



# CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE: GETTING IT RIGHT

## Reflections on the Humanitarian Horizons Research Program 2018-2021

February 2022



HUMANITARIAN  
ADVISORY GROUP



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Damage to palm trees caused by Tropical Cyclone Gita in Oni-i-Lau, Fiji, February 2018. Source: PIANGO;

Woven fans in Rarotonga, Cook Islands. Rafael Ben Ari / Alamy Stock Photo;

Landscape of Batur volcano on Bali island, Indonesia. oHyperblaster / Shutterstock;

Tokoriki Island, Fiji. Gary Runn / Unsplash.

**Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG)** was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

**Humanitarian Horizons** is a three-year research initiative. The program adds unique value to humanitarian action in Asian and Pacific contexts by generating evidence-based research and creating conversation for change. This publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the authors' alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

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# TRACKING RESEARCH IMPACT AND INFLUENCE: HUMANITARIAN HORIZONS 2018-21

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**M**easuring research influence and impact is both a challenging and immensely rewarding exercise. Challenging because impact is rarely immediate. It may take months or years for research insights to land in the right policy or stakeholder space. Also challenging because impact is rarely the result of work by one organisation alone: research evidence interacts with ideas and action from across multiple stakeholders and contexts and contributes a small, but critical, part of the change story. This is also what makes it immensely rewarding; the satisfaction of working with a network of fabulous thinkers and doers who each bring a missing piece to the bigger picture.

So, impact is partly about having the right people involved. By the collaborative nature of our work at HAG, we depend on a network of partners, implementers, policy experts and decision makers to make our contribution to change. It is also about getting the timing right. Impact that might look like a quick win often involves months spent gathering evidence to feed into a critical conversation when it matters. It works because it has been there in the wings, ready and waiting for the proper moment, and for an audience ready to hear it. And impact also requires going about things the right way. We make sure our approaches are based on the local expertise and leadership of our partners and cater to the needs of different audiences.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

**This report unpacks the extent to which the Humanitarian Horizons research program provided evidence at the right time; with and to the right people; in the right way.**

This is the final impact report for Humanitarian Horizons 2018-2021. It is a reflection piece that covers all three years of the research program, with an emphasis on work in the final year. It builds on evidence gathered using our M&E framework, which was launched in our previous impact report, and incorporates the findings of an independent external review undertaken in 2020. Examples have been chosen to highlight notable areas of impact as well as capture the processes and inputs that supported them.

The report focuses on how our research has interacted with a broader context and set of actors to contribute to change. This speaks directly to the Humanitarian Horizons program's intended outcome that 'Evidence is used by the right stakeholders and partners to inform actions and change that support effective humanitarian action'.<sup>1</sup> This report recognises our role in the broader ecosystem and celebrates impact as a collective achievement. It unpacks the extent to which we provided evidence at the right time; with and to the right people; in the right way.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the intended outcomes and theory of change for the Humanitarian Horizons program, please see: [Humanitarian Horizons 2018-2021 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#).

# HUMANITARIAN HORIZONS RESEARCH PROGRAMME 2018-21

*Humanitarian Horizons* is Humanitarian Advisory Group's (HAG's) three-year strategic research program. The 2018-21 program aimed to contribute evidence and progress thinking and action towards better humanitarian outcomes for crisis-affected populations in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on four key research streams:



## **Intention to impact: localised humanitarian action**

The current momentum for supporting localised humanitarian action will only persist with evidence that demonstrates its impact. This stream addresses the localisation measurement gap. It will explore and test approaches to measuring the activity and impact of localised humanitarian action across different levels and actors.



## **Drawing on our diversity: humanitarian leadership**

Humanitarian leadership does not currently reflect the broad diversity of talent across gender, age, ethnicity and culture; anecdotal evidence suggests that this hinders humanitarian effectiveness. This stream focuses on understanding the real and potential benefits to organisations and disaster-affected populations of diversifying humanitarian leadership.



## **Building a blueprint for change**

This stream provides an evidence base to progress the implementation of transformative systemic change in the humanitarian system. It will investigate what reform has been possible and how it occurred, and draw lessons to support selected national governments to plan for transformative systemic change for practical improvements to humanitarian action in the short term.



