

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND LOCALIZATION OF AID IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The International actors including donors, UN agencies and INGOs have signed to different commitments including the Grand Bargain, the Charter for Change (C4C) and the Pledge for Change demonstrating their will to actualise, take account, give account, and be held accountable in actualizing a locally led humanitarian response. The purpose of this research was to investigate the progress of one of the commitment instruments i.e., C4C commitments implementation and its effects on aid localization in Kenya. The independent variable in the study was one of the C4C commitments i.e., capacity strengthening approaches while the dependent variable was aid localization in Kenya. Aldrich's resource dependence model guided the study. The research design was fit for this study as it ensured an in-depth analysis and description of the various phenomena under investigation. The study conducted a census of all the 16 signatories and 36 endorsers in Kenya and the response rate was 52%. Primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires administered through Kobo toolbox and in-depth interview guides. Research findings indicated that whilst a majority of the Local and National NGOs (LNNGOs) (71.4%) endorsers indicated that they had participated in capacity strengthening initiatives organised by the INGOs signatories in the last 12 months, most of them (still 71.4%) indicated that the capacity gaps identified in their capacity assessment needs reports are sometimes supported by the INGOs signatories. 28.6% of the endorsers reported that the INGO signatories rarely support LNNGOs in strengthening gaps identified in the capacity assessment needs reports. The most topmost capacity needs required by the LNNGOs C4C endorsers in Kenya include resource mobilization, project management and MEAL, and financial management. These were scored at 42.9%, 28.6% and 28.5% respectively. Only 14.3% of the C4C Kenyan chapter endorsers reported to be having occasional well-structured institutional capacity strengthening by INGO signatories. 28.6% indicated that they received ad hoc institutional capacity strengthening and another 28.6% indicated that they received ad hoc project related capacity strengthening from INGO signatories. 100% of the endorsers highlighted that INGOs signatories that they partner with, partially contribute to their administrative core costs. The study concluded that; there is need for INGOs signatories to collaborate among themselves in conducting capacity strengthening that are locally led by the LNNGOs endorsers. Whilst technical areas are key for the successful delivery of projects, LNNGOs institutional capacities are fundamental in the success of projects, their organisation and sustainability of programs. INGO signatories should invest in institutional capacity strengthening of their LNNGOs partners. There is also needed to contribute to a fair share of LNNGOs core administrative costs.

Key Words: Capacity Strengthening, Funding models, Local and National Non-Governmental Organisations (LNNGOs), Localization, Partnership relations

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In 2016, during the World Humanitarian Summit, the persistent message from Local and National Actors including Local and National NGOs (LNNGOs) was the unrecognition and undermining of their voices, agencies, structures, knowledge, capacities and abilities during humanitarian response and recovery efforts. During the summit eighteen donor nations and sixteen international aid organisations {United Nations (UN), International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (RCRCM)} agreed on a ‘Grand Bargain’ to advocate for localization as much as possible but to remain international as necessary as it needs.

The agreement emanated from the recommendations to reduce needs, expand the resource base and the establishment of a Grand bargain by donors and aid organizations, by UN High-level panel on Humanitarian Financing in 2016. By reinforcing localization as a key area, ‘Grand Bargain’ do not only address issues of humanitarian funding gap, but more broadly the pursuit of a humanitarian international architecture that is efficient, effective and fit-for-purpose, especially given the increasing frequency and intensity of calamities and complexity of prolonged and protracted conflicts. Barbelet (2018) argues that localization is a contested term and there is need to obtain a common understanding in the in academia and practice.

Despite LNNGOs being a lot quicker, understand the social, cultural and political environment, generally cost effective, and stay around even after disaster, there has been persistent unrecognition and undermining of their capabilities. There is a lack of systematic implementation, investment, or demonstrated long-term impact in capacity strengthening (Barbelet, 2019). Jayawickrama (2018) argues that the generalization of the existing gaps in capacity building in the global south, serves self-interests, are paternalistic and indeed a framing by the colonialists and advocated by the humanitarian systems dominated by the North.

