



## Organizational Development of Local Civil Society Partners



**Policy and Practice Discussion Paper  
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**Cover photo:** Members of parliament from both the government and opposition party acknowledging receipt of signed petition that calls for the passing of Kenya's Protection against Domestic Violence Bill.

PIK local Partner, Women's Empowerment Link (WEL) participated in this event.

Photo Credit: IRC-PIK/Valine Moraa

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## Foreword

In July 2015, the IRC embarked on an exploration of its capacity building practices around organizational development of local civil society partners. This 6-month initiative, supported by a generous grant from the Otto Family Foundation, facilitated a better understanding of not only how the IRC is approaching its work with its partners, but how peer organizations are approaching their work in this field. Another key component of this review was to assess how international organizations and academic institutions are capturing evidence and best practices.

The project aimed specifically to complete the following activities over its six-month period:

Activity	Purpose
Map the IRC's organizational development support to civil society partners (including travel to 3 IRC country programs)	A systematic review and analysis to better understand current approaches through a balanced and appropriate mix of desk reviews, surveys, and key informant interviews.
Literature review of evidence base around Organizational Development (OD) support	To better understand evidence base, tools and strategies used by others; mix of theory and practice/ qualitative and quantitative research.
Design a learning event with IRC head quarter and field staff, external organizations and local partner stakeholders	Findings from the mapping exercise help identify gaps, challenges, strengths, and generate new ideas and an IRC approach.
Document findings and recommendations; explore next steps for a new approach	Capture new ideas and lessons learned. Take into account stakeholder perspectives, particularly those shared by local partners, in considering new approaches toward the IRC's capacity building efforts.

The research involved interviews with IRC staff and local partners from a total of 5 countries (including travel to IRC offices in Liberia, Jordan/Syria cross-border program, and Iraq) as well as IRC technical unit staff and IRC leadership. Key informant interviews with peer humanitarian organizations helped build an understanding of their approaches and work with their local partners. An extensive review of methodologies and tools used by peer organizations was carried out and compared to IRC's current practices. This stakeholder review helped the IRC understand the diverse approaches already in development so as to better inform a future organizational development approach.

The IRC is grateful to the Otto Family Foundation for supporting this initiative. We would like to thank IRC staff, local partners, peer humanitarian organizations, and academic researchers who collaborated and shared their important views and information during the research process.

## Acronyms

<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (U.K.)
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organization
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>LNGO</b>	Local non-governmental organization
<b>NNGO</b>	National non-governmental organization
<b>OD</b>	Organizational development
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

### Executive Summary

Working in partnership between INGOs and local civil society organizations has increasingly become the implementation model of choice among donors, policymakers, international practitioners, and local organizations. Many public donors have created policies and initiatives that encourage local ownership through collaborative decision-making approaches, helping put local expertise and solutions at the forefront when responding to crises, whether as a result of conflicts or natural disasters, as well as for the post-crisis recovery phase. Research and global advocacy efforts highlight how and why local civil society partners bring a wealth of contextual knowledge and experience that external organizations often lack. However, the theory and practice of how an effective organization works, particularly how it responds and adapts to public needs when faced with humanitarian crisis, can be shared by larger, more experienced organizations like an INGO. This kind of experience and knowledge sharing has been shown to be helpful, and it is often welcomed by both civil society organizations and the constituents they serve.

**This paper explores the theory and practice of organizational development, in particular, the process through which INGOs work in partnership with their local staff and leadership to help strengthen partners' ability to serve as effective service providers, public advocates, and leaders.** The IRC undertook a 6-month research project that reviewed literature around partnership and organizational development. It also aimed, in particular understanding, to assess its own practices with local partners, with a focus on organizational development strengthening. A close look at organizational strengthening of local partners in 5 country programs revealed a common approach woven together with tools commonly used by organizational development practitioners. However there is variability and some country programs can face more challenges than others in this respect. IRC staff and leaders expressed the need for a systematic partnership strengthening approach in order to better respond to organizational development strengthening requests from its local partners.

**The literature review highlights the growing trend toward mutual partnership among INGOs and local civil society organizations.** It also introduces some evidence and new thinking around organizational development and its important role in strengthening local partners around the world.

The paper also **explores the field of organizational development, including the tools and frameworks** that are frequently employed. It further introduces new ideas that should be considered among **practitioners, both local and international.**

Additional insights based upon the evidence reviewed as part of our research support the view that **working in partnership leads to better, more creative solutions for the world's complex humanitarian and development problems.** The evidence, however, is not always clear, and often takes a flavor of advocacy rather than informed research. Similarly, the field of organizational development has been in existence for nearly half a century and yet, it is an ongoing challenge to cite any one process, method, or tool that will lead to a well-functioning, sustainable organization -- let alone one that is equipped to respond to human needs while remaining indefinitely sustainable.

Finally, **the paper helped set the stage for IRC's Learning Event on Organizational Development of Local Civil Society Partners**, held on December 9 and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at IRC Headquarters in New York. This event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders that work in partnership and helped to highlight the type of support and information exchanges that effective partnership must be based upon. These discussions will help to shape how IRC will support current and future local civil society partners. In addition, the ideas and recommendations made by local partners at the event represented an especially important contribution that will be taken into account by the IRC as it develops a strengthened approach to organizational development of local partners.

## Section 1: Introduction

### 1.1 The Benefits of Working in Partnership

Over the past two decades, an important reform movement around local ownership and aid effectiveness has unfolded among the donor and international communities. The reforms are supported by ample evidence that CSOs play a key role in reducing poverty, marginalization and vulnerability.<sup>1</sup> For example, in 2008, the European Centre for Development Policy Management released its final report of a 5-year research study on capacity, change, and performance which contends that finding ways to develop and sustain capacity is a fundamental development challenge to which country partners and external agencies need to give greater attention.<sup>2</sup> The multi-country study, containing 16 case studies, offers a broad spectrum of contexts and sectors and highlights the idea that local institutions and organizations are crucial elements of the development challenge. Indeed, more often than not, they house the collective ingenuity and skills that countries need to survive and prosper.<sup>3</sup> Further, the recent CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2015 offers an essay titled, The Case for Strengthening Communities, which sets the rationale for “listening to people.” It calls for civil society support and engagement, stating:

*It is these very people who are essential in the process, because they know how things work, have assets they can use, and are already invested in the long term future of their place. Such treasures are present in all communities. Harnessing them in development activity brings local ownership, greater capacity, a long term perspective and a desire for sustainability.*<sup>4</sup>

Civil society organizes in order to respond to conflict, emergency situations or when the State is not respecting the rights of people and neglecting their needs. In these circumstances, civil society organizations play an important role in service delivery as well as be the voice on behalf of the people. In other cases, organizations have an established record of service and advocacy for local and national causes. Whether nascent or mature, these organizations have deep country knowledge and local context and can serve as facilitators for civic participation and service provision, particularly when government systems are disrupted. CSOs certainly make a very significant contribution to service delivery in many countries – for example, one evaluation estimates that they represent 25% of the service delivery budget in Ethiopia, 40% of health services in Malawi, and 10-15% of education services in Nepal.<sup>5</sup> There are also many such examples in middle income or developed contexts. Furthermore, it is estimated that globally 4 out of 5 humanitarian organizations are local actors.<sup>6</sup>

The donor policy shifts of the past two decades have occurred as a result of the growing movement for local solutions to the world’s complex problems, particularly in the global south. Syria’s protracted crisis has added a new dimension to the movement. Recent multi-stakeholder country consultations across the region have drawn upon well-established research into resilience and protracted displacement to create The Dead Sea Resilience Agenda. In large part, the Agenda calls for new and inclusive partnerships and urges that partnerships reinforce local capabilities by supporting and enabling institutions with the capacity to deliver consistently.<sup>7</sup>

Advocacy efforts toward aid transparency have also contributed to calls for reform of the aid industry. What could be considered a global advocacy movement and subsequent policy shifts have resulted in development and humanitarian actors getting together to reflect on the role of civil society and how their engagement with local organizations can better promote development and justice.<sup>8</sup> A recent Bond report examines the record of U.K.-based international INGOs and acknowledges the contributions toward capacity development of southern NGOs and cites how locally-led development increases legitimacy, effectiveness and value-for-money. The paper also offers examples of how local partners benefitted from working with an international partner and how the relationship exposed them to international norms and standards and improved organizational systems and skills.

