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## **THE IMPACT OF RESOURCE DEPENDENCE ON THE LOCALIZATION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION THE CASE OF KENYA**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>Executive Summary</u></b>	3
<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	4
<b><u>1. Background</u></b>	5
<u>1.1. Localization</u>	5
<u>1.2. Localization in policy</u>	7
<u>1.3. Refugees in Kenya</u>	8
<b><u>2. Methodology</u></b>	10
<u>2.1. Operational Definitions</u>	10
<u>2.2. Theoretical Framework and Research Questions</u>	10
<u>2.3. Positionality</u>	11
<u>2.4. Methods</u>	11
<b><u>3. Results</u></b>	13
<u>3.1. Examples of Localization: Training, Steering         Committees and Local Hiring</u>	13
<u>3.2. Barriers of LocalizationL Gatekept Funding and         Lack of Trust</u>	14
<b><u>4. Analysis</u></b>	17
<u>4.1. The Mitigation of Risk in a UNHCR-Dominated Field</u>	17
<u>4.2. Strong Domain Consensus</u>	18
<u>4.3. Lack of Accessibility for LNGOs</u>	20
<b><u>5. Policy Recommendations</u></b>	21
<b><u>6. Conclusion</u></b>	23
<b><u>Works Cited</u></b>	24

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Localization is not a new agenda, but it re-emerged as a major area of focus for global refugee policy during the World Humanitarian Summit (2016) with the Grand Bargain and more recently in the 2018 Global Compact for Refugees. There are many benefits of localization, including reduced costs, deeper connections to vulnerable populations, and reduced duplication of services (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017). However, there are also numerous barriers to localization, including due diligence and risk management systems, indirect funding structures, and the perception of international NGOs that local NGOs have insufficient capacities (Emmens and Clayton 2020). In Kenya, the refugee situation is becoming increasingly long-term after more than 20 years of hosting refugees and funding is dwindling, making the country an important case study. To this end, we conducted four weeks of fieldwork in Kenya.

**This research characterizes the extent of the localization of humanitarian action in Kenya as limited localization. Examples of localization included training, inter-agency and sectoral steering committees, and local hiring by international NGOs.**

Barriers included gatekept funds by UNHCR and a lack of trust in local NGOs. Informed by Aldrich's (1976) resource dependence model, we highlight major barriers specifically related to the organizations' dependence on resources. First, INGOs must mitigate risks in a UNHCR-dominated field and are limited in their ability to localize if they are implementing partnerships themselves, since they must mitigate their own risks by not deviating from what is outlined in those partnerships. Second, exchanges between the UNHCR and other NGOs have established a strong domain consensus, in which the UNHCR is at the centre, INGOs are close to the centre and LNGOs are at the periphery. Third, LNGOs lack access to resources to engage in equal partnerships. To address these barriers, this paper concludes with three policy recommendations: a stronger UNHCR stance on direct funding to LNGOs, a reconceptualization of localization as an imminent priority instead of an eventual transition, and a formalization of INGO exit strategies to encourage concrete steps toward localization.

# INTRODUCTION

While the humanitarian system helps vulnerable populations, it continues to face issues such as limited funding, aid ineffectiveness and unequal relations between the Global North and Global South.

**Localization is considered a key solution to these issues and more, and most notably emerged as important global agenda at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) which influenced international commitments through the Grand Bargain (Emmens and Clayton 2017), and later at the 2018 Global Compact for Refugees (UNHCR 2018a).**

While there is a lack of consensus on the term localization, definitions revolve around the shift of decision-making power and agency to local actors, as well as a shift of international actors from decision-making roles to supportive roles (Brabant and Patel 2018, Cornish 2019, Humanitarian Leadership Academy 2019).

**The benefits of localization are numerous: deeper connections to vulnerable populations, reduced costs, and reduced duplication of services - all of which would improve overall aid effectiveness and management of resources (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017).**

Another benefit of localization is the return of power back to local actors, who are too often marginalized in the very system that is supposed to support them and build their self-sufficiency and resilience. While these benefits are well-known, the barriers to localization are numerous, including an

overzealous use of due diligence and risk management systems, perception of low capacities, and indirect funding structures (Emmens and Clayton 2020). Kenya is a particularly important case to study in the context of localization, as it is the second-biggest host to refugees in Africa (UNHCR 2020), and is in a protracted situation, having hosted refugees for over 20 years (Deardroff 2017). As this project was facilitated by the Local Engagement Research Network (LERRN), which has a goal of co-creating knowledge, the study was implemented by a researcher from Canada and a researcher in Kenya. To carry out this project, researchers engaged in four weeks of fieldwork in Nairobi and Kakuma in July of 2019. Researchers carried out process tracing through document analysis, participant observation and stakeholder interviews of 14 participants from INGOs and LNGOs in both the camp and urban contexts. Using Aldrich's (1976) resource dependence model, three recurring barriers to localization were highlighted in this research: the mitigation of risk in a UNHCR-dominated field, a strong domain consensus, and the lack of accessibility for NGOs, all of which partly inform the limited localization that is occurring within humanitarian action in Kenya. To address these barriers, this paper concludes with policy recommendations of a stronger stance on direct funding to LNGOs, a reconceptualization of localization as an imminent priority instead of an eventual transition, and a formalization of exit strategies.

# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1. LOCALIZATION

While localization has been a buzzword since the World Humanitarian Summit (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017; Meezenbroek 2019), the operationalization of the term is in some ways still highly subjective. In part, the meaning is contested due to the lack of consensus on what it means to be 'local' (El Taraboulsi et al. 2016; Roepstorff 2020) as well as different conceptualizations of what the process of localization includes, with varying emphases. Depending on how local is defined, 'local' actors can include: governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and civil-society organizations (CSOs), at the local-, national- and at times, even the regional level (Roepstorff 2020).