Statement of the Problem

There exists visible, hidden and unhidden power imbalance between Local and National NGOs (LNNGOs) and International Actors i.e., donors, UN agencies and International NGOs in the humanitarian sector. The power imbalance is manifested in different aspects. This include but not limited to the small percentage of funding received by LNNGOs despite them being in most cases the first to respond to humanitarian scenarios as well as remaining in communities even after disasters to develop their resilience. In addition to the small amount of funding they receive, the quality of funding is questionable as indicated by recent Humentum report on NGOs breaking the starvation cycle, 2022. Quite often, LNNGOs’ indirect costs are not catered for and in some cases, some International Actors do not finance overheads of LNNGOs. Partnerships relations between LNNGOs and International Actors are transactional and not equitable, accountable nor mutual. Risks transfers to LNNGOs by International Actors rather than risks sharing is one of the indications of inequitable partnership relations. Atputharajah and Wanga (2020) opines that localization and dependence on INGOs and others are hindered by the focus on risk mitigation. Kent *et al.*, (2016), Stoddard *et al.*, (2010), Howe *et al.*, (2015) and Wall and Hedlund (2016) all contend that the partnerships existing between the local and international actors are just but instrumental sub-contracts and transactional arrangements that are ineffective and powerless in harnessing the potentials of the capacity available at the local level.

There has not been research conducted in Kenya to examine the progress of actualizing aid localization. In addition, aid localization discourse has not been deeply researched in academic world. It is therefore my humble appeal to also bring this conversation in the academic world.

Justification

The research topic on ‘localization’ was selected due to immense challenges the humanitarian systems and structures have faced in the past decade. Localization has been cited as an antidote to resolving the increasing demand of humanitarian response by putting resources power and capacities in the hands of the people in need. It is therefore pertinent to understand to what extent localization has been entrenched within policies and practises in Kenya.

The study focussed on LNNGOs as they have been providing humanitarian response in Kenya since independence. They have also been receiving funding from International Actors through partnership agreements and participate in capacity strengthening initiatives led by international actors. Of great importance was to establish how capacity strengthening is conducted and whether it is locally envisioned, and locally led.

The humanitarian community particularly donors, INGOs will make use of this research when they are designing projects to partner with LNNGOs in a bid to enhance their capacities through partnership approaches and funding models. The study will also be instrumental to Charter for Change network especially the working group in Kenya. It will provide recommendations on how both signatories and endorsers in Kenya can collaborate to promote local humanitarian leadership in Kenya.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Svoboda and Pantuliano (2015) recognizes that capacity strengthening of local actors is a critical component of mutual, and equal partnerships as quite often discussed in literature. Enhanced support for the organizations and the enhanced strengthened capacity, is an area C4C signatories have committed to and they purpose to support LNNGOs to become institutions that keeps on improving their skills, knowledge and roles and share in the overall global humanitarian response.

Despite Local and National NGOs (LNNGOs) being closer to the affected communities hence a lot quicker, understand the social, cultural and political environment, generally cost effective, and stay around even after disaster, there has been persistent unrecognition and undermining of their capabilities. There is a lack of systematic implementation, investment, or demonstrated long-term impact in capacity strengthening (Barbelet, 2019). Zyck with Krebs (2015) expressed concerns that quite often, capacity strengthening remains an objective never achieved and a mirage of sorts, given the underfunding and unrealistic strategies. Ouma (2016) notes that capacity strengthening initiatives have majorly been driven from a deficit-based approach rather than an asset-based approach. Furthermore, in most cases, capacity strengthening has concentrated on administrative, financial and reporting which ensures that LNNGOs are accountable to donors at the expense of other institutional capacities like revenue sustainability of the organisations.