In the search for evidence of why and how local civil society partners can benefit from capacity building assistance there is an interesting dichotomy. There is less reflection on how international actors can and are learning from their local partners, relative to how their local partners' internal systems, skills, and cultural understanding are being improved and expanded. This point is made in a paper commissioned by Tufts University Feinstein International School<sup>9</sup> in which organizational capacity and operational capacity are analyzed against the strengths and weaknesses of international and local organizations. The authors define organizational capacities as management, governance, and decision making, while operational capacities refer to delivery of programs and projects. Analyzing the situation in Syria and its unique cross-border work, the study found that international organizations were much stronger in organizational capacity than their Syrian counterparts.<sup>10</sup> Local Syrian organizations, however, focused more on operational capacity in order to deliver services and respond to the immediate needs inside and around the borders of Syria. While INGOs and local organizations' strengths or weaknesses can't be easily placed into a static category, the study helps identify learning opportunities among INGOs and local organizations and how all can benefit from mutual partnership and capacity building activities.

### 1.2 Organizational development: achieving humanitarian and development outcomes

The IRC's work around the world -- whether in response to an emergency, to provide education or health services in a protracted conflict setting, in response to gender based violence, or to improve economic well-being and empowerment – can be done more effectively and efficiently in partnership with local civil society organizations. “Without these partner organizations and their knowledge of changing needs, local context and shifting conflict lines, their deep connections to communities, their understanding of how business gets done inside, and their ability to reach cut-off areas and people in desperate need, often at significant risk, IRC's humanitarian programs would be much more limited in size, geographic scope and volume, and helping far fewer people,” states the Director of Partnership and Capacity Building for the IRC's Syria Regional Response.

An extensive study commissioned by a consortium of UK-based international non-governmental organizations looked at partnerships between INGOs and local civil society organizations. It found a significant number of benefits that stem from working through such collaborations. The study notes that partnerships helped to:

- Enhance the relevance and appropriateness of humanitarian responses. National and local actors' understanding of context and internal dynamics allow them to shape programs accordingly;
- Enhance the effectiveness of assistance, by ensuring accountability to disaster-affected populations;
- Smooth the transition between the different elements of the disaster cycle. Unlike the international system where tasks such as resilience, response and recovery might be undertaken by different teams and organizations, local NGOs (LNGO) and NNGOs (national NGOs) typically work in all of these spaces. This enables them to enhance connectedness and ensure that responses take place in ways that respect longer-term perspectives.<sup>11</sup>

Many research documents, including the one cited above, offer a mixed picture of different aspects of partnership. For example, issues of partners' ability to achieve wide coverage of services and efficiency/greater value for money than INGOs show mixed results.<sup>12</sup> The study recommends that humanitarian aid agencies, donors, UN agencies, and their local and national partners build the evidence base on local and national partnerships, undertaking more case studies of the work of partnership-based INGOs, direct delivery INGOs, national NGOs, UN agencies, and southern INGOs. Given the anticipated rise in the number and complexity of emergencies, it is becoming clear that the formal international system cannot be expected to respond in all settings, all the time.<sup>13</sup> There is a need to complement advantages and maximize assets through partnership. This requires sharing knowledge and creating a shared understanding between and among INGOs and local civil society partners.

In summary, INGOs and donors are increasingly recognizing and encouraging that humanitarian and development programs should be undertaken with the full participation of local organizations. This practice helps ensure that commitments that promote local ownership and aid effectiveness are implemented. Partnerships, however, can be most effective when all organizations involved are operating with a strong foundation, grounded in agreed-upon standards, and with an understanding that mutual learning will occur. While INGOs benefit from local partners' reach and connections to community members, local organizations can benefit by employing new organizational standards and practices, often introduced by external organizations.

## Section 2: Why Strengthen Local Partner Organizational Capacity?

### 2.1 Insights and the search for evidence

The international community's drive toward local ownership and increased local capacity in development and recovery contexts extends to emergency assistance as well. There is an increasing realization influencing policy shifts in the past decade, that the challenge of maintaining sufficient humanitarian space and an operational presence in a number of countries in order to access populations in need is already great and will most likely become greater.<sup>14</sup> The reform is less about scientific evidence and more about insights that reveal the current humanitarian model's inability to reach people in need. This broad challenge of humanitarian response has generated considerable effort and a complete rethink of the modus operandi, with greater emphasis on working with local partners and a renewed commitment to principled humanitarian action. The realization that the current humanitarian system might be undermining local capacity suggests that international agencies are inadvertently choking the potential of the very organizations that are best placed to meet the needs of persons trapped by disaster, conflict and extreme poverty.<sup>15</sup>

Evaluation and research like the Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami<sup>16</sup> has generated new thinking around supplying aid versus supporting communities in their own relief and recovery process. During Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, it was the local community that did lifesaving first, as NGOs were prevented from entering the country.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, in an article published in the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), a Pakistani national foundation claimed that they 'maintained the quality of their work through geographical and sector-specific strategies [...] avoiding duplication and minimizing relief disparities at local level'.<sup>18</sup> Studies of these responses have supported both evidence and advocacy. The IRC's 2009 conference report, *Strengthening Partnership for Effective Humanitarian Response*, summarized the findings and recommendations of this gathering organized by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. Humanitarians, it was argued, need to question the assumption that they are the solution to emergencies, and consider more seriously the role of governments, local civil society, the private sector and other actors.<sup>19</sup>

As noted in a challenge paper by the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on Humanitarian Assistance, the focus of discussions, and hence the evidence cited, has revolved around the factors that produce humanitarian crises and how to manage the response so that further crises are less likely. The paper emphasizes national capacity-building as the key scaffolding of risk management and disaster response, implying new roles for aid donors and private-sector partners under a new "business model" for humanitarian action.<sup>20</sup> The paper also highlights how governments have created risk frameworks that address the increasing threat of climate change, political instability, war and civil conflict, and the impact of those and other hazards and threats. It acknowledges that an appropriate response requires knowledge of the social, environmental, cultural and political issues in the affected community both prior to and after an emergency, citing that such knowledge is best held by organizations who habitually work with the affected community.<sup>21</sup>

Academic and donor-led research is ongoing regarding the important role that local actors have and continue to play in crisis and post-crisis settings. Evidence is slowly emerging as more INGOs and donor governments, as well as private sector actors, engage local communities in ahead of and during a crisis. Partnership principles are increasingly being put into practice among the humanitarian and development communities, and this is creating new opportunities for capturing partnership impact. Initiatives like those being pursued by CDA Collaborative Learning Project (Cambridge, MA) offer interesting methods that gather evidence by capturing the voice of people, including partners and clients, and listening to the views of those at the receiving end of international aid, and bringing forward these cumulative voices as a form of "meta feedback" to actors in the aid system.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.2 The local ownership movement and resulting policy shifts

Underpinning the idea that local civil society strengthening, in particular organizational development, promotes development and advances aid effectiveness are declarations and principles that have been established by developing and developed countries, multi-lateral development institutions and civil society fora. These policy shifts occurred as part of research, global activism, and institutional reviews of the Millennium Declaration and progress of the Millennium Development Goals.

In 2005, the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, a high-level forum, examined the effectiveness of humanitarian and development aid and reaffirmed commitments made in previous declarations, namely the *High Level Forum on Harmonisation in Rome* (2003) and the *Marrakech Roundtable on Managing for Development Results* (2004). Forum members promoted partnership commitments with an emphasis on “local ownership,” which was defined as an individual countries’ ability to exercise leadership over its development strategy. Three years later in 2008, ministers of developing and donor countries responsible for promoting development endorsed an “Agenda for Action” in Accra, Ghana. The *Accra Agenda* commits to accelerate progress on aid effectiveness through: country ownership; building more effective and inclusive partnerships; to achieve development results and openly accounting for them.<sup>23</sup>

Advancing this local-ownership approach, civil society organizations around the world formed their own coalitions and partnerships to promote their role and contributions toward effective development. Between 2009 and 2011, a worldwide process that reached out to over 3,500 CSOs around the world through national, regional and thematic consultations culminated in a series of consultations that helped CSOs create a set of standards, guidance and principles for development articulated in the *Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles*. This process and set of principles helped lay the groundwork that recognizes CSOs as distinct development actors, with commitments they themselves must make toward social justice, people’s participation and ownership, gender equality, accountability and transparency, sustainable change and equitable partnerships. Governments and other stakeholders endorsed these principles in the 2011 *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*, which made an important commitment to strengthen the enabling environment for CSOs as independent development actors.<sup>24</sup> At the Busan High Level forum, CSOs were invited for the first time to participate in both the preparations and the forum, in equal standing with governments and multilateral donors. This created a shift from how aid can support state actors (Rome and Paris initiatives) to how aid can support and empower non-state actors (Busan and Istanbul commitments).