**The process of localization is also conceptualized in a variety of ways. For example, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) defines localization as “the process through which a diverse range of humanitarian actors are attempting, each in their own way, to ensure local and national actors are better engaged in the planning, delivery and accountability of humanitarian action, while still ensuring humanitarian needs can be met swiftly, effectively and in a principled manner” (Humanitarian Leadership Academy 2019: 3).**

As such, they view localization as four sub-processes that occur simultaneously:



**a political and identity process**



**an operations and effectiveness process**



**a financial and efficiency process**



**quality and accountability process**

**(Humanitarian Leadership Academy 2019: 4).**

Brabant and Patel simply define localization as “building on local capacities” and consider it to have seven dimensions: funding, partnerships, capacity, participation revolution, coordination mechanisms, visibility, policy (2018: 3). Barbelet defines it as a process in which international actors “recognise, respect, strengthen, rebalance, recalibrate, reinforce, or return some type of ownership or place to local and national humanitarian actors” (2018: 5). The agency Trócaire defines localization as “a collective process involving different stakeholders that aims to return local actors, whether civil society organisations or local public institutions, to the centre of the humanitarian system with a greater role in humanitarian response” and states that it can take different forms, such as partnerships between international and local actors that are stronger and more equal, more direct funding for local actors, and local actors as a more fundamental part of the system (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017: 4).

Despite the lack of consensus about who to consider as local actors, the benefits of localization are well-documented in the literature about the humanitarian sector. As the credibility of the humanitarian system largely relies on its ability to be effective, localization is considered to play an important role in that effectiveness (Red Cross 2015). In fact, the lack of localization is cited as being one of the reasons for aid ineffectiveness (Voorst 2019). For example, when considering the ways to address the limited funding that is available, international actors often mention the benefit of lower costs from localization (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017; Roeperstoff 2010).

**One of the other benefits that is often mentioned is a deeper connection to affected populations due to the social capital of local personnel; local personnel are considered to have more knowledge about the history, language, culture, geopolitics and personal information of affected populations (Al-Abdeh and Patel 2019; El Taraboulsi et al. 2016).**

Local personnel are also considered to have better physical access to affected regions that may be difficult for international actors to reach (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017). Additionally, it is known that in disaster or outbreak situations, local and national actors are often the first responders on site to assist the affected populations, which highlights their agility in humanitarian action (Red Cross 2015; Roeperstoff 2020).



**Local actors are also important in terms of their ability to have a long-term presence in affected regions (Green 2018), which**

**allows them to have more sustainable programming and be a part of international actors' exit strategies (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017).**

Localization also helps to build the resilience of local communities by linking crisis-affected communities to development activities (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017). It can also be a major way through which unequal relationships between the Global North and Global South – and more specifically between international and local humanitarian actors – can be addressed since many conceptualizations of localization involve a return of power to local actors as well as a centralization of their roles (Barbelet 2018; Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017; Green 2018).

While these benefits are well-known, there is also literature about barriers which prevent this global localization agenda from being implemented on the ground. First, a major barrier is the centralized humanitarian system, which places the majority of resources into the hands of a few actors (El Taraboulsi et al. 2016). Another barrier is the level of risk that is associated with localization (Roeperstoff 2020). In an atmosphere as uncertain as the humanitarian sector, risk is something that is entirely avoided if possible (Green 2018).

There is a perception that connections of local actors with affected communities is a risk in itself, as they would be more susceptible to being pulled into local politics. Due to this fear of risk, donors use due diligence and risk management to protect themselves, but in that process, they end up building walls between themselves and local actors (Charter4Change 2019; Humanitarian Leadership Academy 2019; Green 2018) and

depicting them as less credible (Usen 2019). The capacities of local actors are often called into question (Emmens and Clayton 2020). These misperceptions cause a vicious cycle of exclusion due to a lack of capacity, and no opportunity to build their capacity due to that very exclusion. These barriers to localization are not new. The 2015 World Disasters Report states that

“

**local and national civil society actors have little or no access to the corridors of power of major donors, are extremely diverse and disconnected, and have few opportunities to articulate their priorities and concerns in international debates**

(2015: 112)

”

## 1.2. LOCALIZATION IN POLICY

Global refugee policy is “a formal statement of a problem relating to protection, solutions or assistance for refugees or other populations of concern to the global refugee regime and a proposed course of action to respond to that problem” (Milner 2014: 480). Localization is currently a major area of focus in global refugee policy. While it is not a new agenda (Al-Abdeh and Patel 2019), it re-emerged at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit with the phrase “as local as possible, as international as necessary” (UNGA 2016: 30). It was during the WHS that numerous humanitarian actors, including donors and aid providers, reached a collective agreement called the Grand Bargain, in which they committed to raising the percentage of funding which they dedicated to local and national responders (Network for Empowered Aid Response 2017a; 2017b;

Emmens and Clayton 2017; Brabant and Patel 2018; Humanitarian Leadership Academy 2019; Nolan and Dozin 2019; Robillard et al. 2020). The Charter for Change was also introduced at the WHS (Roepstorff 2020; Emmens and Clayton 2017). This initiative stressed the importance of funding national and local actors, and had 29 INGOs commit to various actions such as increasing their funding to national NGOs, increasing transparency about that funding, and changing the nature of their relationship with local actors (Charter4Change 2017).

