



# A PATHWAY TO LOCALISATION IMPACT: Testing and Learning in Bangladesh



# Introduction

The humanitarian sector has made significant progress in measuring the process of localisation, with various frameworks and tools supporting organisations on their journey towards more localised humanitarian action. Despite this progress, there is a gap in sector-wide understanding of, if and how, localised approaches are impacting affected communities. This learning paper contributes towards filling this gap by showcasing learning from work undertaken to define and test localisation outcomes in Bangladesh, as outlined in *A Pathway to Localisation Impact: Laying the Foundations* (Box 1).

## Box 1: The Foundations

*A Pathway to Localisation Impact: Laying the Foundations* explores to what extent localisation impact is being measured at the community level. The paper puts forward an evidence-based model (Figure 1) that illustrates domains for change, suggests causal pathways, and proposes a process to guide articulation of intended outcomes and subsequent measurement of localisation impact against those outcomes.

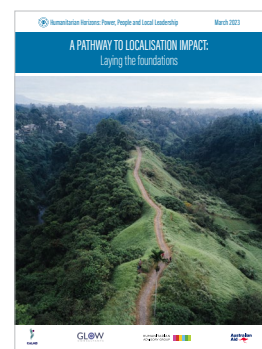
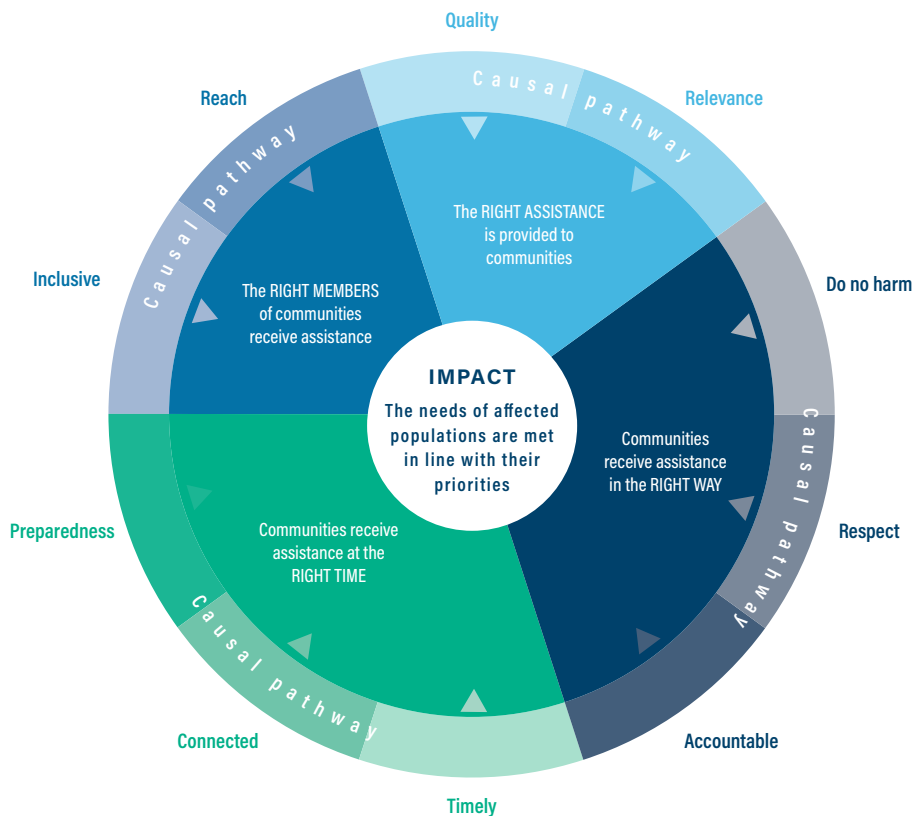