In recent years, local partners’ experiences and perspectives have been actively solicited and presented as evidence for reform within the humanitarian system. Several INGOs, as well as donor governments have commissioned large-scale, multi-country qualitative research projects centered on partners’ insights on international assistance efforts.<sup>25</sup> One such study, “*Fast Forward: The Changing Role of UK-based INGOs*,” was published in 2015 by U.K.-based Bond for International Development and identifies ten strategies that UK-based INGOs must adopt to remain relevant and valuable in a rapidly changing global context. Strategy 3 calls for INGOs to shift from delivering services to enabling local actors by increasing their capacity and involvement. Moreover, the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) is undertaking a Civil Society Partner Review between July and November 2015, which, among other objectives, will explore how DFID and the UK government can build society partnerships most effectively.<sup>26</sup> This includes how DFID can contribute to strengthening civil society organization (CSO) effectiveness, capacity and leadership in lower and middle income countries and the changing relationship between Northern and Southern organizations.<sup>27</sup>

In 2010, USAID undertook a major development reform agenda known as *USAID Forward* which introduced several core reform areas including the promotion of sustainable development through high-impact partnerships and local solutions. The strategy calls for “increased investment directly to partner governments and local organizations.” This push for local investment has unfolded in different USAID funding and procurement mechanisms. The ambitious *USAID Forward* reform agenda introduced in 2010 set a target of channeling 30% of USAID’s mission program funding to local organizations by the end of fiscal year 2015. This is largely implemented through USAID’s Requests for Proposals (RFPs) that

increasingly require program work plans for capacity strengthening of local organizations to gradually strengthen their ability to become prime USAID partners.<sup>28</sup>

Supporting CSOs through program partnerships is another avenue for developing local technical and organizational skills, while also achieving program goals and objectives. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC), a unique forum in which the governments of 34 democracies work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalization, conducted peer reviews (OECD 2011) that studied how DAC members work with CSOs. A strategic framework was presented as a result of that review which offers lessons on how DAC members and CSOs can create stronger, more balanced partnerships to reach common development goals. Among them are two lessons: on the *strengthening of civil society in developing countries*; and *building strong partnerships with humanitarian NGOs*. The former suggests why strengthening civil society in developing countries can empower citizens to participate in development and advance democratic ownership, while the latter discusses how support for building partner capacity can be useful to strengthen the quality of humanitarian response.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3 IRC's commitment to local partner strengthening

Over the last decade, the IRC has increasingly partnered with local civil society, government, and the private sector, helping to not only increase the scale and reach of its relief programs, but also laying the foundation for long-term recovery and sustainable development. Working in partnership with local civil society organizations helps achieve the IRC's goal of helping people whose lives and livelihoods have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover, and gain control of their future. Working closely with local partners in developing their organizational capacity and growth increases the chances that a capable cadre of advocates and service providers are themselves equipped to respond to the next humanitarian emergency, and are better able to advance their countries' development.

After consultations with IRC field staff and local partners, they offered the following rationale for developing a dedicated approach to strengthen the organizational capacity of the IRC's diverse set of local partners:

- The very process of organizational development facilitates mutual learning between the IRC and its local partners. They learn, and we learn. The IRC's Peace Initiative Kenya program is a good example. While the IRC has strength in national level organization and engagement, partners such as Rural Women Peace Link and Sauti ya Wanawake Pwani have the skills and knowledge for engaging at the community level. Local partners offered creative ideas around grassroots organizing. The process of capacity building, therefore, becomes mutually enhancing for all parties involved.
- Strengthening organizational capacity supports increased sector specific technical capacity. A strong foundation of organizational effectiveness serves as a solid platform on which sector-specific technical skills and practice can be built upon. Currently within the IRC's Syria operation, local partners have delivered over 14 million USD of assistance since 2014. In the first 6 months of 2015, 72% of the IRC's assistance delivered to Syrians inside their country was carried out by partner organizations. Organizational support is helping partners manage their geographic, sectoral and financial growth. Without this kind of support to its partners, IRC program outcomes cannot be sustained.
- Organizational development activities help build networks, coalitions, and collaborative systems, potentially longer lasting than an IRC program. For example, the IRC's Syria Regional Response brings together its regional partners for workshops on topics they have requested, such as team building and managing conflict. The IRC also links partners to share experience and to collaborate. These interventions allow local partners the opportunity to meet and share knowledge and information and help reduce suspicions and misconceptions.

- Local organizations, particularly those in humanitarian and crisis settings, operate in a rapidly changing environment. An organizational development process helps introduce tools and processes to help understand and analyze an organization's ability to adapt to rapid changes in their environments so they are better prepared to respond to crises, increasing their scale and reach. One IRC Kenya team member notes, "Part of the capacity building process involves 'identity clarification'. If an organization has a niche or would like to build a niche in emergency preparedness, they learn how to put in place the systems, values and a culture that facilitates timely, efficient and effective life-saving action. This involves both organizational and programmatic resourcing, including human capital development, to achieve the required posture of an emergency responder."
- Organizational development pillars, particularly leadership, team building, human resources, advocacy and outreach, and board governance, offer unique opportunities to introduce civil society organization (CSO) policies that promote inclusion and equality, particularly women's participation and leadership, while discouraging nepotism, discrimination and corruption. A member of the IRC's Liberia team observes that through board governance strengthening and recruitment training, local partner organizations were better able to consider the percentage of women's representation that the board needed to aim toward. Organizations were also encouraged to clearly stipulate women's inclusion in their statutes and internal regulations documents. The partners' policy documents began to explicitly discourage nepotism, discrimination, and corruption.
- Organizational development helps pave the way for equitable, democratic organizational standards, including accountability to constituents, which serves as models of good governance within a country's public and private spheres. The IRC staff in Kenya noted that local partners' organizational efforts helped them become more credible in the eyes of the government and authorities, creating an environment in which advocacy for improved governance is illustrated through the organizations' actions -- they model what good governance looks like.
- Strengthening local partner organizations helps equip them to create pathways for citizen participation, which can offer a channel for service users and people to voice their demands to service providers or local governments. As has been evident in the IRC's Peace Initiative Kenya project, effective advocacy requires tactics and skills, as does community mobilization and organization. Partner organizations that had a clear sense of the thematic issues and knowledge of how to engage diverse stakeholders were more capable of generating broad support, thereby more effectively stimulating informed citizen participation.
- The process and skill sets that are shared and implemented during an organizational development process, particularly those skills that go beyond basic management and toward leadership, networking, and advocacy, help create an enabling environment for CSOs to thrive and maximize their contribution to development. A CIVICUS essay within its 2015 State of Civil Society Report calls for more coalition building in order to enable stronger connections of solidarity and support, including between service-oriented and change-seeking CSOs, to make it harder for repressive states to pick off individual CSOs or types.<sup>30</sup> At the basic organizational level, analysis that uses common organizational development tools such as SWOT and PESTLE<sup>31</sup> helps organizations understand their internal and external environment so that they can better navigate restrictive environments that impact their ability to operate.

In 2010 and 2013, the IRC participated in a partner survey process conducted by Keystone Accountability using a technique of feedback data analysis increasingly common in the customer satisfaction industry known as Net Promoter Analysis (NPA). The IRC's capacity building to local partners was a low rated area of performance. . While IRC local partner respondents value support for building their technical abilities to deliver services, they were dissatisfied with all other capacity building support received, particularly in the areas of board/governance and long-term planning/financial viability

The IRC recognizes the need to work harder to improve its responsiveness to local partners' needs and is committed, as articulated in its 2020 Strategy, to its local partners:

*We will invest in supporting local state and civil society institutions. We will do so respectfully and based on an understanding of our own strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of our partners. We will view them as allies in achieving our core outcomes but also as catalysts and drivers of change in their own right. This will require us to develop a more formal approach to technical and organizational capacity development of both civil society and state institutions, and to invest in identifying effective interventions which can be taken to scale.*

The IRC's commitment to working with local partners is underpinned by the belief that stronger local stakeholders contribute to the improved performance of individuals, organizations, networks and systems -- ultimately resulting in improved service delivery outcomes in communities served by these local actors.<sup>32</sup> The IRC's strategy development process provided an opportunity to review our historical approaches, better understand our current interventions, and position the IRC for the future. The process concluded with Strategic Roadmaps that outline the ways in which the IRC will contribute to relief and recovery processes in both emergency and transitional contexts. Not surprisingly, working more effectively with local actors emerged as a key theme throughout in the new IRC strategy. This theme is reflected in the following strategic objectives in IRC 2020:

- Improves the effectiveness of our interventions;
- Increases the scale and reach of our work, knowledge, and expertise;
- Increases the speed and timeliness of our support;
- Improves our responsiveness to the demands of our clients and communities.

