

# SUMMARY

## CARE International recommendations on ECHO's guidance on the promotion of equal partnerships with local responders

CARE International, as a signatory to the [Grand Bargain](#) and the [Charter4Change \(C4C\)](#) strongly believes that more must be done to ensure that the humanitarian response is as “*local as possible, and as international as necessary*”. This includes building genuine equitable partnerships, quality funding and supporting change at country-level to support “locally-led, globally-connected” approaches. This summary presents CARE International's reflections and **recommendations for the development of ECHO's guidance on the promotion of equal partnerships with local responders**. For more details and information, please refer to the [full position paper](#).

### How can ECHO support locally-led humanitarian action?

#### 1. Invest further in supporting local organisational capacities across the nexus, including local women's leadership

Supporting capacity strengthening and sharing of national and local partners' organisational capacity is key to ensuring they are best equipped to engage meaningfully and effectively in humanitarian response. This requires working with partner organisations over time, supporting the development of their institutional capacity with sustained investment to enable them to respond to emergencies at the scale and quality required when disasters hit. It also requires tailoring support based on their mandate and size as well as their existing strengths and context-specific needs, be it to deepen technical programming capacities relevant to humanitarian interventions or organisational core functions such as financial management, influencing, resource mobilisation, etc. **Appropriate investments in advance of crises are key for NGOs (national/local partners and ECHO certified partners alike) to be able to provide a timely response.** To ensure this, ECHO should:

- Be more flexible to include capacity strengthening and capacity sharing components in humanitarian financing proposals.
- Work actively to leverage other EU funding instruments to support on-going and longer-term capacity strengthening of national and local actors across the nexus.
- Support innovative approaches focusing on partner capacity strengthening and sharing, such as CARE's Humanitarian Partnership Platforms.

#### 2. Systematically include partners at all stages of the humanitarian cycle, from country-level UN-led and donor planning, to programme design and budget development and final evaluation

In many countries, national and local partners are only occasionally or superficially integrated into humanitarian coordination structures and, as such, have limited influence on programmatic planning and specific response decisions, including in terms of priority-setting. Even where they are represented in clusters or equivalent and in Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and equivalent, they report struggling to really influence decisions. **National and local partners should be supported for their participation to be meaningful, which means ensuring they are able to influence, are listened to and supported to take on leadership roles, such as co-chairing clusters.** Linked to this, deliberate efforts to include women's and girls' organisations must also be made, as they are often excluded from humanitarian coordination structures and processes.

**Involving national and local partners at all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle and programme planning requires cultural shifts both within ECHO and its certified partners.** ECHO needs to grow a practice of consulting with key local and national organisations and networks, including women's organisations to embrace a gendered approach, when developing its own programming and policies, pulling them into the conversation, in addition to consulting ECHO certified partners. ECHO should also ensure that its certified partners, including UN agencies, work meaningfully with national and local partners as a matter of course, unless it is duly justified in a specific context, and that they are held accountable for upholding more equitable behaviours as “good intermediaries”.

#### 3. Ensure genuine risk-sharing in practice – not just in theory

It is essential for donors to accept a fair share of the risks of delivering aid in increasingly complex and insecure environments while working with all humanitarian actors to reduce risks. Specifically, **ECHO should develop an approach whereby risks are**

minimised and shared with all its partners, including and equally for local and national NGOs, rather than transferred. This must include:

- Supporting ECHO certified partners to conduct **participatory organisational capacity assessments of local and national NGOs'** readiness to operate in complex environments;
- Significantly increasing investments in **strengthening/sharing capacity to increase local and national NGOs' readiness to conduct** i) access and risk assessments; ii) strategies, safety and security management plans and associated duty of care policies, **applying a gender lens**; iii) training on IHL, Core Humanitarian Principles, Counter Terrorism regulations, Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH);
- **Fully covering the operating costs in the long-term, including risk management and safety and security-related costs**, of local and national NGOs.

Overall, we would welcome a **reinforced partnership approach to risk management**, as well as **more creative and flexible approaches from ECHO**, which would enable ECHO certified partners to build effective responses in collaboration with national and local partners in difficult contexts.

#### 4. Prioritise national and local partners' participation in advocacy fora and let them lead the agenda

There is an important role for ECHO and its certified partners to play to ensure that national and local partners can engage in high-level relevant spaces where they can influence structures, policies, legal frameworks and/or social norms. ECHO can **proactively ensure that a diversity of NGOs and humanitarian actors are consistently included in relevant EU, UN and other global fora**, such as at the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) structures at global and country level, as well as in the Grand Bargain. In particular, ECHO should **consistently engage stakeholders who are not often heard or included in humanitarian decision-making spaces and coordination structures at all levels**, including diverse national and local women-led, women's rights, organisations working with persons with disabilities and refugee-, IDP-led organisations.

#### 5. Improve the volume and quality of funding to local and national NGOs

While direct financial support by ECHO to local actors is not possible, there are still a number of measures that ECHO can take to improve the volume and quality of funding managed in partnership with national and local actors. One of them is that when providing funding through international partners, pooled funds and other "intermediaries", ECHO **holds intermediaries accountable for cascading the various quality funding provisions to frontline responders and for including local and national partners in proposal designs and in grant negotiations**. In addition, ECHO should:

- **Provide quality (flexible, multi-year, predictable and unrestricted funding)** as it is the most transformational strategy to support localisation. Importantly, ECHO should also allow its certified partners to budget for national or local partners' support costs beyond their own indirect cost percentages.
- Make bold efforts to **reduce bureaucracy, simplify the contracting cycle, as well as harmonise further** with other donors (including by using the 8+3 reporting template).
- **Support pooled funding accessible to national and local organisations**, including women's organisations and smaller local and community-based organisations, also ensuring they have a seat in the management committees.

#### 6. Place gender equality at the centre of humanitarian action through partnership with women-led and women's rights organisations

It is essential that humanitarian actors **acknowledge women's and girls' roles as service providers and agents of change, as well as the best representatives and spokespersons of their own needs and capacities in humanitarian crises**. Whether women and girls have organised themselves into a women-, youth- or girl-led group, or they come forward through a community initiative, they have to be consulted and their voices, specific needs and solutions have to be heard. It cannot be assumed that local humanitarian initiatives will automatically result in an inclusive or community-based approach, let alone ensure the participation of women and girls. Thus, ECHO should ensure that **women's equal, direct, substantial participation and empowerment is integrated explicitly into all mechanisms to strengthen the role of local actors in humanitarian action**.