

Appendix 4: Country case studies

The findings of the three in-depth case study countries (DRC, Myanmar and Ukraine) are integrated in the main findings of the evaluation and are a core analytical component underpinning the overall analysis and conclusions. The summaries below highlight the salient findings for each of the three countries. These are the summaries prepared by the national researchers for the ‘sense-making’ workshop with EBA and Sida in Stockholm in October 2023 – and therefore reflect the key observations derived by the national researchers from their in-country interviews and literature reviews.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Context: The complex and protracted crises in the DRC have resulted in 25 percent of the population (approx. 26.4 million people) estimated to require humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2023). The DRC has the largest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Africa - approx. 6.2 million people - and globally, it has the highest number of food insecure people (Sida, 2023b), and high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Humanitarian crises in DRC are driven by decades of conflict, fragility and insecurity, mainly in the Eastern provinces, and are exacerbated by natural disasters, epidemics and poverty. Humanitarian access is largely hampered by the presence of armed groups and absence of infrastructure (OCHA, 2021).

Swedish engagement in DRC

Sweden is an important donor to DRC and it is among Sweden’s top five recipient countries of humanitarian assistance (OCHA FTS). Between 2021 - 2023, Swedish humanitarian aid to the DRC totalled

SEK 1.2 billion, but nearly halved over the period (from SEK 504 million in 2021 to SEK 245 million in 2023).

Sweden has a strong and long-standing presence in the DRC, with in-country staff actively engaged in the humanitarian donor group, Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), nexus agenda, and a donor representative on the DRC Humanitarian Fund (DHF) advisory board. However, staff capacity was stretched and limited, with only one staff responsible for all the nine Sida humanitarian partners while the in-country Embassy team has limited human resource capacity to support in-country humanitarian operations.

Sida's Humanitarian Country Appeal (HCA) 2023 prioritised protection, food insecurity and malnutrition among IDPs and the host communities, with funds channelled through nine (9) international partners; 5 UN agencies and 4 INGOs. The appeal also prioritised partnerships with organisations operating in hard-to-reach areas, and those in strategic engagement with LNAs.

Localisation in DRC

Most international actors in the DRC are committed to advance localisation by implementing reforms for a more equitable and inclusive humanitarian landscape in the country.

Opportunities have increased for LNA representation and participation in country humanitarian coordination mechanisms, notably in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), DHF advisory board (which includes 3 LNAs), cluster and sub-cluster coordination, among others. There is also CONAFOHD, an umbrella platform for LNAs which is made up of five provincial platforms for LNAs to engage on localisation in the country.

Recent examples of localisation progress included shifts in allocations from the DHF: 53.7 percent of DHF funds in 2022 were allocated to LNAs (both direct - 46.4 percent and indirect – 7.3 percent), and the DHF also decentralised its operations to Eastern

DRC where 90 percent of the funds are targeted (OCHA, 2022b). At the same time there are on-going discussions among humanitarian actors on overhead cost sharing with LNAs, equitable partnership principles and consortia arrangement with LNAs.

Despite the progress made, there are still some obstacles to localisation in the DRC. Interviewees noted that progress is too slow and disjointed, explained by one LNA; “we have talked a lot about localisation and yet we have not seen it in reality. Time for speeches is over, we have to act now.” The reluctance of international partners to recognise and give equal space to LNAs coupled with Sweden’s lack of clarity of its localisation expectations was said not to bond well with the goal of localisation.

Methodology

The researcher conducted 27 interviews: 2 Sweden officials; 13 INGOs and UN agencies; and 12 interviews with LNA partners of Sweden’s SPOs (including 4 women-led LNAs). Nineteen respondents from DRC responded to the global online survey for this evaluation: 61.5 percent LNAs and 38.4 percent Sweden officials, UN and INGOs. Nearly, all interviews with international actors were conducted remotely, while interviews with LNAs were conducted in person.

Summary of findings

Strategies: Sweden had no localisation definition or strategy, but its approach was generally understood by partners in DRC to be aligned with the Grand Bargain (GB) definition. When compared to other donors, Sweden was perceived as less assertive and clear about its localisation goal to partners, who used their own organisational interpretation or the Grand Bargain definition for guidance. The reluctance of Sweden to clearly define localisation expectations were partly premised on its assumption that all partners are signatories to

the Grand Bargain and will somehow fulfil their commitments. But without Sweden's clarity and communication of its localisation expectation to partners, there were wide variations and inconsistencies of their localisation approaches.