Since then, additional global refugee policies have reiterated the importance of the localization agenda and the roles of civil society organizations, specifically those working at local levels (UN 2016; UN 2018).

**For example, the New York Declaration, which was adopted in 2016 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), stressed the use of local knowledge and capacities as well as the need to support “community-based development programmes that benefit both refugees and host communities” (UN 2016: 14). The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) was adopted in 2018, with a comprehensive prescription of changes to current global norms to be more inclusive to national and local actors (UNHCR 2018).**

The GCR states that civil society, specifically local actors, need to be supported by the international community to “strengthen institutional capacities, infrastructure and accommodation” through “funding and capacity development” (UNHCR 2018: 15). It also states that LNGOs need to be included



in the processes of “assessing community strengths and needs, inclusive and accessible planning and programme implementation, and capacity development” (UNHCR 2018: 15).

### 1.3. REFUGEES IN KENYA

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While Kenya has been hosting refugees since the 1970s, it was in the 1990s that it saw a massive influx of refugees from surrounding countries which were experiencing violent conflicts, including Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia (Odhiambo-Abuya 2004). Now, after Ethiopia, Kenya is the secondbiggest refugee hosting country in Africa (UNHCR 2020).

 **494,649**

**As of April 30th, 2020, there are 494,649 refugees and asylum-seekers in Kenya (UNHCR 2020), who are largely camp or urban refugees, with a small portion residing in the Kalobeyei settlement.**

The majority of the refugees and asylum-seekers come from Somalia, who make up 53% of the refugee and asylum-seeker population in Kenya, followed by South Sudanese (24.7%), Congolese (9%) and Ethiopian (5.8%) (UNHCR 2020). Kenya has two major refugee camps: Dadaab in the north-east province and Kakuma in the north-west region of the country. Dadaab is slightly larger, with 217,513 refugees and asylum-seekers, while the camps in Kakuma host 196,120 refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR 2020). Considering the lengthy stays of refugees and asylum-seekers in the camps, and the subsequent infrastructures and economies that have resulted, the camps are often thought to resemble towns

or cities (O’Callaghan and Sturge 2018).

Hosting refugees is often seen as a temporary and short-term situation, but the situation is now considered protracted, with some refugees having been in Kenya for over 20 years (Deardroff 2017). While Kenya has hosted refugee and asylum-seeking populations for a long time, there have been a variety of challenges. As with many protracted refugee situations, security became an increased risk (Loescher and Milner 2006). For example, several terrorist attacks occurred in Nairobi in 2013, for which the Somalia-based Al Shabaab group claimed responsibility. Somali refugees and asylum-seekers had been securitized prior to these attacks (Loescher and Milner 2006; Deardroff 2017). However, after these security attacks, the securitization of refugees and asylum seekers increased further. Due to this increased securitization, on May 6th, 2016, the Government of Kenya moved to close Dadaab camps by November 30th, 2016 (UNHCR 2020). While they extended the deadline of the closure amid plans of repatriating refugees, Dadaab camp remains open to this day (UNHCR 2020). Not only is Dadaab still open, but Kenya has already begun to implement the more permanent, integrated Kalobeyei settlement in Turkana county, where the refugee and the local Turkana population live amongst each other (UNHCR 2018). Kenya has also strategized about the economic future of those refugees and Turkanas in Kalobeyei, with the release of the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement and Economic Development Plan (UNHCR 2018). Furthermore, as of April 2020, the combined total number of resettlement departures and voluntary repatriations were only 214 refugees and asylum-seekers (UNHCR 2020). Additionally,

the humanitarian situation in Somalia is expected to remain the same in 2020 (UNHCR 2020), highlighting the strong probability that Kenya will continue to host refugees for some time. This evidence of a protracted refugee situation is concerning, as donor fatigue has set in (Danish Refugee Council 2014: 18), while the needs of refugees in Kenya have changed from short-term needs – needing more than “blanket-assistance” – to long-term needs.

Despite the awareness of a protracted refugee situation, and the abilities of local actors to maintain a long-term presence with affected communities, the existing literature about localization in Kenya paints a picture that is not so promising. The current relationship between INGOS and NNGOs/LNGOs is largely a donor-subcontractor relationship (Jerving 2017).

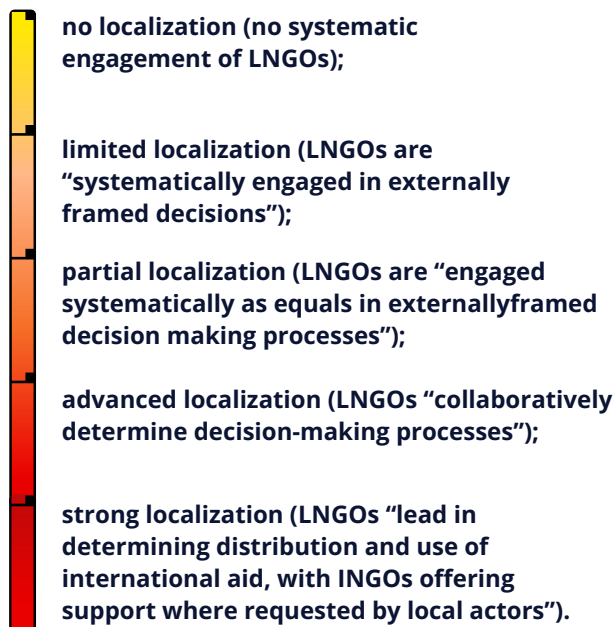
Even though approximately 75% of the implementation of INGO programming in Kenya is already being completed by national or local NGOs, these NGOs are often dismissed as credible actors who deserve funding (Stoddard et al. 2019: 17).