Barbelet *et al* (2021) further expresses concern that ‘capacity’ is primarily defined by International Actors in ways that favors how they operate based on their structures, forms and missions. Jayawickrama (2018) argues that the generalization of the existing gaps in capacity strengthening in the global south, serves self-interests, are paternalistic and indeed a framing by the colonialists and advocated by the humanitarian systems dominated by the North. This may result to a tendency towards ‘isomorphism’ including attempts to reshape LNNGOs to be like International Actors based on their operations, structures, and functions.

According to Fast and Bennet (2020), organizations and institutions with a capacity to determine skills and abilities prioritization, also have the capacity to determine the organizations that possess the right and appropriate kind of skills. There exists conscious or unconscious bias that technical and institutional capacities flow from the international actors to the local and national actors. Additionally, the insufficient, inadequate and limited support for critical costs of operation limits the capacity of local actors, and hence they are not able to invest in human resources capacity strengthening, takes longer to complete a development program and inhibits other development efforts of the organization (Barbelet, 2018).

Isabelle Persson (2021), indicated that Covid-19 operating context had evidenced that LNNGOs have capacity to lead efficient response. At an unparalleled scale, it had evidenced their comparative advantage when it comes to trust of the communities they are based in and understand how to adapt interventions to cater to local needs. As actors at the top of the aid-chain, Grand Bargain signatories have a responsibility to reflect this in policies and practice. Capacity should not merely be framed in terms of financial and administrative terms as frequently stipulated in due diligence requirements. Instead, there needs to be recognition of comparative advantages on both sides to leverage complementary and equitable partnerships.

The Resource Dependency Theory

The resource dependency theory proposed by Aldrich (1976) guided this study. This theory seeks to expel how organisations relate, attempts and posits that the resources from the environment are limited because of competition for the same resources by different and many organizations, that organizations can only survive and prosper depending on their ability to outdo their competitions in the acquisition of the limited resources (Aldrich, 1976). Effectively, organizations are forced to do what they must do to not only protect and maintain themselves, but also fight for more without losing any. Organizations with more resources will provide additional resources to those with less, so as to help them maintain their power and influence and dependence.

Resource Dependence Theory reminds us of the linkages between Power and Resources. Resources are a basis of power. Institution X's Power over Institution Y is quite often equal to Institution Y's dependence on Institution X's resources. Capacity is a form of resource

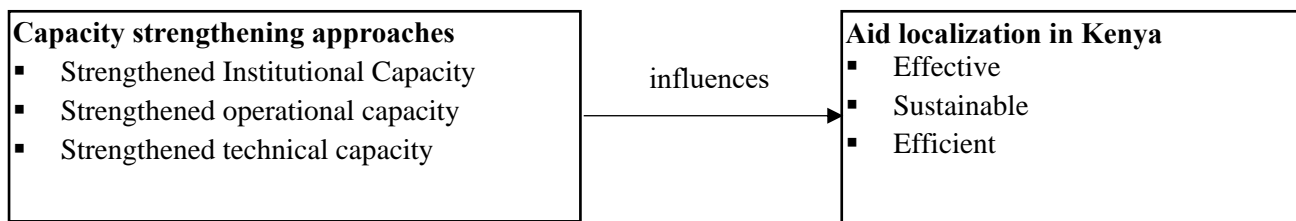


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2023)

METHODOLOGY

The researcher applied descriptive research design in the study. By applying this method, the study attempted to describe the current state of affair with regards to aid localisation in Kenya, applying in-depth analysis using quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, the study was guided by Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) definition of descriptive research design which involves a process of collecting data in order to respond to queries with regards to the status of subjects under investigation. The study carried out a census of all the local and national NGOs endorsers and INGOs signatories of the Charter for Change that are members of the Kenya Chapter. There are currently 36 and 16 endorsers and signatories respectively in Kenya. The researcher conducted a census, and therefore all the signatories and endorsers were targeted. Total number of the sample size was fifty-two (52). The study deployed in-depth interview schedules, both structured and non-structured questionnaires to gather data from selected respondents.