Figure 1: Potential domains of change as a result of localised practices

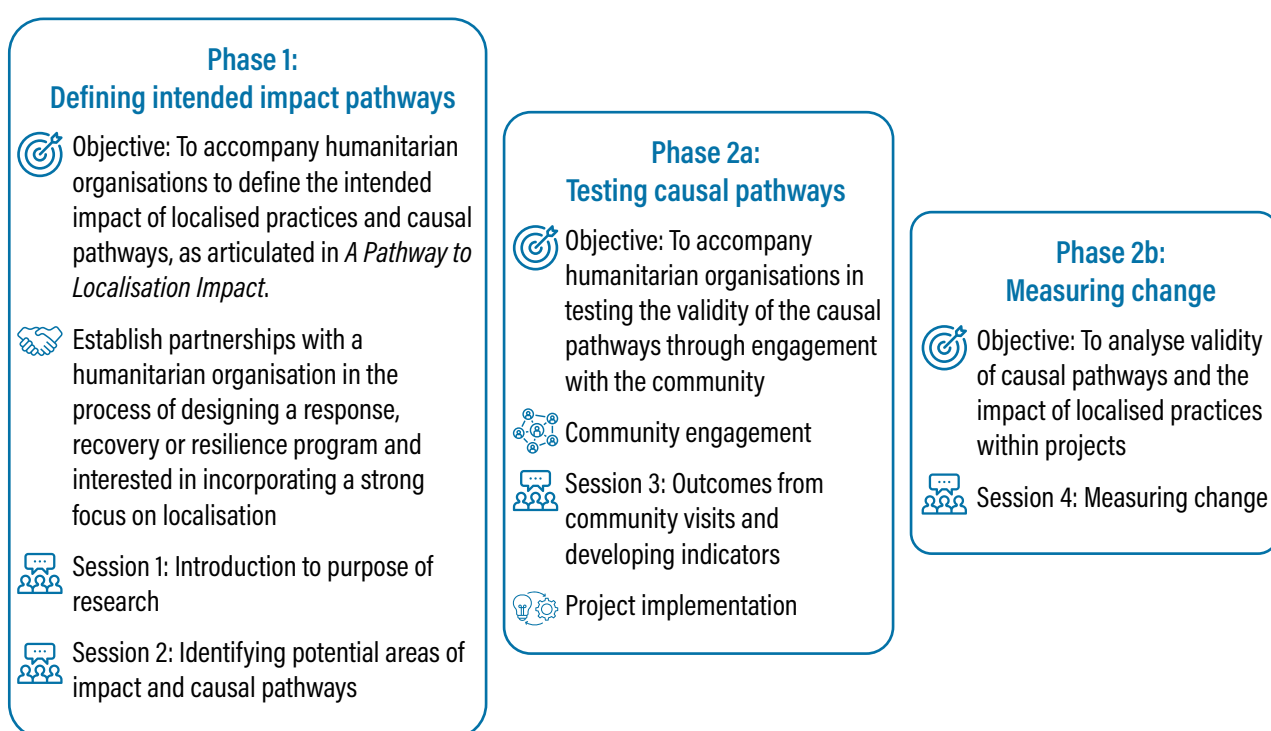


## ABOUT THIS PAPER

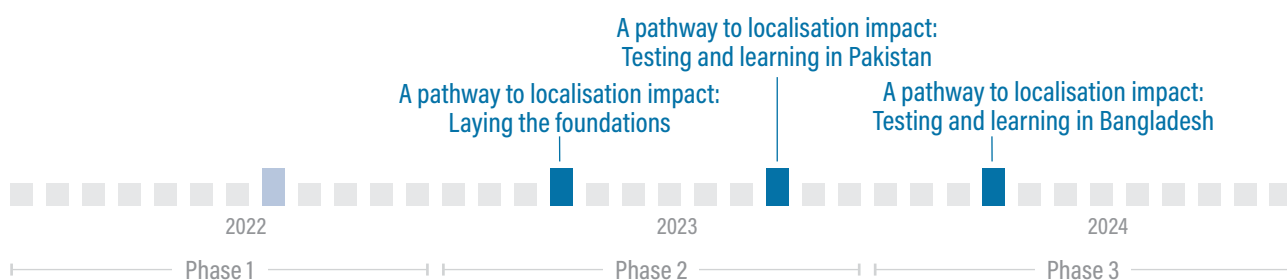
*Purpose:* The purpose of this paper is to share learning from a case study involving a test of the proposed model and approach for measuring localisation impact in Bangladesh. This paper is the second in a series of three case studies, which will be analysed collectively to inform the development of a final framework to support localisation impact measurement at the community level.

*Methodology:* The methodology for this paper was grounded in an accompaniment process (Figure 2), in which members of the research team worked alongside humanitarian partners at the outset of a new program. Over the course of several formal sessions and informal engagements, partners collectively defined and tested intended outcomes, causal pathways and indicators of localisation impact.

**Figure 2: Accompaniment process**



*Structure:* This paper has three sections. This first section introduces the case study and the accompaniment approach, the second section provides an overview of the partners, program and process, and the third section highlights key learning that has emerged from the process to date.



# Partner, Program and Process

From July to November 2023, inSights and Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK) (Box 2) worked together in the accompaniment process. The phases of the process and the outcomes/key actions from each phase are outlined in Figure 3.

## Box 2: About GUK

GUK is a community-led non-governmental organisation (NGO) that was established in 1985 in Gaibandha district, northern Bangladesh. GUK aims to help poor, vulnerable, excluded and disadvantaged people, especially women, children, ethnic minority groups, and persons with disabilities. Its main goal is to bring about sustainable, positive change in their lives.

It currently operates through 91 outlets/branch offices, training centres, and district and upazila-level training centres in 15 districts in Rajshahi, Rangpur and Chattogram divisions. GUK implements programs that focus on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and humanitarian response, partnering with national and international donors including UN agencies and the private sector.