**This lack of direct funding and provision of resources to LNGOs can hinder the positive effects of projects that INGOs implement (Charter4Change 2019). There is often no local capacity to maintain the impacts of INGO projects after the projects are complete and the INGOs have left Kenya (Jerving 2017).**

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

While the background covers the various definitions of concepts that relate to the localization of humanitarian action, this study operationalizes only some of them, in order to assess implementation of localization in the Kenyan refugee regime. For the purpose of this study, any reference to LNGOs will include national and local NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) if those organizations are operating within national borders. In this study, localization will be defined by combining two definitions in the literature, including Cornish's definition "the local community in being the leaders, decision-makers, and implementers of solutions impacting their country" (2019). However, like Green (2018), this study will also conceptualize localization as a spectrum:



These interpretations allow for a focus on power and agency that are crucial to the concept of localization.

### 2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is informed by Aldrich's (1976) resource dependence model, which seeks to explain the relationships between organizations. The model posits that

**(1) environmental resources are in short supply because of interorganizational competition, and**

**(2) organizations survive and prosper to the extent that they are able to outmaneuver other organizations in the acquisition of scarce resources**

(Aldrich 1976: 421).

In other words, while resources are in short supply and competition is widespread, agencies with less resources will do what they must to maintain their organization, while agencies with more resources will provide some to the agency with less, if that helps them maintain their influence and power. One of the ways to examine the relationships between organizations is through their exchanges. Under the resource dependence model, exchanges are expanded to not only consider bi-directional exchanges, but uni-directional changes as well, which can be examined in terms of frequency, intensity, reciprocity and level of standardization (Aldrich 1976: 428). While the resource dependence model is not meant to be a comprehensive approach to the exploration of localization, it does help to highlight the barriers to localization that specifically derive from the strong dependency of organizations on resources to survive in the humanitarian

sector. Additionally, it helps to contextualize the field within which INGOs and LNGOs in Kenya operate, as a realm which has seen aid funding dwindle in the past (UN News 2015). As such, the resource dependence model will help to highlight specific barriers that arise from a centralized humanitarian system, through the consideration of internal organizational strategies to obtain and maintain resources in their inter-organizational field.

As this study is focused on the implementation of the global localization agenda at the ground level, the following research questions guide this study.

**1. What are the factors that condition the roles and forms of engagement of both INGOs and LNGOs?**

**2. How do these factors promote or hinder the localization of humanitarian action?**



## 2.3. POSITIONALITY

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The researchers for this project were brought together by the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network, a transnational network that includes Canadian universities as well as working groups in Kenya, Tanzania, Jordan and Lebanon. One of the goals of LERRN is to foster the co-creation of knowledge. Both researchers considered their intersecting positions, as racialized researchers from the Global North and Global South, respectively. Throughout this research project, it was often considered that the project's methodology was an attempt at localization in itself, as it was a shift away from the usual norm of the majority of academic work on refugees in the Global South being conducted from the Global North. For example, LERRN's Kenya

Working Group selected the topic of localization for this paper, as they felt that it was an important agenda to explore in the Kenyan context. Due to those complex intersections, as well as the overarching goal to co-create knowledge, both researchers engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process.

## 2.4. METHODS

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In order to determine the actors and interests that make up the social field in which INGOs and LNGOs operate, and how that impacts their relationships, it is imperative to engage with the “everyday politics” of the global refugee regime (Hilhorst 2013; Landau and Amit 2014). It is important to consider the everyday politics because implementation is “a parallel process to institutionalization which draws attention to the steps necessary to introduce the new international norm’s precepts into formal legal and policy mechanisms within a state or organization in order to routinize compliance” (Betts and Orchard 2014: 2). Additionally, the observation of these politics at the ground level are important, as they can vary according to context, such as the differences in actors and interests that dominate urban settings (Landau and Amit 2014) compared to those that dominate refugee camps (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010). Due to these differences, research about localization is largely done on a case by case basis, as localization is not a “one size fits all” process and is highly informed by context. Qualitative research can also uncover discrepancies between the “closed-system assumptions of standardized practice and the open system of actual practice” (Longhofer et al. 2012: 84). This research is

informed by process tracing, which is achieved through interviews, participant observation and document analysis (Walby 2013).

This research initially planned to utilize purposive sampling, as the Refugee Consortium of Kenya divides the types of services provided to refugees into the following categories: immediate needs (water, shelter, food), legal advice, education and health care (RCK 2020). However, due to time constraints, there was limited access to international organizations, and even more limited access to LNGOs, which resulted in the researchers undertaking convenience sampling instead. Through the use of convenience sampling and relying on contacts from the Kenya Working Group of LERRN, researchers sought out participants from international organizations as well as LNGOs. An additional limitation that researchers experienced was the closure of the camps in Dadaab to outsiders. As we would not be permitted entry, we had to exclude Dadaab from our sample. Another result of the time-constraints and other limitations at the recruitment stage was the skewed number of participants in Kakuma (n=12), compared to Nairobi (n=2).

Researchers conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews with 14 participants, comprising of 12 INGOs and 2 LNGOs. Among the local NGOs, one was a national NGO, while the other was a refugee-led organization. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 90 minutes, and asked participants about their views on localization. Specifically, some interview questions asked participants to provide examples of ways that their own organizations engaged in localization, their

I asked three main research questions:

- How might in-service professional learning (workshops) support pedagogical reform in Hareed Primary School (including new teaching and classroom management methods)?
- If, how and to what extent do in-service workshops transform teaching practice and create a community of collaborators and teacher 'co-learners'?
- To what extent did the workshop impact teacher confidence (e.g. in relation to classroom management techniques)?