## **Partnerships and practice**

Just as important as what is researched is how it is researched, communicated and debated. Humanitarian Horizons will leverage its research outputs to influence policy and practice in the region and globally. It will amplify Australian and Indo-Pacific voices on humanitarian policy, build knowledge and collaboration, and communicate strategically for greater impact.



Contributing relevant evidence at the right time is critical to its uptake and influence. Sometimes this means being positioned to respond to demand and react to opportunities. Sometimes this means anticipating emerging needs – being ahead of the curve, so that when demand increases the groundwork has already been done. By combining agenda-setting analysis with responsive research, the Humanitarian Horizons program has capitalised on HAG and partners' engagement in sector debates, foresight and agility, to stay relevant while pushing the boundaries.

Both the Intention to Impact stream and Building a Blueprint for Change provided evidence that could feed directly into conversations following on from the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the first iteration of the Grand Bargain.<sup>2</sup> Despite commitments to overhaul structures and rebalance power across the system, reviews of the reform agenda 5 years on have revealed limited progress and uneven results. The Blueprint project was positioned to respond to these shortcomings by proposing an alternative approach to humanitarian reform, one that starts from specific local and national needs and priorities. It directly responded to WHS and Grand Bargain commitments by contextualising global priorities to reflect local realities in Indonesia in efforts to reverse an entrenched top-down power structure. The research elevated local voices to participate in reform discussions and engage with international actors on a level footing.<sup>3</sup>

The Intention to Impact stream was designed to advance action on localisation. The research team invested its energy into measuring change, rather than getting caught up in the sector's

ongoing definitional debates. This led to the development of the first framework to measure progress on localisation in a holistic way using ideas from the START Network,<sup>4</sup> an innovation that has been influential as more actors in the sector began to look for evidence of progress. For example, the NEAR Network directly drew on this framework in developing their own approach in 2018, it has been used as a key tool in Grand Bargain localisation country guidance, and over the last year of the program the framework has been used by ICVA and UNICEF to structure their localisation work and analysis.<sup>5</sup> The paper on working in partnership to support localisation research has also been influential across the sector, informing HPG's thinking and approach in their program.

**“The intention to impact stream provides a great overarching structure and examples of indicators. We have adapted the framework to develop localisation indicators in our own humanitarian coalition. The ‘credible voice’ of the HAG as a trusted research institution gives our own adaptation of the framework credibility and alignment with others (e.g. DFAT) who are increasingly using also.” (Survey respondent, Mid-term review, 2020)**

The Drawing on Diversity stream was designed to be ahead of the game. A leadership gap was, and still is, consistently identified as a key issue in humanitarian action – the international humanitarian sector's need for greater diversity of approaches, funding sources, and thinking to confront the multiple challenges. So we asked

2 For more information about the WHS and Grand Bargain, see <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>, <https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/grand-bargain-localisation-workstream-2/>

3 See, for example, HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2020, [Building a Blueprint for Change: Laying the Foundations](#); and HAG and Pujiono Centre, 2021, [Local Voices on Humanitarian Reform: A briefing series from Indonesia](#).

4 See Patel and Van Brabant, 2017, [The Start Fund, Start Network and Localisation](#), Global Mentoring Initiative.

5 See ICVA and Humanitarian Leadership Academy, 2019, [Unpacking Localisation](#); UNICEF, 2019, [Working Paper, A review of UNICEF's approach to localisation in humanitarian action](#).

ourselves—how are we to address the leadership deficit? We kicked the project off in 2018 and started gathering evidence on the importance of diversity and inclusion to improve humanitarian action, such as our report [Data on Diversity: Humanitarian Leadership under the Spotlight](#). It was difficult to gain traction, but when #Metoo and the Black Lives Matter movement went viral and reached the aid sector in 2019 and 2020, insights from the project were readily available to inform discussions. For example, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement reached out to partner in research on how different leaders responded during the COVID-19 response. As the sector conversations progressed, our initial research positioned us well to engage.