Funding: SPOs noted that Sweden's flexible humanitarian funding (inclusive of overheads cost) had either been stable or slightly increased over the years but did not provide information on the amount of funding received from Sweden. However, official Sweden (Sida) data show a general decline in Sweden's humanitarian funding to the DRC overall (see above).

There was a similar challenge with accessing information on funding pass through to LNAs by SPOs. Neither SPOs nor LNAs interviewed shared relevant information on pass through. As one LNA noted; "we do not even know how much our international partner receive from Sida. There has never been a clear communication related to money." Some international organisations acknowledged LNA criticism around the lack of pass-through: one INGO explained: "we are also guilty of the same ICR issue as other INGOs. ...we give nothing from the ICR we receive from Sida." Sweden's lack of assertiveness and clarity with SPOs on the mandatory pass-through rates and the percentage of overhead cost sharing with LNAs remain a barrier.

Leadership and influence: There was notable improvement in the participation of LNAs in various coordination mechanisms: localisation working group, HCT, DHF advisory board, cluster and sub-cluster under the UN-led formal coordination mechanism but these were not specifically attributable to Sweden's influence or efforts. The centralised nature of humanitarian decisions making still limits LNAs humanitarian participation and leadership at the country (Barbelet, et al, 2019). Being a large and important humanitarian donor to the DRC, Sweden could leverage its soft powers to improve LNA's meaningful participation and leadership at the country level.

Partnerships: Several interviewees noted that a lack of clarity by Sweden on risk-sharing drives SPO's fear or unwillingness to partner equitably with LNAs in DRC. Fear of fiduciary risk made several SPOs avoid partnerships with LNAs, especially those they perceived not to meet their requirements. At best, SPOs engaged in short term sub-contracts instead of long-term and equitable partnerships with LNAs, even though they routinely relied on LNAs to implement in places where access is constrained due to insecurity. The short-term nature of Sweden's humanitarian funding and the demand to satisfy donors' due diligence requirements complicated relationships and resulted in unequal partnership models. But interviewees emphasised the importance of long-term and equal partnerships with LNAs for mutual accountability.

Capacity development: There was no evidence that Sweden prioritised or pushed SPOs on the capacity development of LNAs in DRC. Instead, Sweden's humanitarian funding priority to save lives was felt to be at odds with the demand to develop LNAs capacity. Interviews revealed that SPOs still implemented a range of capacity development activities, however the focus was on meeting donors' compliance requirements to minimise fiduciary risk – a source of criticism by some LNAs (Barbelet et al, 2019). The top-down approach to capacity development was also seen by LNAs as problematic. One LNA explained; “most capacity-building activities are designed and imposed on LNAs. Very often, institutional capacity assessments are carried out by INGOs/UN, who determine and develop LNAs capacity building needs, tools and sessions.” However, LNAs prioritised capacity development areas that support staff welfare and organisational institutional capacity and are also cognisant of their own capacity although international actors do not always recognise it.

Conclusions and lessons

- Most LNAs lacked sufficient information about Sida's work and contribution to the humanitarian response in the DRC. In fact, some LNAs were not aware that the humanitarian funds received from SPOs were Swedish funding.
- Some interviewees expressed a lack of trust between LNAs and SPOs, with LNAs voicing suspicions that some SPOs were misusing Sida's flexible funding.
- USAID/BHA, another major donor like Sweden/Sida in DRC, is already directly funding to some local actors. Sweden could take lessons from BHA on its direct funding to LNAs in the country. Given that the presence of strong national organisations with high comparative advantage to international organisations, there was a clear call Sweden to pilot direct funding to such LNAs.
- Even though Sida's funding may be small compared to other donors, in terms of their global portfolio, it was still perceived as an important entry point to other bigger funding opportunities including ECHO.
- The evaluation revealed the methodological difficulties of conducting comprehensive research with local actors: most LNAs were reluctant to take part in the online survey, which required several reminders by email, phone calls and physical visits to enlist their participation. There were also issues with the accuracy and meaning of the French translation of some difficult words and concept used in the interviews such as "engaging communities, localization of aid, accountability to affected people".

Myanmar

Context: The complex humanitarian crisis in Myanmar is rooted in the country's long history of civil war since independence in 1948. The crisis is driven by a combination of the political militarisation, systematic human rights violations, armed conflicts, natural disasters, poverty, and long-term displacement and re-displacement of the population (Sida, 2023).