# 3. RESULTS

## 3.1. EXAMPLES OF LOCALIZATION: TRAINING, STEERING COMMITTEES AND LOCAL HIRING

Several strategies emerged as common practices that participants understood as processes of localization: training, steering committees, and local hiring. Most participants from INGOs identified capacity-building of LNGOs as an example of how their organizations engaged in localization. Descriptions of capacity-building included a variety of examples, such as teaching LNGOs financial literacy, leadership and even information management. Others cited the sharing of vehicles for LNGOs, and mentorship.

**However, training was the most often mentioned example of localization. Two participants from INGOs noted that their own financial capacities were limited, and that training was one of the few options to localize, considering their financial limitations.**

One of these participants, from an INGO in Kakuma specifically stated that “even when there aren’t well-defined roles, we show them their niche, try to guide them, and even if we don’t have much capacity we try to help them focus on their goals, and we have been able to help grow quite a number of them [...] and many now operate without our support” (P07).

Another example of localization described by participants was the creation of collaborative groups and the occurrence of regular meetings for those groups. Participants

described a variety of collaborations – particularly those which are occurring through working groups. For example, one participant who worked at an INGO in an urban context described the monthly meetings held by sectoral working groups consisting of INGOs and LNGOs, during which they would “compare notes, and look at areas of synergy” (P04). Another participant who worked for an INGO in the camp context described daily meetings of sectoral groups, held to discuss plans and how best involve actors in those plans. Several participants also mentioned that senior leaders from most organizations also met on a monthly basis. The UNHCR mentions these monthly meetings in its fact sheets and describe them as “inter-agency meetings” (UNHCR, 2019b: 2). While participants did not describe the number or proportion of LNGOs to INGOs in these working groups or the collaborative nature of these meetings, they did identify that the participation of LNGOs in these practices was in itself an example of localization. Despite researchers not being able to attend any of the meetings that were described by the participants, they were a point of interest as a potential practice of localization.

From observations in the field, researchers noticed that in both camp and urban contexts, the personnel working for INGOs were racialized. In both urban and camp contexts, the personnel in INGOs were almost entirely national Kenyans. In fact, during our interviews with INGOs in the camp context, all the participants identified either as a Kenyan national or a refugee



living in Kenya, except for one participant who was a national of a country outside of Africa. Participants discussed the shift towards hiring local staff, with some citing the costs of international employees to live on site, and others mentioning the growing need for local staff as the situation in Kenya became further protracted. Travel costs for INGO personnel from abroad to go back and forth was also cited as one of the main reasons for hiring locally. Additionally, it was stated that local staff were more comfortable working in some regions than international staff. These reasons are echoed by the latest annual report by the Kenyan NGO Coordination Board, which states that NGOs' (including those providing programming for refugees) total expenditures for local staff was greater than that for international staff (2019: 45). This does not mean that local staff were paid higher wages than international staff – in fact, wage gaps between international and local staff continue to be an issue (Pauletto 2018) – instead, it highlights shift towards hiring of more local staff than international staff for program delivery (Kenyan NGO Coordination Board 2019).

### **3.2. BARRIERS TO LOCALIZATION: GATEKEPT FUNDING AND LACK OF TRUST**

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While participants discussed the ways that their organizations engaged in localization, they also brought up challenges that they faced. Two barriers were notably evident in the research process: the gatekeeping of funds, and the lack of trust. While funding is a necessity for NGOs, it can come at the cost of strong localization.

**Considering the large amount of funding that goes through the UNHCR, in conjunction with donor pressures to pursue particular mandates, the UNHCR plays a central role as a gatekeeper to funding, which takes much of the decision-making power away from NGOs. This lack of decision-making power is particularly evident in their implementation partnerships with INGOs, who in turn have implementation partnerships with LNGOs.**

Participants acknowledged that the procurement of funding was a challenge. They also agreed that LNGOs needed more funding, funding that was beyond their own financial capacities. Some participants from INGOs stated that their organizations shared some of their resources with LNGOs, for example sharing their vehicles when needed. One participant from an INGO stated that localization was now a practice upon which some of their own funding depended: “there’s been one [a move to localization] because of a push from donors, some have called for partnering with national and local NGOs, some make it a requirement” (P08). However, the pressures from donors that are brought to INGOs trickle down to LNGOs as well. When describing the ways that their INGO selected LNGOs, one participant stated, “there are those [LNGOs] that we deliberately pick to align with our programmes” (P07).

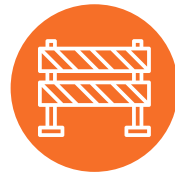
Many participants from INGOs also indicated that they were implementing partners of the UNHCR, from whom they received financial support. In their booklet which provides “guidance for partnering with the UNHCR,” the UNHCR describes implementing

partnerships as consisting of “UNHCR and a governmental, inter-governmental or non-governmental body, United Nations organization, or other not-for-profit organization partner to achieve a common objective.” (UNHCR 2019a: 89). As many participants working in INGOs mentioned being implementing partners, researchers examined the UNHCR-Kenya website and found that as of 2016, 10 out of the 27 implementing partners listed were also national or local NGOs (UNHCR 2016).