“We are carrying out a Diversity and Inclusion review—so the Spotlight report is very helpful. It has been used to inform the development of the ToR for our global review. We are also looking at localisation approaches—so that report is very meaningful.” (Survey respondent, Mid-term Review, 2020)

Timing was the critical factor for the Partnerships and Practice stream. We gained enormous traction influencing real time policy and practice discussions with our practice papers that delivered analysis on response to rapid onset crises in [Bangladesh](#), [Indonesia](#), [PNG](#) and [Vanuatu](#).<sup>6</sup>

“I think I’d say when we are talking about relevance that all of the research that HAG does is very relevant. I feel like they have their finger to the pulse of what issues the humanitarian sector is grappling with and I think they are able to bring out timely research on some of the bigger issues.” (Key informant, Mid-term review, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> For more information about the influence of our practice papers see HAG, 2020, [Reach and Reality: Tracking the impact of our research](#).



## Practice papers

Practice papers focus on real-time and topical issues in the humanitarian sector and produce analysis that is robust and rigorous and yet short and digestible. They seek to contribute in a timely way to live discussions or ongoing decision-making.

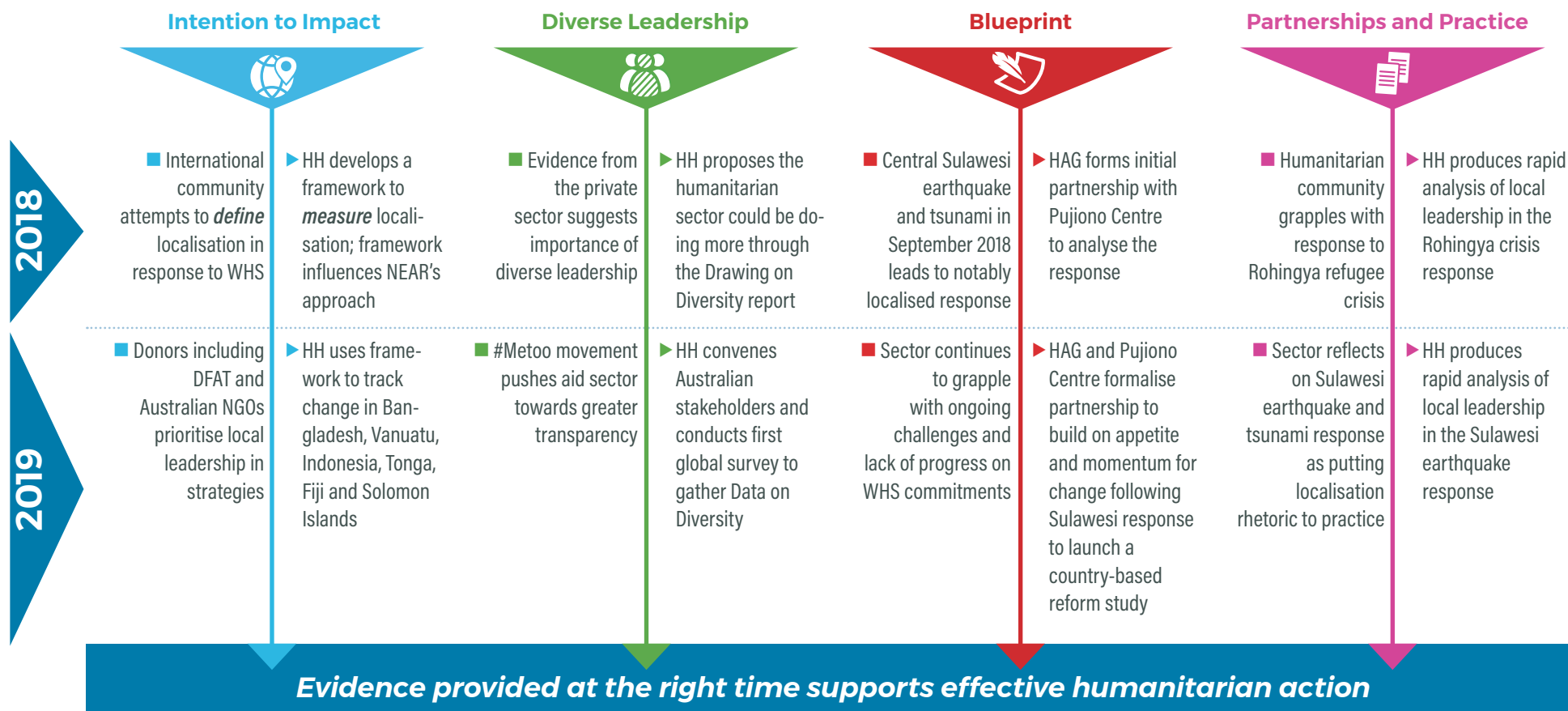


Our practice paper on local leadership in the Central Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami response was produced at a critical time as the sector was reflecting on Indonesia’s decision to restrict access for international actors. The paper explored implications of this type of locally led response becoming the new norm. Findings were presented by HAG and Pujiono Centre at the Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Localisation in 2019 and also to the Humanitarian Country Team in Indonesia to inform future responses.



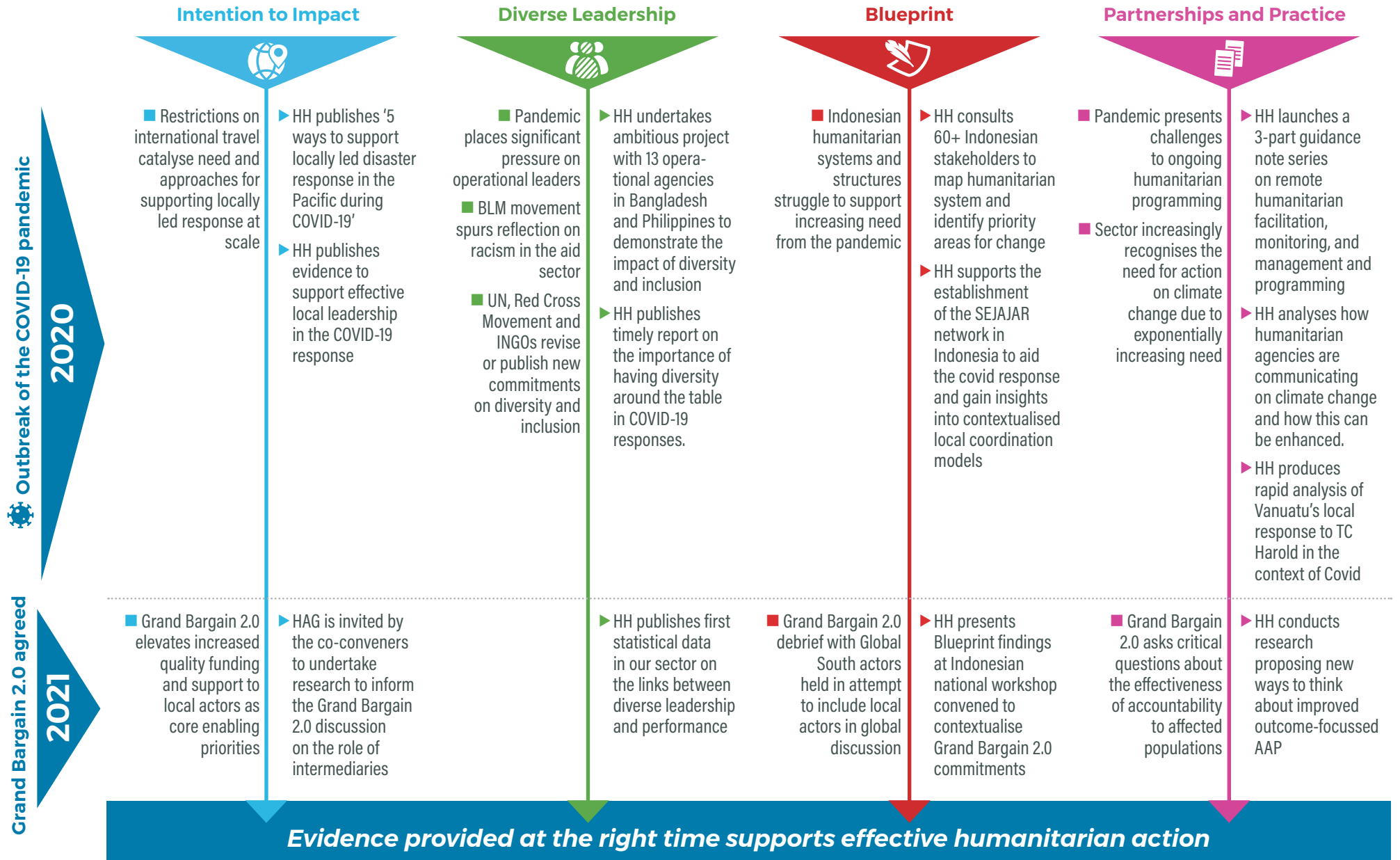
Our most recent practice paper on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) was developed in response to a [scathing assessment](#) of the lack of progress on AAP put forward by former Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock in April 2021. The paper provided a succinct overview of the main challenges facing AAP efforts and proposed ways to think about improved outcome-focused AAP. This paper was published at a critical time in the lead up to discussion around Grand Bargain 2.0.