According to the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, approximately 17.6 million people (around a third of the population) required humanitarian assistance, compared to 1 million and 14.4 million people in 2021 and 2022 respectively (OCHA 2023c). The increased need resulted from the significant impact of the 2021 military coup, which exacerbated the extreme poverty (around 50 percent of the population are impoverished). Additionally, there are approximately 1.8 million IDPs, the majority within the Sagaing region (Sida 2023). The coup also heightened violence and worsened the insecurity, highly constraining humanitarian access – Myanmar scored 5/5 in the ACAPS humanitarian Access Index.

Swedish engagement in Myanmar

Sweden is one of the most significant humanitarian donors in Myanmar, contributing 5.8 percent of the total humanitarian funding in 2023 (Sida, 2023). Its contribution to Myanmar humanitarian funding increased in the last years in response to the military coup of 2021. Between 2021 – 2013, Sweden contributed SEK 289 million to the Myanmar humanitarian response.

Sweden's 2023 humanitarian funding priorities to Myanmar emphasised a life-saving multisectoral approach to provide humanitarian assistance including food security and protection through five international partners - 2 UN agencies and 3 INGOs who operate in a wide geographic reach, and with direct and indirect presence in the conflict affected regions of the country.

Although Sweden has a diplomatic presence/embassy in Myanmar, key staff responsible for overseeing the humanitarian and development portfolio were relocated out of Myanmar because of security reasons. This poses a challenge to coordination and communication with partners in the country.

Localisation in Myanmar

Sweden is among the 12 donors of the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund (MHF) that funds over 40 LNAs and has three LNAs representation on the advisory board. In parallel to MHF, Local Intermediary Actors (LIA), a consortium of 14 national organizations that represents hundreds of community-based organizations (CBO)s across Myanmar also facilitate locally-led humanitarian response and offers opportunities for LNAs collective leadership.

There is also LNAs representation in the UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) that oversees Myanmar's humanitarian response and coordination. As part of the HCT, LNAs are actively engaged in national cluster and sub-national cluster thematic working groups.

Yet despite all the above, gains to LNAs leadership and participation in the humanitarian response during Covid-19 is felt to have regressed, especially since the military coup of 2021, with LNAs having to maintain a low profile for fear of possible security profiling, harassments, arrest and attacks (HARP, 2022). Additionally, the European Union Fund that supported localisation engagements among INGOs and LNAs scaled down and/or closed some of their programmes because of the military coup and subsequent humanitarian crises.

Methodology

The Myanmar researcher conducted 20 interviews: 3 Sweden officials; 7 INGOs and UN agency which are Swedish SPOs; and 10 LNA partners of these SPOs, in addition to desk reviews.

Summary of findings

Strategies: LNAs and SPOs felt that Sweden did not have and communicate a clear understanding of its localisation definition or strategy to partners. Although in general, Sweden's localisation strategy was perceived to be aligned with the Grand Bargain definition. In the absence of a clear localisation guidance or communication from Sweden, partners, UN agencies and INGOs referred to their organisation localisation strategy where it existed, resulting in significant differences and inconsistencies in localisation approaches across SPOs.

Funding: Sweden does not currently provide any direct funding to LNAs although it is in the process of exploring how it might do so in a pilot, including through consortia and collaboration with other donors. Decisions on this were pending at time of this research.

Presently, Swedish funding only reaches LNAs indirectly through its flexible funding to international partners. Evidence on pass-through funding to LNAs from SPOs was unclear and inconsistent. Interviews with SPOs showed a lack of transparency on funding information - very few of them shared relevant financial data and what was provided was inconsistent or incomplete. This data did not present a clear picture of progress made by Sweden and partners to achieve the 25 percent Grand Bargain commitment. Interviewees from LNAs were critical that without mandatory or specific allocation on pass-through funding by donors like Sweden, the 25 percent mark may not be attainable.

Leadership and influence: Apart from LNA representation on the MHF advisory board, in general, evidence on improved LNA

participation and leadership in Myanmar was weak. Moreover, LNAs interviewees still felt that most decisions were made by the expert advisory board members of the MHF – comprised of the donors, HCT and UN/INGOs representatives, which made LNAs representation on the board superficial.

Partnerships: Sweden's support to the Myanmar humanitarian crisis has helped to support formation of partnerships between SPOs and a vast network of LNAs. For example, the MHF, a recipient of Sweden humanitarian support has close to 40 LNAs beneficiaries. While this is a positive development, some of the new partnerships with LNAs were considered reactive to the constricting humanitarian access in the country, especially for international agencies.