FINDINGS

The research sought to investigate the progress of C4C commitments implementation and its effects on aid localization in Kenya. The study targeted 52 respondents out of which 27 responded to the study contributing to a response rate of 52%. This response rate was sufficient and representative and conforms to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) stipulation that a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting; a rate of 60% is good and a response rate of 70% and over is excellent.

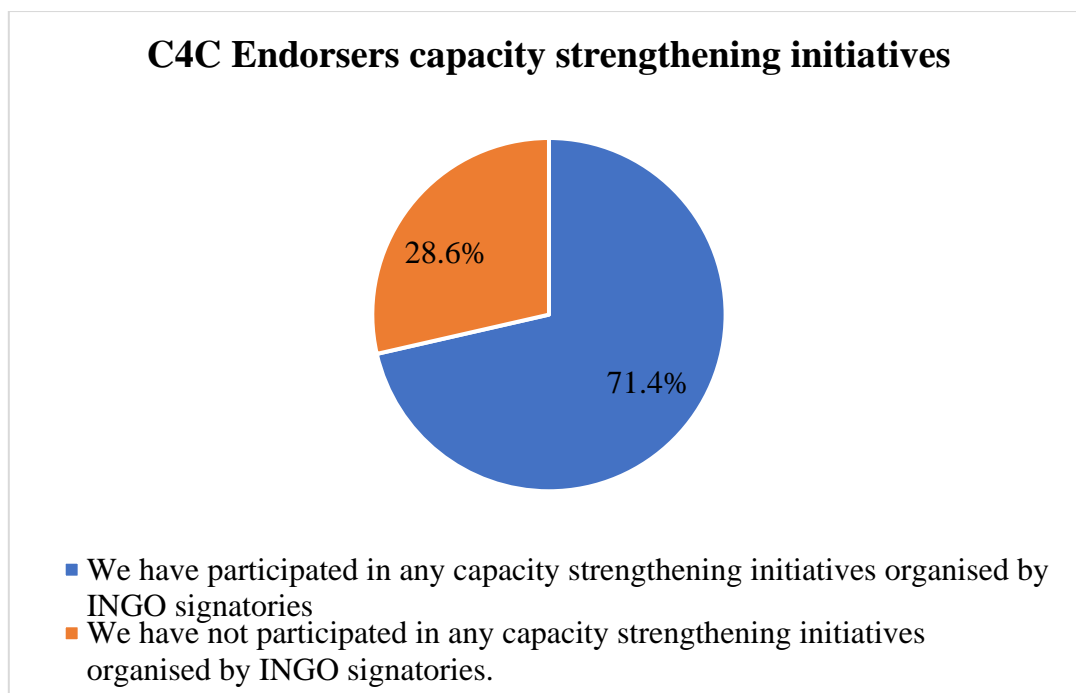


Figure 2: Participation of C4C endorsers in capacity strengthening initiatives organized by INGO signatories in the last 12 months.

Source: Research Data (2023)

This study finds that 71.4% of the endorsers have participated in some sort of capacity strengthening initiatives organized by the INGO signatories in the last 12 months (Jan-Dec, 2022). The in-depth interviews conducted with some of the endorsers in seeking for further clarification and follow up on this issue, indicated that some of the initiatives they had participated in, organized by the INGOs included capacity strengthening on strategic planning, resource mobilization, co-designing of project proposals. 28.6% of the endorsers indicated that they had not participated in any capacity strengthening initiatives organized by INGO signatories in the last 12 months.

Endorsers survey analysis report, November 2018 conducted by C4C collaborates with these findings indicating that 67% of the respondents reported that they had received funding for capacity strengthening and 81% confirmed receiving other means of support for strengthening their capacity (for example accompaniment and training), indicating that providing support in-kind rather than actual funding is more frequent among C4C signatories.