At first glance, it appears there is localization occurring, due to an evident engagement of LNGOs. However, from document analysis examining the process of entering into and being a part of implementing partnerships, it is clear that they only exhibit limited localization, as they involve minimal, unequal engagement of LNGOs in externally-framed decisions, rather than being part of the decision-making processes. Implementing partners do not receive funding from the UNHCR – rather, they can apply to become implementing partners of a program or activity to which the UNHCR would contribute financially. As stated by the UNHCR, “the Partner must share UNHCR’s core values and principles as set out in Section 1.3.1. UNHCR and the Partner contribute financial and other resources for specific activities which are defined in a Partnership Agreement (PPA)” (UNHCR 2019a: 90).

**In other words, LNGOs do not receive funding for their organizations to create their own programming. Instead, they must propose activities and programs to the UNHCR to be approved, for the activities/programs themselves to be funded.**

While the amount of funding as well as the method of distribution to NGOs already highlights the UNHCR as an omnipresence in the centralized system, their selection process for choosing implementing partners further underscores their role in the humanitarian realm in Kenya.



**The realities of gatekept funding can also be found in the UNHCR selection processes for implementing**

**partnerships, which consist of interested organizations responding to calls from the UNHCR for “Expressions of Interest.” These calls include the would-be “project goals and specifications, predefined and relevant selection criteria for Partner assessment” (UNHCR 2019a: 100).**

Organizations’ responses are expected to “set out its objectives in undertaking a project or intervention” and “demonstrate how it will complement UNHCR’s capacity and resources” (UNHCR 2019a: 100). Considering that it is the UNHCR which sets out the goals while organizations propose projects which align with those goals, it is evident that while there is systematic engagement of LNGOs, it is not as equals and only in externally-framed decisions, resulting in limited localization.

While implementing partnerships with the UNHCR are evidence of limited localization, access to even this limited systematic engagement may be challenging for smaller LNGOs, particularly those who are more localized than national. The international, national and local NGOs who are implementing partners passed assessments with criteria such as project management and partner contributions (e.g. cash) to



supplement UNHCR resources (UNHCR 2019a: 101). As many participants described the limited capacity, few resources, and low levels of financial literacy experienced by smaller LNGOs, it is evident that such organizations would not score well in an assessment of the aforementioned criteria. Thus, it was no surprise that participants from INGOs described having LNGOs as their own implementing partners. While hiring locally was considered to be an example of localization by participants, it is also evidence of a barrier to deeper forms of localization that result in a shift of power – a lack of trust. As previously mentioned, there were more expatriates working in the urban context than in the camp context. However, in both cases, the majority of personnel were Kenyan nationals. It is apparent that in some ways, this form of localization is producing outcomes that were goals in some global policies and global refugee policies, if one considers the “local as possible, international as necessary” (Grand Bargain 2016) or the goal of reducing costs (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017). However, it is also evidence of one the barriers to levels of localization that shift power back to local actors.

**Participants specifically cited a lack of trust as a one of the reasons why their INGO did not engage more with LNGOs. One of the reasons for an absence of trust was cultural differences.**

One participant stated that despite the strengths of LNGOs, there were issues of trust due to local politics. These local politics created animosity between different local communities and thus an environment in which national NGOs were not as willingly accepted in the camp context as much as INGOs.

Specifically, that participant stated that “the locals themselves, because of local politics they are not very much accepted, you will find that more international organizations are preferred” (P04). Another participant exhibited a lack of trust in abilities of LNGOs to carry out projects because of their lack of capacity – when referring to LNGOs, they stated that “they need to have more capacity building to work in Kalobeyei [Settlement].”

Despite projecting an image of strong localization, the hiring of local staff is an example of what Green (2018) describes as limited localization, with unequal systematic engagement. This unequal systematic engagement was further evidenced by statements from several participants that their INGO communicated with them from their headquarters outside of Kenya to provide them direction. Otherwise known as ‘remote-control,’ this is a common trend among INGOs, as it a way to subcontract their work to reap the benefits of the social capital of local actors, without risking the relinquishment of power (Voorst 2019; Sundberg 2019), or in the case of the Kenyan context, having to trust LNGOs to take the lead in refugee programming.

# 4. ANALYSIS

## 4.1. THE MITIGATION OF RISK IN A UNHCR-DOMINATED FIELD

The resource dependence model highlights that organizations will do what it takes to minimize risk as much as possible. In the case of Kenya, there is evidence that this focus on the mitigation of risk continues to be a barrier to localization, as it maintains the high level of dependence of INGOs and LNGOs on the UNHCR, as well as the dependence of LNGOs on INGOs. One element of Aldrich's resource dependence model is the reciprocity of exchanges, or the level of collaboration involved in inter-organizational exchanges: "If it were possible to measure the degree of reciprocity present in all transactions and relations between two organizations, one would have a measure of the extent to which one organization dominates the other, i.e., a measure of the dependence of one organization on the other" (Aldrich 1976: 429).

Our research has highlighted the unidirectional nature of, or the lack of collaboration in the bulk of interorganizational exchanges in the humanitarian sector of Kenya. Specifically, there are mostly unidirectional exchanges of resource transfers from the UNHCR to INGOs as well as some LNGOs, as evidenced by the lack of collaboration that exists in the selection processes through which INGOs and LNGOs mitigate their risks and obtain resources that are vital to them from the UNHCR (UNHCR 2019a).

While the UNHCR can post a general call for expressions, it is the INGOs who must take the initiative to submit those expressions and prove their capacities as well as their credibility in order to obtain those resources, which highlights the lack of collaboration.