However, interviews noted some good practices of equitable partnership implemented by Sida's development-funded projects. For example, SPOs holistically included LNAs as part of the project design and decision making. They suggested that Sida's humanitarian unit could incorporate some of the creative and equitable partnership models implemented and learned by Sida's development cooperation in their own approaches instead of reinventing the wheel.

Capacity development: Capacity development activities provided to LNAs by SPOs largely focused on compliance requirements but fell short of addressing LNAs' long-term technical and institutional development priorities. Sweden's humanitarian funding priority of saving lives and the short-term nature of humanitarian funding without clear capacity strengthening budget lines remained a barrier to prioritising capacity development under its humanitarian funding.

Conclusions and lessons

- The level of distrust from LNAs towards SPOs was striking.
- LNAs and SPOs expressed a broad range of concerns and priorities around localisation making it difficult to draw hard

conclusions: some viewed partnership as the most critical aspect of localisation, others viewed flexible and long-term funding as the most important element of localisation, while some were concerned with the power dynamics between LNAs and SPOs as the most vital element of localisation.

- The evaluation was conducted within a short timeframe which limited the number of interviews the country consultant could carry out within the available time for the study. However, of the 10 LNAs interviewed, they represent hundreds of small NGOs and community-based organizations, therefore, it is safe to conclude that a lot of the concerns raised by these 10 KIIs reflect those faced by others LNAs in Myanmar
- Generating financial data as part of the study was challenging, and most SPOs were either reluctant or unwilling to share financial information, especially on pass through funds to LNAs. And even what was provided was not standardized financial data which made it challenging to make sense of it.

Ukraine

Context: The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 caused an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the country. Approximately 17.6 million people were estimated to require humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2023. The war also led to the mass displacement of the population, 5.1 million internally displaced inside Ukraine and 6.2 million Ukrainian refugees globally by 2023.

The crisis led to serious protection challenges: nearly 15.4 million people in need of various protection support in 2023, while humanitarian access remained a challenge, especially along the frontlines, in newly accessible areas (NAA) and in areas controlled by the Russian Federation. National non-governmental organisations and local volunteer networks remain essential in enabling access to humanitarian assistance in these areas (Sida, 2023).

Swedish engagement in Ukraine

Sweden is one of the major humanitarian donors to Ukraine, which is one of the top five recipient countries of Swedish humanitarian funding, receiving SEK 797 million between 2021-2023. Since the Russian invasion in February 2022, Sweden's humanitarian funding to Ukraine has increased, with SEK 544 million extended that year. Sweden also undertook various initiatives to respond to the war, including adopting macroeconomic support and sanctions against Russia.

At the country level, the Embassy staff (though few) are remotely supported by Stockholm based staff (about 35) and are actively engaged in Humanitarian Country Team and the small donor group on Ukraine's humanitarian response.

Sweden's humanitarian priorities in 2023 covered: assistance in hard-to-reach areas, displacement-related concerns, locally-led response

and providing protection services which were channelled via 7 international partners – 3 UN agencies and 4 INGO partners. There is also ongoing consideration to pilot direct support to LNAs.

Localisation in Ukraine

Localisation initiatives implemented in Ukraine include: the 2022 “If not now-when?” appeal signed by 37 LNAs on the implementation of localisation. LNAs are represented on the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT); participate in the cluster coordination meetings where there is a localisation working group under the Protection cluster; represented on the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (UHF) advisory board (3 LNAs) and are also beneficiary of the fund. There is also ongoing NGO Forum advocacy on localisation.

Increasingly, international actors recognise LNA capacity and rely on them, especially to gain access in hard-to-reach areas. Many LNAs are working in partnership with INGOs and UN agencies to provide humanitarian assistance. For example, at the end of 2022, UHF partnership increased from 51 (prior to the invasion) to 92, of which 35 are with LNAs who received 33 percent (23 percent direct and 10 percent indirect) of its funds in 2022. Moreover, nearly 300 CBOs, CSOs and volunteer groups working as frontline responders received funds or other forms of support from the UHF in 2022 (OCHA, 2022). All these are progress in the right direction, providing opportunities to LNAs to accumulate the necessary capacity to engage in the humanitarian response.

However, some obstacles to localisation still persist, notably: the lack of direct donor funds to LNAs due to associated fiduciary risk, complicated due diligence procedures, language barriers, and a highly centralised humanitarian system and decision-making processes that exclude LNAs.