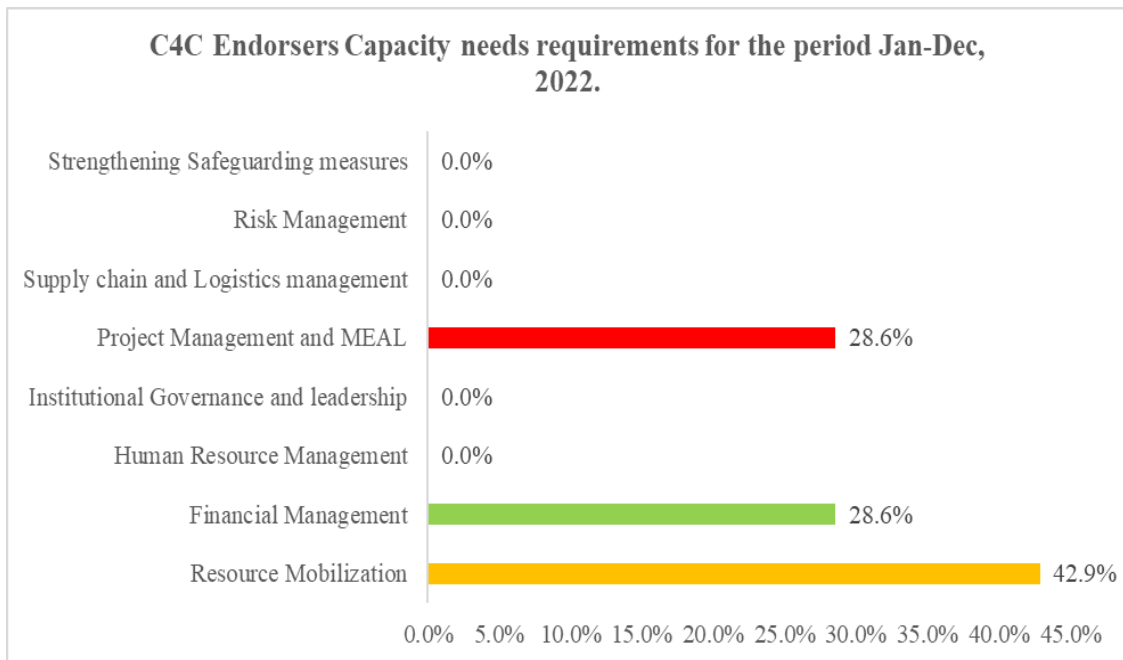


Figure 3: C4C endorsers capacity needs requirements for the period Jan-Dec, 2022

Source: Research Data (2023)

The study also sought to identify the high priority capacity gaps that were identified through a needs assessment conducted by the endorsers in the last 12 months (Jan-Dec, 2022). 42.9 % of the endorsers highlighted that resource mobilization was the most significant area that they require technical support, while 57.2% of the endorsers felt that financial management, project management and MEAL are the most important technical areas they need capacity strengthening from the INGO signatories in order to enhance their humanitarian responsiveness.

