

HUMANITARIAN INNOVATION FORUM 2025

11-13 February 2025 | Nairobi, Kenya



Provocation Paper for Structured Discussions

Localisation and Power Dynamics

Theme Overview

Localisation—not as a tokenistic inclusion but as a transformative shift in power—is essential for equitable, effective, and sustainable innovation. For too long, global humanitarian systems have favoured top-down approaches, sidelining local creativity and leadership. As we prepare for the Humanitarian Innovation Forum 2025, this paper challenges participants to rethink and restructure how innovation is designed, implemented, and scaled.

Framing the Challenge

Problem Statement: Global humanitarian systems often prioritise international agendas, leaving solutions that are locally led underfunded, undervalued, and overshadowed. This creates systemic barriers to sustainable and culturally relevant innovation.

Why It Matters: Shifting power dynamics is not only an ethical imperative but also a practical one. Local actors bring critical context, trust, and adaptability to innovation ecosystems, making their leadership key to addressing global challenges.

Discussion Prompts for Structured Engagement

1. **Overcoming Barriers:** What systemic barriers prevent local actors from becoming equal partners and leaders in humanitarian innovation? Amitabh Behar, Oxfam's interim executive director, highlights four critical dimensions that global development must address to catalyse transformative change in this piece, "[How to get from rhetoric to reality in decolonising development](#)", structures, money, knowledge and competence and theory of change. How can we dismantle them in relation to innovation?
2. **Sustainability and Scale:** What mechanisms are essential to prioritise and sustain local solutions while scaling them as needed? What are some proven business models that

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work for local innovation? How do we hold space for the fact that not all innovations will, can, or should generate revenue and can still be sustainable?

3. **Power Dynamics:** Elrha's Community-Led Innovation Partnership (CLIP) has learnt that "localising humanitarian innovation goes beyond funding innovators locally but starts with deep community engagement and ensuring the innovation cycle is led by people who are part of those communities." How do we navigate the inherent power imbalances in international-local partnerships to ensure true equity in innovation ecosystems?
4. **Measuring Success:** A HAG study on [measuring the impact of Localisation](#) notes that "there are multiple barriers to understanding the impact of localisation. Humanitarian organisations are not articulating the intended outcomes of their localised approaches, there are few clear incentives to measure impact, and there is still the challenge of attributing how much of the change is a result of localised practice. The starting point for overcoming these barriers is a clear definition of the intended change." How should we define the intended change in innovation to provoke change? What metrics can capture the success of localised innovation—not just in scale but in impact and sustainability?
5. **Supporting Creativity:** How do we support creativity that emerges locally without diluting its authenticity? The CLIP has intentionally deviated from the dominant humanitarian innovation narrative of tech output-oriented scaling and instead focuses on innovation as a *process*, and looks at how communities can be supported to unlock their own problem-solving and creativity skills, facilitated to design their own solutions, and become innovation champions in their own context.
6. **Enabling Growth:** How can we create environments where grassroots solutions can grow and scale without being overshadowed by global systems? After 4 years of operation, the [CLIP has learnt](#) that "'scaling up or out' aren't the only indicators of a successful innovation, and that ensuring community ownership and local sustainability are equally important in creating long-lasting social impact and increasing communities' resilience

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to crises.” How can we re-define scaling, so it includes space for communities and ethical practices?

Online discussion summary

The online pre-forum meeting was well attended with more than 60 participants.

The participants discussed the meaning of "localisation" and why it is an essential element of effective and equitable humanitarian innovation. They emphasised that localisation is not just about adding local consultations, but rather a fundamental shift in power dynamics to prioritise local leadership, creativity, and solutions.

Localisation is seen as critical for innovation to be sustainable and truly responsive to local needs. The group identified key systemic barriers preventing local actors from becoming equal partners, including funding mechanisms, regulatory burdens, and technology access that favour large international organisations. They discussed the need to dismantle these barriers and redefine power structures to enable local innovation and leadership.

Ensuring sustainability and scalability of local solutions: Participants explored how to sustain and scale local innovations, noting that success should not be defined solely by global scalability. They emphasised the importance of business models and funding mechanisms that support local solutions, as well as the need to adapt innovations to different contexts rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all approach.

Navigating power dynamics and centering local voices: The group grappled with the colonial roots of the current humanitarian system and the need to shift power dynamics to truly centre local perspectives and leadership. They discussed how to build equitable partnerships between local and international actors and ensure that the forum itself models this approach by meaningfully including local innovators.