## How timing and context influences research impact



■ Sector ▶ HH

# How timing and context influences research impact







## WORKING WITH AND REACHING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

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Humanitarian Horizons has been designed and conducted collaboratively with local, national, regional and international stakeholders. Working in partnership with key national research partners has been a core element of the program. The program has sought to ‘walk the talk’ on localisation, collaborating with local and national partners to articulate research priorities, co-create and contextualise research methods and outputs. This approach allows partners to own the research process and products. It helps to ensure products are relevant, appropriate and meeting partner priorities, while also promoting greater dissemination and uptake in the countries where we work. As a result, national partners have become key advocates and presenters of Humanitarian Horizons products. The program has also engaged regional and international actors to extend the reach of our research on a global scale.

“I think they coordinate well with other stakeholders, that comes through in their partnership approach [...] When you look at the other actors in this (localisation) space for example the ARC is doing a lot of research on localisation but they are choosing to do that with HAG because I think of what the HAG has done through this program is well considered by the sector, but I think also because of that coordination and coherence so that they are working together on the same issue at the same time.” (Key informant, Mid-term review, 2020)



**Working with the right partners was critical to the successful impact of the program. Our partners were able to support the program in four critical ways:**

**1**

to undertake relevant research in an appropriate way to context

**2**

to ensure quality of the research through critical conversations and engagement

**3**

to implement evidence-based recommendations and findings in humanitarian contexts

**4**

to extend the reach of the evidence by sharing through networks and promoting findings

## **1. WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO UNDERTAKE RELEVANT RESEARCH IN AN APPROPRIATE WAY TO CONTEXT**



**91%** of research products developed in partnership with key stakeholders



**26** partners



**\$349,544** funding to national partners



### **Profile: Pujiono Centre**

The Pujiono Centre, based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is a not-for-profit knowledge management organisation, which seeks to expand the capacities of practitioners and promote evidence-based policymaking in disaster management and risk reduction.

HAG first established a partnership with the Pujiono Centre for our practice paper on the Central Sulawesi earthquake response in 2018. The relationship was formalised as a long-term institutional partnership through the Building a Blueprint for Change stream the following year. The Blueprint research was entirely co-designed and co-conducted by HAG and Pujiono Centre. The Humanitarian Horizons program was able to support the Centre to raise its profile and become a key national player in reform discussions in Indonesia.

## 2. ENSURING QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH THROUGH CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT



**6** RAC meetings for strategic engagement and strengthening influence and uptake



**87** consultations to inform research evolution



**1** program-wide mid-term review



### Research Advisory Committee

The program's Research Advisory Committee is comprised of experts from government, private sector and NGOs across the region. It convened 6 times over 3 years. The RAC provided strategic advice and informed research priorities, processes and findings, ensuring that the program was as relevant and useful as possible. RAC members were able to facilitate introductions to key stakeholders and promote the research in national, regional and global platforms.