Local partner support and organizational strengthening advances another of the IRC's objectives of building local partners' capacity to respond to the needs of local populations, a critical component of an effective IRC exit strategy.

In summary, evidence and advocacy over the past two decades have highlighted the critical importance of engaging civil society throughout humanitarian responses and recover initiatives. The dividends of this type of engagement are far reaching and potentially long lasting. The IRC and other INGOs have articulated their commitment to partnership with local entities as well as capacity building to advance program implementation capabilities and promote effective organizational performance and client responsiveness.

## Section 3: What Is Organizational Development?

There are many terms and definitions that describe the process of strengthening an organization's ability to deliver on its mission, goals and objectives. One common definition of *organization* was established by Douglas North, an American economist known for his work in institutional economics and economic history: "Organizations are groups of individuals bound by a common purpose to achieve objectives." In parallel, a definition of organization development is found in a classic work of American organizational theorist Richard Beckhard's (1969). In *Organization Development: Strategies and Models*, he established that: Organization Development is an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organizational effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organizations "processes", using behavioral-science knowledge.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.1 IRC's understanding of organizational development

Organizational development (OD) is a field of study and practice, often falling under the subject areas of human resources, leadership and management, and behavioral science. It is closely linked to organizational culture, strategy and change. The IRC defines organizational development as a change process that aims to build the capacity of an organization and improve its ability to effectively serve people and respond to their needs. The process includes strengthening leadership and planning, internal structures, and management systems. It enhances organizational performance and individual professional development while aligning an organization's internal systems with its mission and programs. The type of organization this discussion paper focuses on is independent, non-state, faith-based or secular, civil society groups or associations. They can often be registered with the state as a charity or not-for-profit that provides services or resources for the public good. In some cases, depending on the country program, the IRC may partner for example with a community-based entity for engaging with the local population on their needs, a faith based organization for delivering health services or a media organization to help achieve outreach, advocacy or public information objectives.

### 3.2 Donor and INGO definitions

Donor governments, INGOs and international institutions use a variety of terms to describe their capacity strengthening interventions or processes. Among the international community, and in the non-profit world, organizational development is commonly called organizational capacity building, capacity development, or more broadly, civil society strengthening.

The organizational capacity building framework produced by the AIDSTAR-Two Project in collaboration with USAID Office of HIV/AIDS uses the term Organizational Capacity Building and offers the following definition: the strengthening of internal structures, systems and processes, management, leadership, governance and overall staff capacity to enhance organizational, team and individual performance. The framework provides an *operational* understanding of organizational capacity building, particularly in the context of local civil society organizations although it has applicability to a wide range of organizations, including government institutions at local, regional and national levels.<sup>34</sup>

The United Nation's Development Program's (UNDP) *Strategy on Civil Society and Civic Engagement* outlines its lessons learned and corporate strategy and defines capacity development for CSOs as: a) capacities related to creating and sustaining an enabling environment for civil society to thrive and interact with the state, and, b) capacities related to providing services to its constituency and delivering on its mandate.<sup>35</sup> The strategy document adds, "Whatever the role of the CSO is within UNDP programming...it is critical that all efforts ultimately lead to nationally-owned and sustainable development results – improvement in the lives of communities and people."

INGOs have also formulated capacity building definitions, approaches, and frameworks (more detail in section 11, INGO Approaches). For example, PACT, a U.S. based international NGO, developed a theory

of change for what it calls “capacity development” which reads: a) stronger local organizations and networks (b) do better work and, (c) as a result, have greater impact on health, the environment and livelihoods in their target communities. Similarly, Mercy Corps, another INGO, has an established portfolio of civil society strengthening programming tools that it applies to its local partnerships. Oxfam is endeavoring both to work increasingly with local NGO partners and government actors and to strengthen the quality of those partnerships while helping to develop partners’ capacity.<sup>36</sup>

A civil society partner from the IRC’s Liberia program articulated her understanding of organizational development based on her organization’s first-hand experience:

*“It’s a series of activities that look at an organization’s systems and structure. It’s a process that goes on within an institution to enable it to develop policies and procedures for its improved health and function. It makes an organization more relevant. It builds the capacity of the organization in terms of staff management and program activities. It looks at a lot of things like the key assets of an organization: human resources and capacities of staff, financial management, donor compliance, training, networking with others, and sustainability.”*

International humanitarian and development actors are increasingly embracing the integration of local partner development into their country programs, whether they call it organization development, capacity strengthening, partnership development, or civil society support; and as policy shifts continue, donors are increasingly demanding that they do. The terms are often interchangeable, while the approaches are unique yet adaptable depending on one’s vision, investment and commitment to partnership.

## Section 4: Organizational Development Approaches and Intervention Logic

Before discussing existing organizational development (OD) approaches for strengthening the variety and types of organizations that INGOs partner with, it's helpful to understand the theory that forms the foundation of an organizational development approach. Organizational development emerged out of human relations studies from the 1930s where psychologists realized that organizational structures and processes influence worker behavior and motivation.<sup>37</sup>

### 4.1 Grounding organizational development in theory

Kurt Lewin (1898–1947) is widely recognized as the founding father of organizational development, although he died before the concept became current in the mid-1950s.<sup>38</sup> Lewin's organizational development theory is linked to action research and social change. Lewin believed that the motivation to change was strongly related to action: If people are active in decisions affecting them, they are more likely to adopt new ways. "Rational social management", he said, "proceeds in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of action."<sup>39</sup> The framework below developed by Lewin is evident today in organizational development approaches adopted by international institutions, corporations, non-profit national and international organizations. The current theories of change associated with organizational development are often framed just as Lewin conceptualized in 1958:



The theory posits that an organizational cycle of change and adaptation leads to eventual behavior change as a result of many learning activities (commonly called 'interventions').. In the context of the IRC's partner organizations, their ability to implement and achieve life-saving results are critical. Simultaneously, partner organizations need to maintain or expand their operational structures when faced with rapid change. This highlights the significance and challenges of sustaining an organizational development process. The context under which local partners operate requires that special attention be given to capacity building in areas like change management and organizational adaptability. An organizational development process must offer the tools to help organizations pivot quickly to adapt to the changes in emergency and conflict settings. An IRC local partner that operates in Syria shared their experience on rapid growth and the need for mentorship:

*"It was a challenge to move from a volunteer organization to a grant and program-based organization. We had to establish policies and manuals, and we needed help setting up and putting structures in place that large organizations have. We have been reactionary vs. proactive."*

Organizational theorists also stressed the importance of local ownership of an organizational development process. Theorist Richard Beckhard quoted above stated: "People support what they help create. People affected by a change must be allowed active participation and a sense of ownership in the planning and conduct of the change."<sup>40</sup> This points to today's research literature and development discourse that has encouraged INGOs to take on the task of working more closely in partnership with

local organizations and civil society groups, and to strengthen partners' organizational capacity to become a more sustainable, influential and responsive force in their societies.

The European Centre for Development Policy study proposes a complementary lens for exploring organizational or system capacity. It encourages stakeholders to look beyond the formal capacities to deliver development results (such as technical and managerial competencies) and to identify other factors that drive organizational and system behavior (for example, relationship building, managing change, innovation and experimentation, and navigating complexity).<sup>41</sup>

While each international development donor or donor funded institution has adopted its own theory of change, organizational development framework or civil society intervention logic, there are many common features among them that appear to originate in the organization development theory noted above. Some donors like DFID and AusAid have developed theories of change to justify their engagement with civil society and clarify how it is expected to contribute to development outcomes.<sup>42</sup> Many theories of change in relation to civil society, however, are based on an assumption of a state which is capable and willing to respond to the demand of its citizens, as is the intervention logic in Danida civil society strategy.<sup>43</sup> This assumption challenges the use of static logic frameworks for all contexts, which may neglect power issues and external influences that affect local partner organizations' ability to perform and thrive. In other words, an organization's external environment has to be a strong consideration when developing an organizational development approach, and it is critical to adapt to the local context and mutually agree on what can realistically be achieved and how.