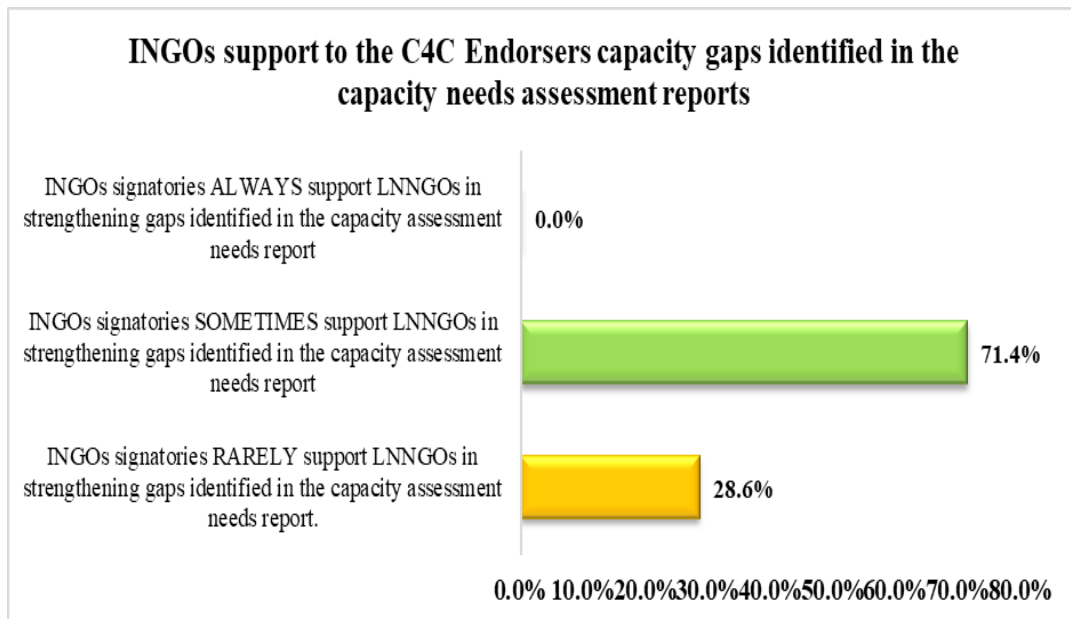


Figure 4: INGOs support to the C4C endorsers capacity gaps identified in the capacity needs assessments reports.

Source: Research Data (2023)

Figure 4 above highlights the extent to which the INGO provide capacity strengthening support towards addressing the capacity gaps identified by the endorsers during the capacity needs assessments conducted in the last 12 months (Jan-Dec, 2022). 71.4% of the endorsers indicated that the INGO signatories sometimes support LNNGOs in strengthening gaps identified in the capacity assessment needs reports, while 28.6% of the endorsers reported that the INGO signatories rarely support LNNGOs in strengthening gaps identified in the capacity assessment needs reports.

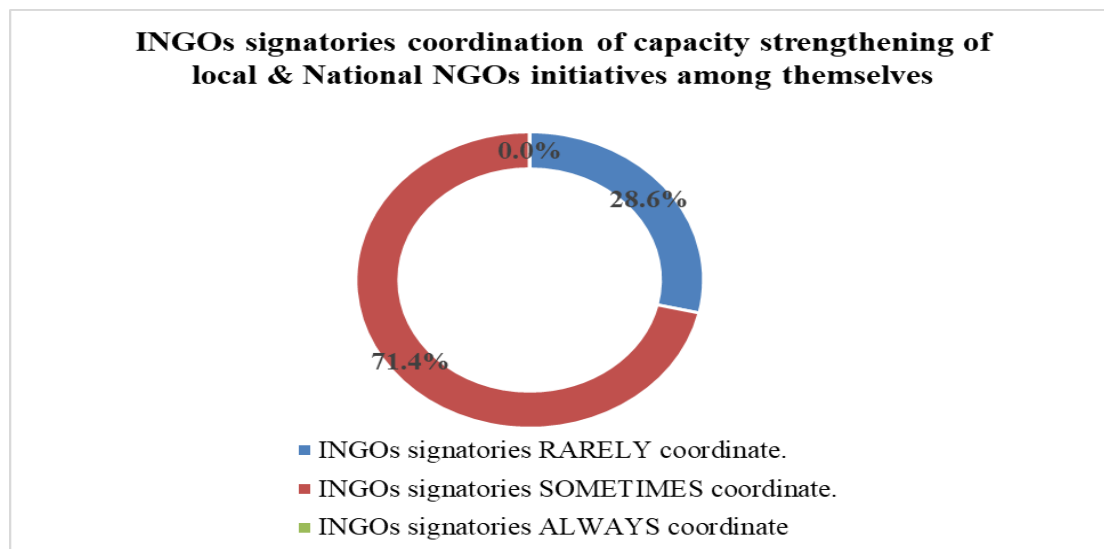


Figure 5: INGOs signatories’ coordination of capacity strengthening of LNNGOs
Source: Research Data (2023)