## 3. IMPLEMENTING EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINDINGS IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS



**22** operational organisations have sought HAG's technical support and advice for program or policy implementation because of evidence generated through the HH program



**13** internal reports submitted to inform organisational diversity and inclusion practice



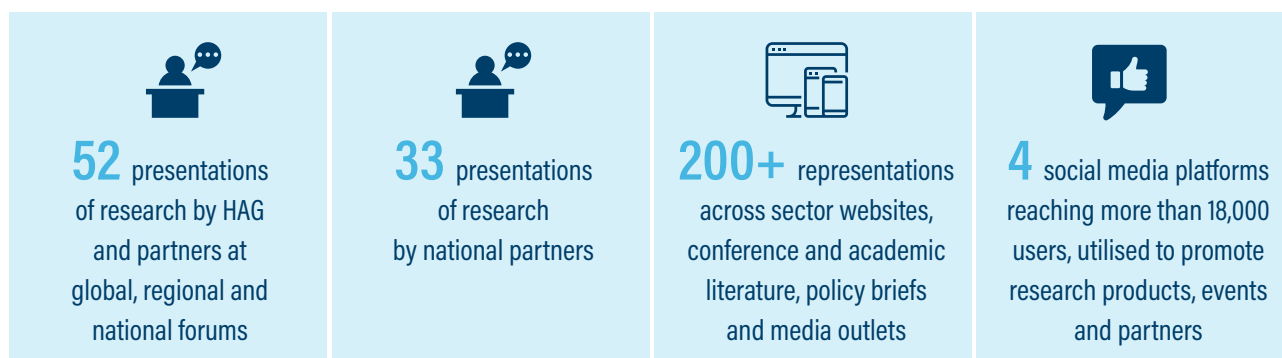
**4** rapid review analyses to inform ongoing humanitarian response



### Impacts across the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement

HAG, the Global Network for Women leaders in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (GLOW Red), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) partnered to conduct research on the impact of diverse and inclusive leadership on the Movement's responses to COVID-19. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the world's largest humanitarian network, made up of nearly 100 million members, volunteers and supporters in 192 National Societies. The final report of the COVID-19 leadership study was disseminated by the Director General of the ICRC and the Secretary General of the IFRC, highlighting their commitment to reflecting on, creating and sustaining diverse and inclusive humanitarian teams. For example, IFRC is working to fully implement a plan of action to support the 2019 IFRC pledge for safe and inclusive workplaces. The ICRC is implementing the commitment made in its institutional strategy (2019-2022) to creating an inclusive and diverse working environment. GLOW Red is in the process of establishing women's reflective circles where women leaders throughout the RCRC Movement can come together and discuss issues related to women's leadership.

## 4. EXTENDING THE REACH OF THE EVIDENCE BY SHARING THROUGH NETWORKS AND PROMOTING FINDINGS



### Australasian Aid Conference

In 2019, HAG supported PIANCO and key Australian humanitarian actors to discuss the progress on World Humanitarian Summit commitments in the Pacific at the Australasian Aid Conference. The panel focused on regional measurement processes developed in partnership with HAG's Pacific partners and provided an opportunity for shared learning and progress on the commitments. The panel aimed to elevate the voice of Pacific Islanders in the localisation discussion.

At the Australasian Aid Conference in 2020, HAG supported Puji Pujiono to discuss Indonesian reform priorities. He represented the Blueprint research on a panel titled, "Still broken: global humanitarian reform and the Asia Pacific," and engaged in debate with representatives from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Australian Red Cross. The panel discussed how to action transformative change in ways that are most relevant to the Asia-Pacific region, including the unique approach to country-led humanitarian reform provided by the Blueprint research.

## Social media spotlight

**"Thank you for engaging @ifrc & Huge congratulations @HumAdGrp for this important toolkit. No more excuses for international orgs & donors. Let's hold each other accountable for our commitments on supporting local action #GrandBargain" Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, Under Secretary General, IFRC**

**"Getting beyond the binaries: Very helpful insights and tools for measuring localisation from @HumAdGrp and @Pacific\_2030" Cristina Bennett, CEO Start Network**

**Helpful guidance from @HumAdGrp and @Pacific\_2030 in supporting #localisation during #COVID19. Supporting locally led response is essential for effective, accountable humanitarian action. (James Gilling, DFAT)**

**"Let's talk about #localisation as the new norm in #humanitarian response. One of the findings by @HumAdGrp & @pucenjogja is that "regional bodies, including @AHACentre will increasingly play an important coordination role in responses in the region" Adelina Kamal, Executive Director, AHA Centre**