### 4.2 Diverse Approaches

While donor governments establish theories of change as an effort to guide grantees, INGOs often establish their own frameworks that meet their institutional values and goals. For example, Oxfam's approach to partnerships and capacity strengthening is grounded in a commitment to building capacity with, rather than forcing it upon, governmental and non-governmental partners. The capacity is not only technical, but also organizational (e.g., developing financial and human resources systems), focused on the short and long-term sustainability and growth of the partner.<sup>44</sup> Oxfam has established a set of partnership principles which aims to support organizational and institutional capacity strengthening.<sup>45</sup>

Capacity building and organizational development lies at the heart of Mercy Corps' approach for developing and sustaining partnerships with civil society, as reflected in the agency's Local Partnerships Framework and Guide to Local Partnerships. For Mercy Corps, capacity building goes far beyond training, and includes mentoring, joint program implementation with intentional reflection to "learn-by-doing", cross-visits and other opportunities for shared and peer-learning. Recognizing that assessing the strengths and weaknesses of local CSOs is critical for appropriate and effective capacity building; Mercy Corps utilizes capacity assessments and indices to help understand an organization's technical and organizational capacity.

This includes Mercy Corps' Organizational Capacity Index (OCI), a process that combines individual and group assessments with facilitated group reflection to assess organizational strengths and weaknesses. Building on the OCI discussions and results, Mercy Corps' Capacity Development Plan (CDP) methodology helps organizations collaboratively prioritize capacity building objectives and set their own standards for development. Together, the OCI and CDP move organizations from capacity assessment to capacity building, focusing on a range of functional and programmatic competencies, including management, leadership, technical expertise, fundraising and external relations.<sup>46</sup> The entire process is aligned with Mercy Corps training and program management materials, which can be adapted to the local operating environment and organizational level to address identified capacity needs and further strengthen the effectiveness of CSOs. The organizational capacity index (OCI) and subsequent capacity development plan (CDP) facilitates local ownership as it helps CSOs identify and address capacity needs and opens space for them to set their own development priorities.

Pact, another INGO, has a strong focus and practice in what it calls 'capacity development,' considered part of its core approach that is applied to advance its organizational vision and enhance impact, in

integration with good governance and access to markets.<sup>47</sup> Pact developed a framework that offers a continuum of development that advances partner impact. It identifies capacity support in organizational development as: systems and structure strengthening for organizational governance, financial management, human capital development, and resource mobilization. Pact describes a range of methodologies for its capacity development interventions that include consultancy services, training, mentoring and coaching, knowledge management and peer exchange and learning. Like Mercy Corps and others, Pact customizes its methods and tools depending on the type of partner organization, the organizational context, and the particular challenge being faced. It describes its five core phases of capacity development as *Scan, Analyze, Plan, Act, and Learn*. Each phase offers a set of tools that are mutually reviewed and agreed upon between Pact and its local partners.

To analyze partners' performance beyond their internal capacity and discrete systems, policies and skills, Pact developed the Organizational Performance Index (OPI). This index measures organizational sustainability, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. The OPI looks at the outcome level change in capacity holistically, using benchmarks in eight sub-domains of performance. OPI is a standardized tool that allows drawing conclusions while working with cohorts, networks, national and global level programs. USAID has recommended OPI to its missions as the preferred performance measurement tool. For more effective and sustainable impact programs and capacity development work at community and national levels, Pact is also using a portfolio of network strengthening instruments including Organizational Network Analysis (ONA). These are grounded in social network analysis and facilitation of social change processes with groups of organizations. Pact's organizational and network assessment tools are available online on the Capacity Solutions Platform that houses data from over 700 local organizations collected via various assessments over the past 5 years.

Many tools originate from donors, including private foundations, and the private sector. Foundations like the Marguerite Case Foundation have publicly-available<sup>48</sup>, widely-shared organizational strengthening tools for the non-profit sector. Many U.S.-based nonprofits have adapted these tools, and the IRC used these tools widely in the establishment of its organizational strengthening process for a U.S.-based program for local refugee nonprofit organizations, Project for Strengthening Organizations Assisting Refugees, which provided organizational technical assistance to over 45 refugee organizations over a 9 year period (2003-2012).

Local partners often independently search for tools or seek trainings from institutes or consultants. They may be drawn to tools and strategies provided by UNDP, USAID, or the World Bank. As well, tools are available by private firms like the McKinsey & Company's Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT),<sup>49</sup> developed with Venture Philanthropy Partners. The tool is free of charge and available on McKinsey's website. It offers additional supporting materials to help organizations interpret assessment results and facilitate debriefing and prioritization discussions. Further, recognizing the need for setting a learning and change process after an assessment is completed, McKinsey offers a follow-on tool, The Learning-Driven Assessment Workshop, created for foundation program officers, social investors, and others charged with determining the effectiveness of social-sector programs.<sup>50</sup> It is part of a broader initiative toward measuring social impact and social change.

INGOs look at the broad range of tools available and experiment with them, adapting them to diverse and challenging country contexts while tailoring them when establishing an organizational standard for their organizational/capacity building practice area. This process of looking at the many tools mentioned above and experimenting with different processes while gathering and incorporating partner feedback and ideas, helps INGOs develop their organizational development skills, approach and guidance.

### 4.3 Trends, insights, and new thinking

A review of the theory offered in the previous chapter points to the goals of organizational development as a behavior change that leads to improved organizational performance. The challenge that are facing is how to articulate the purpose or goal of an organizational development process with local partner organizations. Is the goal to strengthen a local partner's capacity to achieve a current project or program? Is it to help a local organization achieve high performance in order to independently manage donor funding? Is it to help build sustainable, social change agents in order to influence policy in their own countries? While these goals may not be mutually exclusive, it is important to ask these questions when establishing an organizational development process.

Questions often include: *To what end are the organizational development interventions?* In order to create an evidence-based approach, it is important to start with identifying specific objectives that an organizational process might realistically achieve. *Are interventions grounded in what local partners themselves wish to achieve?* INGOs should be realistic about what organizational development assistance seeks to accomplish, and this should first be articulated and adopted by the local organization itself. *Might capacity building support be limiting or too temporary if it only targets one project or program?* Together, INGOs and partner organizations can explore a sequence of organizational development interventions, focusing on priorities expressed by local partners. If the process is approached like building blocks, one block building on the next, it can make monitoring and measurement achievable over time. A sequenced approach can also be continued independently by the organization after an INGO-funded project has ended. *With such limited objectives, can an organization grow and survive beyond the INGO/donor project period?* The more an organization takes ownership of the process, the more likely it may be to continue to strengthen its management and internal structure, building on successes during a project period. In addition, where organizations are clear about what they want to achieve through improved capacity, and where there is clear understanding of the purpose of a monitoring and evaluation plan, it is much easier to come up with a sensible blend of tools, methodologies, and approaches that can meet the needs of different stakeholders.<sup>51</sup> It is thus critical to establish a theory of change that outlines the results the organization wants to achieve, balanced with and not subservient to donor/INGO program objectives.

INTRAC, a U.K.-based training and consulting organization, illustrates organizational development challenges through its "Onion Skin Model." It likens an organization to an onion with different layers. The outside layer represents the physical and financial resources that an organization needs, while the inside layer are the human skills and competencies.<sup>52</sup> Further, the core represents the very heart of an organization, and INTRAC's model, based on its numerous studies conducted with civil society groups, illustrates how values, culture, and identity form the intangible elements very much influenced by an organization's leadership, with a strong connection to external relationships. Many standard organizational development areas and interventions only scratch the surface rather than helping an organization dig into its core. Addressing only the surface issues might only help meet donor compliance and immediate project goals. By their very nature, the core elements are often deep-rooted, complex and more difficult to understand. Without addressing the 'health' of those areas, an organization can become 'de-capacitated,' i.e., it will not have the capacity and ability to be effective and healthy in the long-term.<sup>53</sup>

The life cycle stage of an organization is another consideration in understanding its development. The following stages of the health of an organization were introduced by Community Development Resource Association in South Africa during an INTRAC facilitated workshop in 1999:

<b>Dependence</b>	<i>Pioneer or childhood stage:</i> great learning where others play a major role in providing resources and environment required for growth.
<b>Independence</b>	<i>Early adulthood:</i> Period of testing to determine uniqueness of the organization. Using capacities and competencies to impact the wider environment.
<b>Interdependence</b>	<i>Adulthood:</i> Organization realizes its full potential through effective collaboration with others.

