**

Ensuring accountability and good governance within local organizations is vital. Research should investigate mechanisms that enhance accountability while respecting local governance structures. Reviews of different accountability frameworks, studies on the governance practices of local organizations, and their impact on transparency and effectiveness are necessary to strengthen governance without imposing external models that may not fit local contexts. This is a critical area that need robust research as many of the localization approaches are built around contemporary and modern methods of governance and accountability and variations are not always understood as alternatives but as weak systems. In this regard a comprehensive

analysis of self-regulation approaches like QuAM and how to reposition it will be helpful in a manner that draw from local knowledge and international best practices.

#### **4.5 Research in Participatory Community Engagement Approaches**

Community engagement and participation are essential for effective localization. Research should focus on methods for involving communities in decision-making processes and ensuring that marginalized groups are included. Research and evaluations of community engagement strategies, their outcomes, and inclusive participation frameworks that highlight successful inclusion of marginalized groups will provide the evidence needed to enhance community involvement.

#### **4.6 Impact Measurement and Development Tools for Self-Assessment**

Measuring impact and effectiveness is another critical issue. Developing appropriate metrics to measure the impact and effectiveness of localized interventions is essential. Research should aim to create and validate these metrics, with a focus on developing localized impact indicators and tools for self-assessment by local organizations.

#### **4.7 Research that Examines the Policy Space**

The Uganda policy and regulatory environments in which local actors operate can significantly impact their effectiveness. The rationalization of institutions, the proliferation of oversight agencies from the NGO Bureau, the Financial Intelligence Authority, Local Governments, Security Agencies and several layers of bureaucracy all point to a direction of a continuously evolving policy space. Research should examine these environments to identify barriers and enablers. Analyses of policy and regulatory frameworks in different contexts and recommendations for policy reforms that support localization are necessary to create a conducive environment for local actors.

#### **4.8 Research in Organizational Cultures and Cultural Contexts**

Cultural contexts and adaptation are crucial for the success of localization efforts. Research should explore how cultural factors influence the implementation and success of these efforts. Studies on the impact of cultural contexts and guidelines for culturally adaptive practices in humanitarian and development work are needed to ensure that interventions are culturally appropriate and effective. This is a critical area because culture is sometimes quick bundled up as backward and inferior to modern modes of working and approaches and sometimes local partners are preoccupied with 'looking' modern and in the process dilute their unique ways of working and engagement.



#### **4.9 Summary of Key Evidence Needs**

1. Comparative analysis of funding mechanisms and their impact on local actors' operational capacities.
2. Case studies of successful financial sustainability strategies among local organizations.
3. Evaluations of existing capacity-building programs and their outcomes.
4. Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of capacity-building initiatives over time.
5. Analyses of power relations in existing partnerships and their implications for project outcomes.
6. Best practices for fostering equitable partnerships, with examples from successful cases.
7. Reviews of different accountability frameworks and their applicability to local contexts.
8. Studies on the governance practices of local organizations and their impact on transparency and effectiveness.
9. Evaluations of community engagement strategies and their outcomes.
10. Inclusive participation frameworks that highlight successful inclusion of marginalized groups.
11. Development and validation of localized impact indicators.
12. Tools and methodologies for self-assessment by local organizations.
13. Analyses of policy and regulatory frameworks in different contexts.
14. Recommendations for policy reforms that support the Localization Agenda.
15. Ethnographic studies on the impact of cultural contexts on localization.
16. Guidelines for culturally adaptive practices in humanitarian and development work.

#### **5.0 Implications for Uganda's CSOs**

Uganda's CSOs operate in a diverse and dynamic environment, addressing various issues from poverty alleviation to emergency response. However, they often face funding, capacity, and influence challenges in the broader development landscape system. The Grand Bargain's emphasis on supporting local responders and increasing transparency can benefit Ugandan CSOs by providing more direct funding opportunities and reducing bureaucratic barriers.