**Great article from @HumAdGrp - stunning blind spots in the sector. "Inclusion: the ultimate irony" argues the work may be intersectional but our understanding of gender, racial, social and cultural inequality within the sector itself is lagging. (RDI network)**

**Have you read @Pacific\_2030 / @HumAdGrp's fantastic report 'Localisation In Vanuatu: Demonstrating Change'? Its stark statistics and powerful words have been very influential to our own work on local innovation with @ADRRN1 (HIF)**

We are practitioner-based research organisation and as such the pitch and tone of our products is important. Humanitarian Horizons products are intended to not only support the generation of knowledge in the sector but also to be useful and used in real time for practitioners and policy-makers. We aim to produce research that is accessible and evidence-based. What does this mean in practice?

“I think the program has done a lot to package up and provide an accessible evidence base that has then enabled us to make organisational changes both in programmatic and policy-oriented places. So, I think there is something about the relevance of the material but also the accessibility of it- it is communicated well so a range of stakeholders are able to access it and that helps to build momentum around these changes as well.” (Key Informant, Mid-term Review, 2020).

## THE RESEARCH IS ACCESSIBLE

We use a range of mediums and formats to help the research speak to different audiences and learning styles. We try to keep reports succinct and easy to read using plain language and infographics. Where relevant we aim to provide translated products that can be influential in specific national contexts.



## Research outputs



RESEARCH REPORTS



PRACTICE PAPERS



MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORKS



GUIDANCE NOTES



BLOGS



PODCASTS



PRESENTATIONS



CARTOONS



PUBLIC EVENTS



ANIMATIONS



## Translation of the Blueprint research

The Blueprint project was designed to be participatory and nationally led. The research was highly consultative and directly informed by national and local stakeholders throughout the project. This was only possible through the translation of all materials and bilingual format of data collection. The Pujiono Centre translated all relevant materials, including workshop pre-readings, circulated minutes, blogs and communications as well as final research products. Interviews, workshops and focus group discussions were conducted in both English and Bahasa Indonesia through interpreters and simultaneous translation in an online format. All research products launched nationally have been translated to promote uptake and advocacy among Indonesian stakeholders.



## THE WAY WE WORK WITH PARTNERS IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE WORK WE DO WITH THEM.

The work we do draws on the expertise, creativity and generosity of our national consultants, local partners and regional advisors. Our goal is to use our platform and networks to amplify the voices and knowledge of local and national organisations. We see our role as elevating, accompanying and supporting the growth and priorities of local, national and regional humanitarian actors as they work in their own communities.



**2** multi-year institutional partnerships



**6** partners supported to develop their own research objectives



**100%** of country case-study data collection led by national partners



**2** reflective papers on partnership-based approaches to share learnings



### Walking together in partnership



Working in partnership is a journey. The path we take and how we walk together on it are as important as the destination. Three years ago, the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO) and Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) embarked on a journey together: to explore progress on locally led humanitarian action in the Pacific. Our partnership was founded on the idea that it was both possible to track progress on localisation, and to influence change using the research evidence, with Pacific researchers and partners leading the way.

“For HAG, the partnership with PIANGO has fundamentally changed how we engage, partner and invest in our national partners. This is why we believe how we do the research and manage the partnership is as important as the research output.” (Walking Together in Partnership, 2021).



## REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

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We have learned a lot from tracking research impact over the past three years. Our approach has adapted and evolved to capture many contributions to the sector, to the region and to partners and key stakeholders. We have been able to incorporate lessons identified throughout the program to strengthen approaches, partnerships and products.<sup>7</sup> Because of the flexibility and adaptability of HAG and our partners, the program has stayed resilient through the challenges of COVID-19. We are proud of how Humanitarian Horizons has contributed to change at the right time, with the right people and in the right way. But this is not the end of our impact journey. Rather, we will continue to monitor the influence of this program as final products are released and, over the years to come, as the ideas are carried forward to reach new audiences and continue to help make change.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information about lessons learned, see [Reach and Reality: Tracking the impact of our research](#).