It is important for INGOs to encourage organizational development independence over time, serving as a mentor or resource rather than a guide over the process. This helps support an organization as it transforms from a period of ‘dependence’ to a fully collaborative stage of ‘interdependence.’

More recently, the term “Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation” was introduced in a Harvard University paper, “Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA).” The authors, researchers from Harvard and the World Bank, identified a dynamic in international reform initiatives and capacity building efforts that undermines effective action – that is, governments and organizations pretend to reform by changing what policies or organizations *look* like rather than what they actually *do*.<sup>54</sup> Capability traps, the authors posit, emerge under specific conditions which yield interventions that:

- Aim to reproduce particular external solutions considered best practice in dominant agendas
- Through pre-determined linear processes
- Inform tight monitoring of inputs and compliance to the plan, and
- Are driven from the top down.

While the research was conducted with a focus on state-building and public institutions capacity building, there are parallels for civil society organizational development practitioners. It warns against capacity building interventions that produce conformity, and adoption of strategies that discourage new ideas, products, and solutions while front-line workers in the organization prioritize routine [donor] compliance.<sup>55</sup> This idea of shifting focus from what an organization *looks like* to what an organization actually *does* is critical when designing an organizational development process and subsequent organizational development tools and methodologies. It calls for not only a participatory approach, which organizational development literature and guidance widely encourages, but a reform of the traditional organizational development methods common to achieving donor compliance and areas such as: financial management, human resources, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation. Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) encourages solving problems rather than selling solutions and for INGOs and local partners alike, it points to the need for approaches with real substance rather than a checklist of operational and technical topics.

Taking the Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) research further, the Capable Partners Learning Agenda on Local Capacity Development undertook research led by Root Change and funded by USAID. Among the plethora of evidence cited in the research, one important finding highlights:

*While internal systems and management practices contribute to an organization’s “capacity,” they do not, in and of themselves, represent capacity. High capacity organizations make a significant difference in the lives of the individuals and communities they serve. They achieve impact. How well an organization engages in the communities they serve, how much they prioritize making connections, leverage resources and knowledge within their network, and adapt to their ever-changing environment, are underappreciated “higher order” capacities that contribute to an organization’s ability to achieve impact in their work.<sup>56</sup>*

These higher order capacities are rarely included in organizational development plans and assessments provided by INGOs, yet research in the private-sector exposed their significance. For over a decade, organizational change and development literature emphasized transformational leadership, vision, and coalition building as the means to improved organizational performance, often cited in the writing of award-winning author John Kotter.<sup>57</sup> In the development field, however, the quest for evidence of organizational development assistance has focused on how management and operations improvement leads to high performance and/or achievement of program outcomes and potentially scaling-up. A different view, energized by systems-thinkers, is growing and argues that organizations are no longer about “four walls,” but are embedded within, and change, entire systems.<sup>58</sup>

Capacity assessments serve as a baseline as well as a monitoring tool, but projects and programs often end before substantial evidence can be captured and documented. There is lack of evidence that clearly shows that the traditional organizational development package of external support and tools has transformed local organizations into sustainable, dynamic change agents.

A shortage of evidence around capacity building efforts is common and cited in a report commissioned by a consortium of UK-based international non-governmental organizations that studies the current and future potential of partnerships with NNGOs in humanitarian response, based on lessons from across the commissioning agencies in four major emergency settings. Among the many findings, the study acknowledges that funds for capacity building and preparedness are limited and time bound; and many partners are ‘living on borrowed capacity’, in that they do not get to strengthen or build capacity but simply import it for the duration of a crisis.<sup>59</sup> This finding points to a lack of sustained effort, due to the short-term nature of projects, to meaningfully evaluate partner capacity and progress beyond routine program-related activities.

A similar challenge is noted in an INTRAC praxis paper about monitoring and evaluating capacity building. It cites that the evidence challenge is often related to the duration between capacity building interventions and desired end results, which can be very long. As well, capacity building is not a linear process, and an organization’s capacities are constantly fluctuating.<sup>60</sup>

Relatively speaking, INGOs are still very new at this. Organizational development has traditionally been provided to meet immediate donor and project objectives. In some cases, local organizations are being introduced to organizational development for the first time. In other cases, organizations pursue their organizational growth plans without external assistance. Several IRC partners have cited their own professional development efforts in organizational management and leadership to expand their services, improve their performance, and attract new donors. It is possible that INGOs are getting it wrong, and the traditional models of organizational development may be achieving short-term project success, but not solid, long-term organizational change.

Yet, during interviews of local partners during the Keystone surveys as well as this latest 6-month exploration of local partner support in 5 country programs, all partners interviewed stated that they welcome more support in their organizational development from the IRC. If the IRC is committed to being responsive to its local partners, then it must respond with an informed, systematic approach to supporting local partners that is based on theory, new research, and innovative thinking, particularly around monitoring and evaluation of organizational development interventions and their desired effect.

**Section 5: the IRC’S Current Organizational Development Support**

The IRC’s programs around the world help provide health care, education, protection, economic livelihoods and empowerment to the world’s most vulnerable people. In addition, in emergency contexts, IRC is doing its work increasingly in partnership with local organizations that have a deep reach into communities. This reality, as well as donor trends toward local empowerment and ownership, has presented the IRC with opportunities to help build local capacity in technical and organizational areas. This presents an opportunity to support sustainable service delivery systems while expanding the reach of the IRC’s programs and staff deep into the communities we target, including those we may not have had access to by other means. This does not only expand our reach in the most difficult of environments, it also provides one of the best potential routes for bringing programs and services to scale.

Before the IRC can achieve such a vision, it is relevant to assess where we are placed as an organization in this field. The IRC supports its civil society partners’ organizational development when a program or project places an emphasis on partnerships and small grant implementation by a local partner(s).

**5.1 Snapshot of 5 IRC country programs**

The following IRC programs strengthen both technical and organizational areas - in some cases with a view toward increasing local partners’ ability to directly manage donor funds as per the donor’s program and policy goals.

<b>Partnership for Advancing Community-Based Services (PACS)</b>	
<b>Location:</b> Liberia	<b>Partnerships:</b> 2 “first tier” partners; 45 smaller “second tier” organizations
<b>Program overview:</b> Consolidate local organization skills and resources to increase access to quality community-based health services, support the implementation of effective health communications strategies, and improve access to safe WASH services.	
<b>Organizational development notes:</b> In addition to general financial and resource management and other organizational development skills, essential soft skills such as professional conduct, advocacy for change, team work, critical thinking, and conflict resolution.	<b>Duration:</b> 3 years
<b>Project for Local Empowerment (PLE)</b>	
<b>Location:</b> Thai/Burma border; South East Burma	<b>Partnerships:</b> 32 local organizations
<b>Program overview:</b> PLE works to build the technical, management, and leadership capacities of community based organization partners to deliver efficient and effective health, education, food security and protection services for conflict-affected populations in South East Burma.	
<b>Organizational development notes:</b> Management, finance, training of trainers, adult learning methodology, organizational development certification courses.	<b>Duration:</b> 5 years

<b>Protection, Assistance, and Reintegration Centers (PARCS)</b>	
<b>Location:</b> Iraq	<b>Partnerships:</b> 4 organizations  <b>Duration:</b> 1 Year
<b>Program overview:</b> The IRC operates PARCS centers in 10 governorates with four local partners to provide direct assistance to extremely vulnerable individuals through protection monitoring, legal service provision, and referrals for quality gender based violence services, information dissemination, and advocacy.	
<b>Organizational development notes:</b> Organizational development to enhance technical and operational capacity including leadership skills, media skills, advocacy and awareness raising, resolving and managing conflicts, project management, proposal writing, and strategic planning.	
<b>Syria Regional Response (SRR)</b>	
<b>Location:</b> Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq	<b>Partnerships:</b> 12 active partnerships  <b>Duration:</b> 3 years and ongoing
<b>About the program:</b> The IRC provides a range of services to meet the complex needs of individuals and families. Beneficiaries move easily between programs through co-located services, mobile units, and strong referral systems. Community members play a central role in shaping and delivering aid. Programs include health, women and girls protection, education, and economic recovery and development	
<b>Organizational development notes:</b> The country strategy action plan outlines a commitment to support partners in their organizational development. The region is currently working with partners to identify and respond to organizational needs.	
<b>Peace Initiative Kenya (PIK)</b>	
<b>Location:</b> Kenya	<b>Partnerships:</b> 9 local organizations  <b>Duration:</b> 3 years
<b>Program overview:</b> PIK is a USAID funded project supporting prevention of gender based violence (GBV) and improving the current GBV response frameworks at the national and local levels. PIK aims to strengthen county engagement in preventing and responding to GBV and increase access and utilization of GBV services through community outreach and other awareness raising efforts.	
<b>Organizational development notes:</b> Leadership, governance and management, financial resources, operations and logistics, human resources, mediation, negotiation, advocacy and lobbying, networking.	