Figure 5 above highlights the extent to which the INGO signatory’s capacity strengthening approach was reported during the study by the endorsers. 71.4% of the endorsers reported that the INGOs do actually coordinate capacity strengthening efforts among the endorsers, while 28.6 % of the endorsers reported that the INGOs rarely coordinate this capacity strengthening approach. This particular question was particularly necessary in finding out if endorsers actually engage in peer-to-peer learning circles.

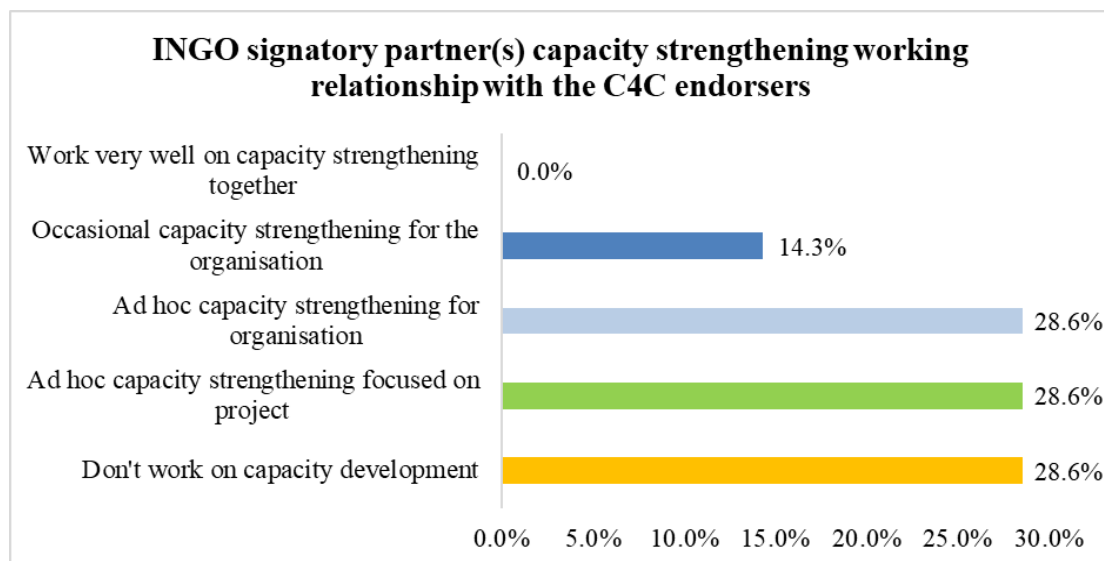


Figure 6: INGO capacity strengthening working relationship with the C4C endorsers
Source (Researcher, 2023)

From figure 6 above, 14.3% of the C4C Kenyan chapter endorsers reported to be having a good working relation with the INGO signatories on capacity strengthening. 57.1% of the endorsers reported that they had ad hoc capacity strengthening for the organization and ad hoc capacity strengthening focused on the projects, while 28.6% of the respondents indicated that they did not have any working relations with the INGOs on capacity strengthening. Isabelle Persson (2021) collaborates strongly with the findings in figure 5 and 6 above highlighting that LNNGOs have capacity to lead efficient response during humanitarian crisis. At an unparalleled scale, it had evidenced their comparative advantage when it comes to trust of the communities they are based in, and understand how to adapt interventions to cater to local needs. As actors at the top of the aid-chain, Grand Bargain signatories have a responsibility to reflect this in policies and practice. Capacity should not merely be framed in terms of financial and administrative terms as frequently stipulated in due diligence requirements. Instead, there needs to be recognition of comparative advantages on both sides to leverage complementary and equitable partnerships.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to assess how capacity strengthening approaches affects aid localization in Kenya. During the study, the researched engaged the LNNGOs to find out the different capacity strengthening approaches (the institutional, operational and technical) that exists between them and the INGOs that are signatories to the C4C.