Methodology

The Ukraine researchers conducted 26 interviews: 2 Sweden officials; 13 INGOs and UN; and 11 interviews with LNAs, in addition to desk review.

Summary of findings

Strategies: Although most partners in Ukraine perceived localisation as a process to empower LNAs in the humanitarian response, its definition and approaches were not clearly articulated and differed significantly between LNAs and international partners. Notably, LNAs expressed a clear lack of understanding of localisation as well as Sweden's strategy but SPOs perceived Sweden's localisation approach to be aligned to the Grand Bargain commitment even though there was no clear communication from Sweden on this. In the absence of any clear guidance by Sweden, SPOs expressed confusion or a lack of clarity of Sweden's localisation expectations of them.

Funding: Since the beginning of the invasion, interviewees noted an increase in funds transferred by SPOs to LNAs – consistent with Sweden's increased funding for the response. For example, 65 percent of UNHCR's funds go to LNAs, while the UHF now requires partners to share 7 percent overhead cost with LNAs. However, the evaluation could not establish information on the quantity and quality of Sweden's funds passed on to LNAs. SPOs inability to separate Sweden's contribution from other donor funding to the organisation and unawareness among some LNAs of receiving Swedish funding made it hard to trace indirect pass through to LNAs. Additionally, Sweden's lack of direct funding to LNAs, short term humanitarian funding (up to 1 year) and a lack of multi-year funding to SPOs in Ukraine were expressed as additional barriers to LNAs' access to funding.

Partnership: Sweden's flexible funding enabled SPOs to establish partnerships with LNAs but there was weak evidence of improvement in the quantity and quality of partnership with LNAs. The only notable example was an increase in UHF partnerships in 2022, from 51 to 92, of which 35 were LNAs. Short-term funding, complicated due diligence, and high staff turnover in some SPOs were cited as challenges and barriers to establishing sustainable and equitable partnerships with LNAs.

Leadership and influence: Sweden's indirect funding toward the participation of the national NGO Forum in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) promoted the representation of LNAs in humanitarian coordination fora. Most SPOs also encouraged similar participation of LNAs in different coordination platforms; NGO forum, cluster and sub-cluster coordination meetings including being members of UHF. But all the same, meaningful LNAs participation and leadership in humanitarian coordination fora was still limited, partly due to language barriers and time constraints. And to circumvent limitations to LNA participation in the formal coordination mechanisms, some LNAs coordinated among themselves.

Capacity development: SPOs organised and provided various kinds of capacity development activities in relevant areas identified by LNAs. An INGO interviewee explained; "we use a questionnaire for the local partners where they indicate their training needs. This year, we have planned training on crisis management and organisational development." Definitely, LNA interviewees lauded these approaches which were considered relevant and suitable to their contexts, but still, a number of SPOs supported capacity development activities were described by LNAs as highly ineffective - unnecessarily expensive and ill-adjusted to the local context.

Conclusions and lessons

- The emergence of active LNAs networks out of the main humanitarian coordination fora present a good opportunity for Sweden to extend direct support to LNAs networks to advocate for and promote localisation in the country. There is also a call for Sweden to coordinate efforts to improve the participation and influence of LNAs in the UN-lead country humanitarian coordination mechanisms.
- To cater for the different capacities among LNAs, Sweden's and partners' due diligence requirements and procedures should be adjusted and simplified to suit different categories of LNAs – by size and the amount of funding requested. Sweden could consider this recommendation in its plan to pilot direct funding to LNAs in Ukraine.
- There is a need to deepen quality partnerships with LNAs including with small and young LNAs to advance localisation efforts in the country. Many of the LNAs interviewed for this evaluation started their humanitarian operation following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These LNAs primarily relied on their past contacts and networks including cooperation with the local communities and governments to access conflict affected populations. There should be some efforts dedicated at strengthening these LNAs and local networks including their coordination with local authorities to increase humanitarian access to crisis affected populations and communities on the frontline and hard to reach areas.
- The lack of information about knowledge and learning exercises supported by Sweden wasn't necessarily surprising as the response in Ukraine recently started with a strong focus on providing emergency assistance. We expect that as the response stabilises, maybe a shift to knowledge generation and lessons learnt would then make sense.

- Most organisations interviewed had conducted and/or supported needs assessments of the affected population prior to receiving any Swedish funding. They had a good sense of what was working well or required additional attention in the response.