As noted by local partners, the IRC programs offer strong technical strengthening support as well as mentorship on compliance-related areas like financial and project reporting and human resources management. However, tools that help diagnose partners' organizational capabilities related to organizational functions such as leadership, strategy, external relations, board governance and others identify additional weaknesses and opportunities for improvement that IRC staff struggle with. The IRC capacity building managers and partnership staff are often not equipped to adequately take on capacity building in those areas. Understandably, staff may lack formal training and technical knowledge about NGO organizational mechanics as well as first-hand experience in particular niche areas like advocacy, team-building or board governance.

The IRC will often contract short-term technical assistance to provide a workshop or training to respond to the needs identified by its partners in their organizational improvement plans. In other cases, the IRC will use its own field staff working in particular organizational areas like human resources, financial management, or monitoring and evaluation, or it will deploy generalists like grant managers to train and assist local partners. The challenge with this approach is that it focuses strictly on compliance and the IRC's way of doing business, missing opportunities to openly discuss the broader fields of financial and resource management, for example. This limits the conversation to a particular grant or project rather than broader organizational sustainability and the capacities and needs a small organization might want to address.

The IRC's local partners are often thinking ahead beyond a current IRC project. Most organizations operating in a crisis environment are meeting immediate needs while trying to plan beyond the emergency, exploring how to position themselves in the eventual post-conflict environment. One local Syrian organization put it this way:

*"We see healthcare as an emergency service and a priority, but for the longer term strategy we have to move toward development. We have good coordination and cooperation with the local councils and are trying to connect projects to the needs. The time is coming not to be stuck in emergency work."*

The IRC's local partners are increasingly asking that capacity building activities take into account the trajectory an organization wants to take rather than the present, project-focused level of technical and organizational support the IRC traditionally provides. If the rationale of providing organizational development to the IRC local partners is to improve program performance; it is not taking into account the theory of organizational development explored above.

Such a consideration points to the need to address organizational change and adaptability skills that can ultimately help local organizations grow and improve their response to new crisis or post-crisis recovery and development. By not recognizing the full breadth and potential of organizational development, the IRC risks that it inadvertently restrains its partners in a short-term mindset that is exacerbated by funding for "projects."<sup>61</sup> Any new or improved approach to the IRC's provision of organizational development will have to first wrestle with current donor-prescribed goals and objectives. Second, it will also have to address local partner needs and desires for more information, training, and strategic thinking, which often start with the building blocks of what makes an organization effective, responsive to client needs, and adaptable to change.

Another consideration for the IRC is the willingness of local partners to help with the development of tools and be partners in providing capacity strengthening to more nascent IRC partners. The IRC's Partnership for Advancing Community Based Services (PACS) program in Liberia will utilize the experience and skills of two seasoned national partners to help strengthen the capacity of up to 45 community organizations throughout Liberia. One mentor partner stated their organization's desire to be part of the PACS organizational development design process:

*"We hope that we can have an organizational development agreement that puts us all on the same page, and that we participate in tools development. We don't want to just receive tools, we want to offer feedback and to contribute to creating them. Helping develop the tools builds ownership and helps us learn continually."*

This sentiment points to the desire for local ownership. The IRC local partners that were interviewed during the research process expressed a desire to own their development process as well as assist the IRC in establishing training and assessment standards. In fact, local partners expressed enthusiasm, as shown in the following quote, at the idea that they themselves could become trainers or mentors to other IRC partners around the world.

*"I would love it if we can also become a mentor organization. This would be an opportunity to grow full blast."*

Assistance and feedback from local partners could help inform the IRC's work in organizational development and help provide unique evidence of an organizational development process' effectiveness.

### 5.2 A look at IRC's OD process

An in-depth look into these 5 IRC country programs reveals that the process by which organizational development is provided to local partners uses a common approach and tools that aim to improve organizational performance. The common goal of such a process is the improvement of systems and processes that directly, or adversely, impact program compliance.

At the process level, IRC programs that were examined had a fairly standard approach that began with partner mapping and selection. Gradually, through a series of organizational assessments, the IRC and its local partners created an organizational work plan, often in a participatory, needs-driven manner with partner-led deliverables and timelines. The following is an example of how several IRC programs move from selecting a local partner all the way through to building capacity and evaluating organizational progress:



This standard process is common within the humanitarian and development field. There are many tools and techniques that are collated and shared by humanitarian training organizations, like INTRAC, private companies and foundations as well as INGOs like PACT (mentioned previously in Section 4). Tools are often shaped and adapted from a variety of private, government and non-government sector resources and aligned with general theories of organizational development and change. INGOs often invest in their own staff trainings through international or national trainings that are offered and endorsed by donor government agencies. The tools introduced during such trainings help establish an industry standard, with the general caveat that tailoring tools based on program needs and local context is an important element in applying them. A review of various websites and resources show that the theory behind many organizational development tools refer back to organizational development theory mentioned in Section 4.

While this process seems to be the IRC's adopted system of measuring partner capacity and providing follow-on support, the framework is loosely structured and often the assistance provided is being done by staff that learn and struggle along the way, with little formal training in organizational change and development.

The IRC has made efforts to standardize tools and create a logical, standard-based process that not only supports an organizational development process for local partners, but also elevates the process to higher-level thinking about how the IRC approaches partnership and the gaps in guidance and policies.

However, without a more systematic investment in knowledge and resources, IRC program staff have had to learn quickly as they generate information and tools that might be helpful to their partners. They are often hired for their technical skills and then must shift to provide organizational development assistance, an area that may be unfamiliar. There is a mixed review of the IRC's current organizational development support, but across the board, all local organizations interviewed as part of this six-month research indicated that the IRC is well-placed to provide this much needed support.

During interviews with local partner organizations, the following points were highlighted as organizational areas that the IRC should target as it considers how to enhance its support to its local partners:

- Human Resources Management: "...it is the heart of the organization. Recruiting qualified staff, retention of good staff members, motivation . . . all of this requires good human resources policies. Good human resources policies equals good finance and good asset management." Liberian national partner
- Budgeting and Financial Management: "As an evolving organization, we don't have experience with what to look for and what to build into budgets, and why." Liberian local partner
- Strategic Planning: "We were established as a response to a crisis, so we didn't plan for the long-term. Since we don't know when the crisis will end, we lack the capacity to think strategically." Syrian local partner
- Board Governance: "We need help with board trainings because organizations often start as volunteers and then have to formalize very quickly." Syrian diaspora partner
- Monitoring and Evaluation: "We have difficulty in managing all the data and outcomes that would help donors see what we have accomplished, and gain external visibility for what we do. We need help with how to collect data and how to analyze the data." Syrian local partner
- Business development: "One new component in organizational development is social enterprise – a business attached to the organization. For example, renting out space to support the organization to pay bills and also supports career development." Liberian national partner
- Advocacy and public relations: "We need more support with gaining public attention [advocacy, media] to share our work publicly. This would support fundraising through exposure, and then we continue to improve through more grants and diverse donors." Syrian local organization
- Working with the media: "Working with the media is also something we need to improve. We are not very knowledgeable in how to outreach to advertise our services to women." Iraqi local partner
- Trust building, team building, negotiations, conflict management: Identified through regional conversations between IRC staff and local partners.

One positive aspect IRC's support is the participatory intent of the organizational development process. For example, the IRC programs that were reviewed as part of this study employed an organizational growth and change work plan, likely adapted from a widely available pre-existing tool. The work plan offers a discussion guide on how to facilitate a "reflection session" with the local partner organization. It encourages a respectful, agreed-upon, participatory process in preparation of partner's organizational work plan.

There were differences among the capacity assessment tools across the IRC programs. Also, the organizational areas evaluated during the organizational assessment differed. This could be due to suggestions by the donor or the need to create a hybrid tool that suits a program when no staff guidance or training is provided. In other cases, local partners have been through their own organizational assessment through its self-driven learning process or during a partnership with another non-governmental organization or international non-governmental organization.