From the study, 71.4% of the LNNGOs indicated that they had participated in some sort of capacity strengthening initiatives organized by the INGO signatories in the last 12 months (Jan-Dec, 2022). The in-depth interviews conducted with some of the endorsers in seeking for further clarification and follow up on this issue, indicated that some of the initiatives they had participated in, organized by the INGOs included capacity strengthening on strategic planning, resource mobilization, co-designing of project proposals. 28.6% of the LNNGOs indicated that they had not participated in any capacity strengthening initiatives in the last 12 months. It is also worth noting that, 42.9 % of the endorsers highlighted that resource mobilization was the most significant area that they require to be technically supported, while 57.2% of the endorsers felt that financial management, project management and MEAL are the most important technical areas they need capacity strengthening from the INGO signatories in order to enhance their humanitarian responsiveness. Organizational capacity gaps identified through a needs assessment conducted by the LNNGOs in the last 12 months as highlighted during the study, indicated that 71.4% of the endorsers had received some sort of support from the INGO to strengthen the gaps identified, while 28.6% of the endorsers reported that the INGO signatories rarely support LNNGOs in strengthening gaps identified in the capacity needs assessment reports. During the study, 71.4% of the LNNGOs reported that the INGOs do actually coordinate capacity strengthening efforts among the endorsers, while 28.6 % of the endorsers reported that the INGOs rarely coordinate this capacity strengthening approach. This particular question was particularly imperative in finding out if endorsers actually engage in peer-to-peer learning circles. Some of the endorsers revealed through the in-depth interviews, with advanced technical know-how in the humanitarian space they possess, they have been providing technical support through exchange learnings in areas of proposal development, governance and MEAL to other local CSOs.

The study, with strong conviction concluded that capacity strengthening approaches strongly affect localization of aid in Kenya. The study also found out that there exists organization to organization capacity strengthening support-where LNNGOs operating in the ASAL regions with particular areas of strengths like advocacy, governance, documentation and MEAL have been able to support other CSOs with the regions they operate in. This is a strategy that has yielded a lot of support from the local communities due to the localised capacity strengthening approaches which has led to building accountable partnerships ensuring where INGOs work where power and decision making are shared, parties to the engagements put in significant resources into the engagements and where the blueprint goals, the strategy to exit, and plans of action are shared and scheduled.

The study recommends that a more intentional focus on Localized capacity strengthening approaches. The ability of the LNNGOs to respond to the humanitarian at the local communities is directly affected by their capacity. This study recommends localized, inclusive and participatory capacity strengthening approaches that will ensure amplification, appreciation and incorporation of the existing capacities of local communities. This will go a long way in demystifying the misconception that LNNGOs lack capacity. Additionally, this study recommends strongly the peer-to-peer capacity strengthening approach where local actors with diverse strengths can offer to strengthen the capacities of other local actors within their regions.

The study concluded that; there is need for INGOs signatories to collaborate among themselves in conducting capacity strengthening that are locally led by the LNNGOs endorsers. Whilst technical areas are key for the successful delivery of projects, LNNGOs institutional capacities are fundamental in the success of projects, the organisation and sustainability of programs. INGO signatories should invest in institutional capacity strengthening of their LNNGOs partners. There is also needed to contribute to a fair share of LNNGOs core administrative costs.

Suggestions for further studies

This study recommended further studies on the gains made by C4C Kenyan chapter since its inception, carry out a comparative study highlighting aid localization approaches, documenting best practices within the East Africa Community region be conducted and a power analysis study within the aid localization agenda in Kenya.

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