On the other hand, the Charter for Change can enhance the role of Ugandan CSOs by promoting equitable partnerships and advocating for their inclusion in decision-making processes.

Further, the Localization Agenda's focus on local leadership and capacity building is also particularly relevant for Ugandan CSOs, offering a framework to advocate for more resources and support. Examples of successful implementation of these initiatives in Uganda can provide valuable insights into best practices and lessons learned, highlighting the potential impact on local humanitarian efforts.

#### **5.1 Strategies for Repositioning Uganda's CSOs**

There is no doubt that Ugandan CSOs play a crucial role in the development and progress of the country. This has been documented variously by different actors. To further strengthen their impact and sustainability, it is

imperative to focus on building capacity, enhancing partnerships, improving funding mechanisms, and engaging in advocacy and policy changes. Below are some suggested areas of focus:

### **5.2 Building Capacity and Resilience for CSOs**

Investing in organizational capacity and resilience is crucial for Ugandan CSOs to effectively engage with and benefit from various initiatives. Strengthening internal structures and processes that can ensure greater impact and effectiveness in their work is critical. While there is the assumption that their capacities are low in Uganda CSOs, it is also true that there is a long history of CSOs organizing and there are a diversity of capacities among these CSOs.<sup>12</sup> It will therefore be imperative that building capacity is not a generic approach but one that is rooted in the appreciation of what is available and what has worked over time and build on that to create the resilience that is needed.

### **5.3 Strengthening Partnerships and Networks among CSOs**

Developing strong, equitable partnerships and networks is essential for enhancing the collective impact of Ugandan CSOs and improving their bargaining power. By collaborating with diverse stakeholders, CSOs can amplify their influence and reach. The role of platform organizations is critical. For localization to work, sector leadership is necessary, and platforms must be proactive and custom-built to serve the sector not as competitors with their members but as enablers of the rollout of the localization agenda.<sup>13</sup> The strengthening of platforms should cover thematic, regional, advocacy, and through-leadership platforms and related configurations.

### **5.4 Enhancing Funding Mechanisms and Financial Sustainability**

Exploring diverse funding mechanisms and improving financial sustainability are key to ensuring the long-term viability of Ugandan CSOs. Diversifying funding sources and building financial resilience will ensure that they continue to drive positive change in communities. In this regard building approaches that focus on new ways of mobilizing resources and enabling financial sustainability is critical. The role of philanthropy and generosity in the localization agenda needs to be understood and enabled. Supporting other approaches like social entrepreneurship, social business and other forms of mechanisms of building financial resilience is critical for the sector.

### **5.5 Advocacy and Policy Engagement**

Advocating for policy changes and engaging with key stakeholders are vital for advancing the interests and causes of Ugandan CSOs. Actively participating in policy discussions and decision-making processes that support the localization agenda can contribute to shaping a more inclusive and equitable society. With the proliferation of rules and laws that govern the sector, sustained and well structured advocacy by the sector

on some of the collective action is important. It is critical that CSOs push back on the excesses that the sector is seized with to ensure that localization that not suffer because of the bureaucratic banter that suffocates the ability of CSOs to operate in the country.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

The Grand Bargain, Charter for Change, and Localization Agenda collectively offer a comprehensive approach to reforming the humanitarian and development system. Their objectives include enhancing effectiveness, promoting local leadership, and ensuring equitable resource distribution. These initiatives aim to create a more responsive and sustainable humanitarian and development landscape. Therefore, it's crucial for CSOs in Uganda to take advantage of this role and work on building an ecosystem that allows for the thriving of the localization agenda.

This ecosystem will need to be supported by three key elements: *institutional building for localization*, *research that supports localization*, and *advocacy that ensures localization benefits everyone*. Understanding and leveraging the synergies between these initiatives can lead to more impactful and locally driven outcomes for CSOs in Uganda and other contexts.

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