**The low reciprocity and lack of collaboration in the exchanges observed in this study exhibit the domination that the UNHCR has over other organizations, and ultimately the strong dependence of INGOs and LNGOs on the UNHCR.**

The resource dependence model also helps to show that problematic due diligence and risk management from INGOs is partly due to the inability of INGOs to deviate from donor requirements established by the UNHCR, which inform their own relationships with local actors. Similar to the social services sector, where "external resources is an especially critical problem for social service organizations, whether publicly or privately controlled" (Aldrich 1976: 422), the organizations in the humanitarian sector are in perpetual need of external resources as "growing vulnerabilities worldwide have resulted in a stubborn and harmful gap between need and response" (Lowcock 2019). Thus, resource dependence model highlights the major risks and uncertainty that INGOs face when they are dependent on the UNHCR for external resources, and how they must act accordingly to maintain positive relationships with the UNHCR in order to

secure those resources. For example, the standardization of the interorganizational relationships between the UNHCR and other organizations (as highlighted by their selection processes) highlights that the UNHCR has minimal risk in its environment. However, it is important to note that as much as the UNHCR has formalized and standardized practices, the organizations which are most dependent on them must accordingly be flexible and less standardized in order to obtain resources through opportunities to work with the UNHCR. While many INGOs and some LNGOs enter into these standardized implementation partnerships, this process may end up excluding LNGOs who may not have the ability to be that flexible. Additionally, as implementing partners, INGOs are subject to the due diligence and risk management systems that are standardized by the UNHCR, which also excludes LNGOs. In other words, when LNGOs are often implementing partners of INGOs themselves, they also indirectly depend on the UNHCR's approval and subsequent support, and are thus subject to similar due diligence requirements which they may not meet due to their limited capacities.

This need for approval from the UNHCR was evident in the number of times that the UNHCR was mentioned in participant interviews, highlighting the omnipresence of the UNHCR throughout Kenya. As a participant from an LNGO in Kenya stated,

“if you don't have their [UNHCR] approval, you can't do anything (P13).”

It is apparent that INGOs are limited in their ability to localize if they are in implementing partnerships themselves, since they must mitigate their own risks by not deviating from what is outlined in those partnerships. In practice, INGO risk mitigation strategies may include avoiding transferring power to LNGOs when they do engage in partnerships with them and hiring locally rather than taking on potential risks of localization, which may jeopardize approval and subsequent funding from the UNHCR.

**In other words, in the interest of avoiding risk, INGOs are “reluctant to undertake tasks or to tolerate practices of other agencies which interfere with the fulfillment of present programs” (Benson 1975: 232).**

It is clear that mitigation of risk limits the level of localization that is currently occurring in Kenya.

## 4.2. STRONG DOMAIN CONSENSUS

The resource dependence model shows that the current interorganizational exchanges in the field have resulted in a strong domain consensus that acts as a barrier to localization. A domain consensus is “a socially reached agreement on what activities a particular organisation will or will not perform” (Yamada 2004: 299). While Levine and White's (1961) exchange theory considers domain consensus a required element of inter-organizational exchanges between organizations, the resource dependence model finds domain consensus to be a result of inter-organizational relationships (Aldrich 1976). In the case of Kenya, the UNHCR stepped into a larger role

in the 1990s, after the mass influx of refugees not only challenged the capacity of the government to host them (Juma and Suhrke 2002), but also sparked a general securitization of refugees (Loescher and Milner 2006).

The inter-organizational exchanges in the 1990s, when the UNHCR stepped in to become a leader in the provision of programming for refugees, helped it to become a hegemony in the humanitarian space of Kenya (Juma and Suhrke 2002). This hegemony results in the appearance of a domain consensus. However, it is the contemporary inter-organizational exchanges between the UNHCR and NGOs which solidify a domain consensus today, in which a centralized system dominates. It is important to note that this reference to centralization is in terms of resource dependence. Politically, Kenya has recently undergone major decentralization, moving away from the national government with an increase in decision-making power among county governments. However, county governments are still struggling to step into these new roles due to their own lack of capacity (World Bank 2019), which may also contribute to the system of resource dependence. As Aldrich and Pfeffer state, “organizations seek to manage or strategically adapt to their environments” (1976: 79). In the case of Kenya, INGOs are adapting to an environment in which the UNHCR is the major funding body, rather than public entities, such as national or county governments.

**This centralized system of resource dependence is particularly evident in the funding structure through which the UNHCR financially supports INGOs,**

**and INGOs become the subsidiaries who are left to financially support LNGOs – if the UNHCR permits.**

Additionally, Aldrich (1976) considers the role of the ‘formal authority’ – in this case, the Kenyan government – and how it can be used “to increase their dominance in an interorganizational field.” The UNHCR not only dominates as the major supplier of external resources, but also as an organization that has a unique relationship with the formal authority which dates back to the 1990s (Juma and Suhrke 2002). Additionally, the lack of capacity among county governments (World Bank 2019) further substantiates the UNHCR as the dominant organization.



**The UNHCR dominates in these two ways, partly due to its size: “size is also**

**important because of the resources it makes available to administrators for use in their efforts to dominate, or avoid domination by, other organizations in their inter-organizational field” (Aldrich 1976: 425).**

The resource dependence model further highlights the impacts these contemporary interactions have on domain consensus. For example, while participants from LNGOs indicated dissatisfaction with the unequal distribution of power and resources as well as the marginalization of their roles in their inter-organizational field, they also explained that due to their limited resources, they needed to adapt to funding requirements or accept implementation partnerships with other INGOs in order to sustain their organizational goals. Additionally, the hiring of local personnel

also informs a domain consensus.