## Section 6: Challenges, Opportunities, and Moving Forward

### 6.1 Challenges

CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, a non-profit organization committed to improving the effectiveness of national and international actors who provide humanitarian assistance, peace practice, and sustainable development, undertook a research process on the impact of international aid on local communities and organizations. Their findings, compiled in a series of documents including a short discussion guide, identify several obstacles to meaningfully engaging with communities. These findings are relevant to the conversation around working with local partners and capacity building activities with civil society groups:

- *Engagement requires time:* Agencies focus more on speed and efficiency than the quality of relationships with aid recipients, and rigid reporting requirements do not enable meaningful engagement.
- *Engagement requires access and presence:* The inability to physically reach certain communities restricts an aid agency's ability to truly understand the capacities, needs, and context of that community.
- *Engagement requires resources:* In order to ensure effective and meaningful engagement, money is needed to pay for staff time spent in the field.
- *Engaging people effectively requires specific skills:* Nurturing collaborative approaches to planning and decision-making requires people with relevant skills.
- *Engagement needs to be measured and valued:* Many of the dimensions of engagement—the quality of relationships, levels of trust, equity in decision-making, and ownership—are not easy to measure.

Many international organizations are facing these challenges, and the IRC continues to address them through the development of tools, systems, and new methods of engagements. The challenges of engagement affect not only how we reach communities, but how we work constructively with local partners. Capacity building activities also requires time, access, resources, skills and evidence of effectiveness. The CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2015 study calls for support for local organizations, yet also found that capacity development, whether it be technical or organizational development support, is a challenging process. It requires that outside interveners like international organizations develop the skills to meaningfully address local organizations' capacity issues.

This is an area of work that humanitarian agencies are struggling with. In emergency contexts, engaging partners and engaging in activities associated with an organizational development plan is extraordinarily challenging. Remote management settings, like the IRC's program in Syria, face a myriad of issues as outlined in a recent study conducted by Tufts University Feinstein International Center. The authors found that international groups are frequently disinclined to partner with local organizations during an emergency, especially if there is no prior relationship on which to build.<sup>62</sup> Yet, an understanding of the local context and the pre-crisis situation is critical in shaping responsive, appropriate, effective and impactful interventions during an emergency.<sup>63</sup> In crisis settings like Syria, it is the efforts of local partners that allowed the IRC to reach 72% of its clients. In turn, clients rely on INGOs to strengthen local organizations so that they can manage and sustain assistance at a rapid pace.

After the emergency phase, some of the IRC's programs that are funded to provide organizational development support beyond technical and programmatic capacity strengthening are struggling with finding the right resources. The tools, experts/consultants, and language/cultural appropriate training materials to address their partners' needs are typically not easily found. Programs like the IRC's Peace Initiative Kenya and the Project for Local Empowerment in Thailand have created tools and acquired expertise through working closely with partner organizations and consistently supporting their growth. But the lack of a knowledge hub or dedicated technical unit staff to institutionalize the knowledge and tools has created a perception that the IRC doesn't do this work, or doesn't do it well. Furthermore, good practices and tools are not shared across the IRC programs or offices, creating missed opportunities to educate and inform new programs. There have been limited resources dedicated to pursue a meaningful,

sustained technical unit level effort to undertake this important task. The challenge is in part due to the limited number of IRC programs with a strong partnership component, and programs that work with local partners often focus on technical areas rather than organizational development.

The IRC leadership and staff in the 3 countries visited (Liberia, Iraq, and Jordan), expressed some frustration with the IRC's concepts of partnership and associated organizational development support. The following are comments made during visits to the different country programs covered during this research. They highlight some of the institutional challenges facing the IRC:

- *Local partners are eager to learn and often we limit our training to technical areas like case management, rule of law, and financial compliance.*
- *We are keen on IRC-wide peer learning around organizational development of local partners.*
- *The IRC needs an attitude change toward partners. Partners need to be heard and treated like equals. . Our approach [lack of] underlies how we see partners and treat partners.*
- *There is a lack of trust toward grassroots CSOs and they are not taken as seriously as they should be.*
- *There is no clear vision for organizational development: Is it to create clones of the IRC? Are the IRC systems the best model for our local partners?*
- *The IRC needs the right skills and attitude to do the soft stuff [effective partnerships; organizational development]. This means we have to make the shift from viewing them only as contractors to full partners.*
- *We [the IRC] need an established timeline of what is to happen in the development of our partners, with associated tools and resources.*
- *The IRC [capacity building] efforts did not take into account best practices of capacity strengthening and could not identify what change it was contributing to in the short or medium term.*

### 6.2 Opportunities

Maintaining the current process of organizational development may cause organizations like the IRC to miss important, emerging opportunities. The following are some opportunities, and risks:

- Establishing an organizational development platform (system, approach, knowledge hub, etc.) that responds to local partners' needs, can mitigate staff's patching together information and training materials, hence continually reinventing the wheel.
- As long as partner strengthening is limited to technical areas, INGOs miss opportunities to assist local partners in becoming sustainable organizations fully engaged in all aspects of their organizational growth.
- INGOs may miss opportunities for their own staff members' professional growth. The pedagogy (adult learning, participatory methods, facilitation skills, mentorship), and theories that support an organizational change process are complementary to any capacity building process (technical skills training, staff trainings and workshops, training of trainers).
- IRC has a unique opportunity to become a thought-leader in organizational development, an increasingly important area of humanitarian practice. Without organization-wide commitment to partnership strengthening in organizational development, INGOs may miss intellectual and strategic program opportunities that may help influence donor policies.

- The lack of evidence around organizational development's impact offers new opportunities for the IRC to integrate an evidence framework to its partnership initiatives. The IRC's unique expertise in crisis and recovery settings provides a timely opportunity to create a partnership model grounded in evidence-based technical and organizational development practices.

The IRC is gaining experience in organizational development of local partners as programs are increasingly working in partnership and establishing their own policies and frameworks. Harnessing staff skills and experience, lessons learned, and testing tools and resources can inform a future, formalized organizational development approach.

Local partners can play a key role in the development of the IRC's OD approach. Rather than an international non-governmental organization (INGO) or donor creating any one plan or set of tools, local partners can serve as reviewers and evaluators, or designers. Local partners can provide constructive criticism and ground-truth methods to ensure effectiveness.

The use of technology offers additional opportunities to expand the IRC's support to partners include. Supported by the U.K.'s Department for International Development, the IRC is working with partners and other Syrian stakeholders to design and launch an online platform. The resources offered on the platform will be relevant for remotely-managed operations inside Syria, whether operated by the IRC, its partners, or other agencies. Key modules and resources will address operational and technical capacity building and will be tailored to the demands of remotely managed operations.

### 6.3 Moving forward

The discussions that were held during the IRC's recent learning event on Organizational Development of Local Civil Society Partners, helped IRC develop a deeper understanding of the experience and evidence base around organizational development and contributed to highlight potential capacity development interventions and approaches. The discussions and group activities conducted during the event further advanced the IRC's understanding of organizational development support and how to effectively strengthens local partners' ability to continue critical programs and services well after an IRC program has ended. The IRC is working toward establishing a strengthened organizational development approach that will not only contribute to more effectively achieving program goals, but that will also contribute to local partner sustainability. The IRC further intends to weave into this approach evidence generation on organizational development and how this ultimately contributes to better partnerships.

As was highlighted during the learning event, many local partners are becoming more educated about their organizational trajectory and learning how to get to where their organizations needs to be. Some of this awareness is a result of self-learning, while increased knowledge is gained through partnerships with NGOs and INGOs. In the most severe crisis environments, local partners often operate with limited information and knowledge, yet they are aspiring to grow stronger in order to consistently meet people's needs. In a similar context, an organization might access diaspora supporters or another international network. Many local partners are savvy consumers of organizational development literature and techniques. In all these scenarios, organizations like the IRC are well placed to support local organizations' organizational development. This kind of support strongly aligns with the IRC's strategic objectives: responsiveness, scale and reach, best use of resources, speed and timeliness, and effectiveness. In reality, organizational development of local partners represents a relatively limited investment when compared to the potential strategic and sustainability returns. The dividends of this type of engagement are potentially far reaching and long lasting, and this should be driving renewed IRC partnership and engagement efforts with its local partners.

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