**While the hiring of local staff may appear to exhibit a shift in roles and power, local staff are often paid less than international staff (Voorst 2019). As such, the hiring of local personal is also part of contemporary, unequal exchanges that inform a domain consensus in which INGOs maintain their dominant positions in the system.**

In other words, in the case of Kenya, the inter-organizational exchanges which stem from resource dependence not only perpetuate the domain consensus of a centralized system of funding but strengthen it further.

### **4.3. LACK OF ACCESSIBILITY FOR LNGOS**

The resource dependence model helps to show the challenges that resource-dependent LNGOs face to obtain authority and power in the humanitarian system. As the possession of resources is vital for an organization to have authority in and dominate the interorganizational field, under the resource dependence model it is clear that LNGOs are at the opposite end of the spectrum from the UNHCR, with few bargaining chips to engage in equal partnerships and extreme vulnerability to enter into unequal or even exploitative ones.



**From a researcher standpoint, the difficulty in access to LNGOs for interviews highlighted their marginalization in the humanitarian sector in Kenya.**

In both the camp and urban contexts, INGO offices were largely located amongst each other, and more

often than not, they were side by side. However, LNGOs were spatially separated from the INGOs, which gave an initial appearance of exclusion. Participant observation further revealed the limited funds which LNGOs had for infrastructure, compared to INGOs.

The two participants from LNGOs also described their difficulties in accessing funding and legal inclusion in the humanitarian realm. Furthermore, they both described their experiences of capacity-building without the access to the funds necessary for them to translate that built capacity into action. Their experiences were further substantiated by the answers from INGO participants, who often cited 'training' as an example of how they engaged in localization without mention of the provision of direct funding to LNGOs. While it is partly their access to local regions that is a crucial component which differentiates them in inter-organizational relationships, their lack of access to other resources such as funding and legal provisions prevent them from being more autonomous or having more agency in their partnerships with larger organizations, such as INGOs or the UNHCR. Thus, while some LNGOs might be engaged as subcontractors or as participants in meetings with steering committees, their lack of access to many other resources diminishes their independence and autonomy even within those forms of engagement. Considering the definition of localization, and its emphasis on a shift to return power to local actors, this lack of accessibility is a major deterrent of that shift, as it not only maintains the status quo in inter-organizational relationships, but also perpetuates the dependency of LNGOs on INGOs and the UNHCR rather than build their self-sufficiency or resilience.

## 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This research suggests three main policy recommendations, which address the issues of risk mitigation in a UNHCR-dominated field, the domain consensus feedback loop, and the lack of accessibility for local NGOs.



### **1. The UNHCR must take a stronger stance on localization through funding.**

The UNHCR is a clear omnipresence in the humanitarian realm of Kenya. It can leverage this omnipresence by taking a stronger stance on localization and creating better conditions under which the diffusion of the global localization agenda can occur. One of these ways is to consider alternative pathways to partnerships, such as partnering on a case-by-case basis rather than the usual standardized processes. The UNHCR could also alter its funding structures for LNGOs to provide them with funding without requiring them to enter into partnerships at all.



### **2. Policy must better acknowledge the risk of not making localization a priority.**

While there are numerous reasons from NGOs describing why they find localization to be risky, there is a bevy of reasons why it is risky to wait to engage in localization. In fact, localization in policy needs to be reconceptualized as an imminent priority, rather than eventual transition. While the protracted situation and dwindling funding already highlighted the potential risks associated with a lack of localization, recent events following our field research have further highlighted its importance. The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures that followed – such as the closure of borders and restrictions on international travel – have reiterated the crucial need for localization, so that Kenya can have a sustainable humanitarian system that is able to handle rapidly changing contexts. As a result, organizational policies, as well as national government policies need to reestablish localization as a major and imminent priority, with benchmarks that are clear to humanitarian actors.



## 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **3. Exit strategies based on localization must be formalized.**

INGOs must begin to formalize their exit strategies and associated contingency plans, so that they translate into concrete, localization-related deliverables. Several participants from INGOs acknowledged the need for an exit strategy, and their organizations were aware of this need. However, this awareness has not translated into concrete deliverables. This lack of action preserves the status quo of the humanitarian sector domain in Kenya, rather than helping to strengthen the roles of LNGOs. Concrete exit strategies can better focus the ways through which INGOs are localizing. For example, through collaboration, in which LNGOs indicate their specific training needs, INGOs can better map out what kind of training is actually vital for LNGOs as well as what funding is needed to implement that training, rather than providing them with capacity-building measures that are not contextualized or considered in terms of implementation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

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**This research characterizes the extent of the localization of humanitarian action in Kenya as limited localization. To ensure a more legitimate and swift transition to localization, this research suggests several changes, such as a stronger approach to direct funding structures, a reconsideration of localization as an urgent priority, and the formalization of exit strategies.**

These changes can potentially address issues related to localization in the case of Kenya, such as the lack of accessibility for LNGOs, the strong domain consensus, and the mitigation of risk in a UNHCR-dominated field. While these are specific issues that were highlighted through a consideration of the resource dependence model, there is evidence of these and other barriers to localization in many global contexts, such as a misperception of LNGOs having insufficient capacities for program implementation, funding through subsidiaries, and a general lack of trust (Emmens and Clayton 2020). Nevertheless, there is a need to overcome these barriers due to the numerous potential benefits of localization documented in the literature, including increased aid effectiveness through reduced costs, deeper connections to communities and reduced duplication of services (Geoffrey and Grunewald 2017). Considering recent events, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, stronger localization as well as greater understanding of localization are more important than ever, as rapidly changing contexts in the world highlight the increasingly important role of local actors in the humanitarian system.



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