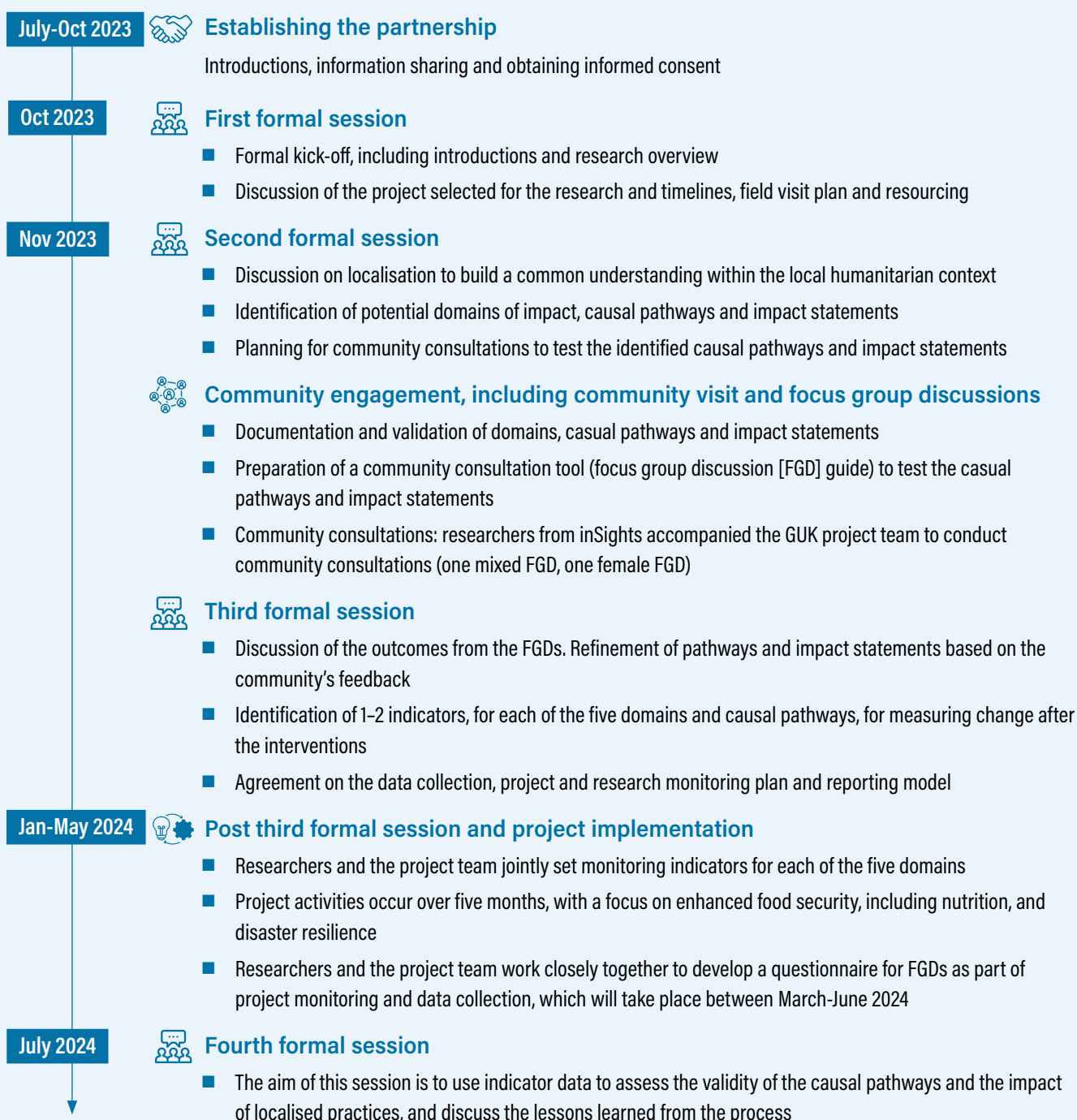
GUK is involved in efforts to improve the localisation of humanitarian aid and played a pivotal role in establishing the National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh (NAHAB). Through this study, GUK seek to contribute to exploring the impact of localisation in Bangladesh, especially in relation to the Rohingya response.

GUK has been involved in the Rohingya response in Ukhia and Teknaf Upazila of Cox's Bazar district since 2018. The project selected for the research is designed to support vulnerable Rohingya and host community members in Camp 13 and Palongkhali Union by providing resilient livelihood options and enhancing knowledge and capacity on sanitation, personal hygiene, fire incidents, cyclone preparedness, landslides, gender-based violence and safeguarding issues. Two results are expected from the project: (1) Enhanced food security, including nutrition, and (2) Community disaster resilience. Achieving result 1 will include training on vertical vegetable gardening, vermin compost production and various trades and livelihood activities. Achieving result 2 involves the formation and strengthening of fire protection, WASH management and cyclone management committees, and volunteer-delivered awareness sessions on issues such as sanitation and personal hygiene, DRR, cyclone preparedness, social inclusion, GBV and safeguarding.

*Photo: Asif Rahman on Unsplash*



Figure 3: Partnership journey



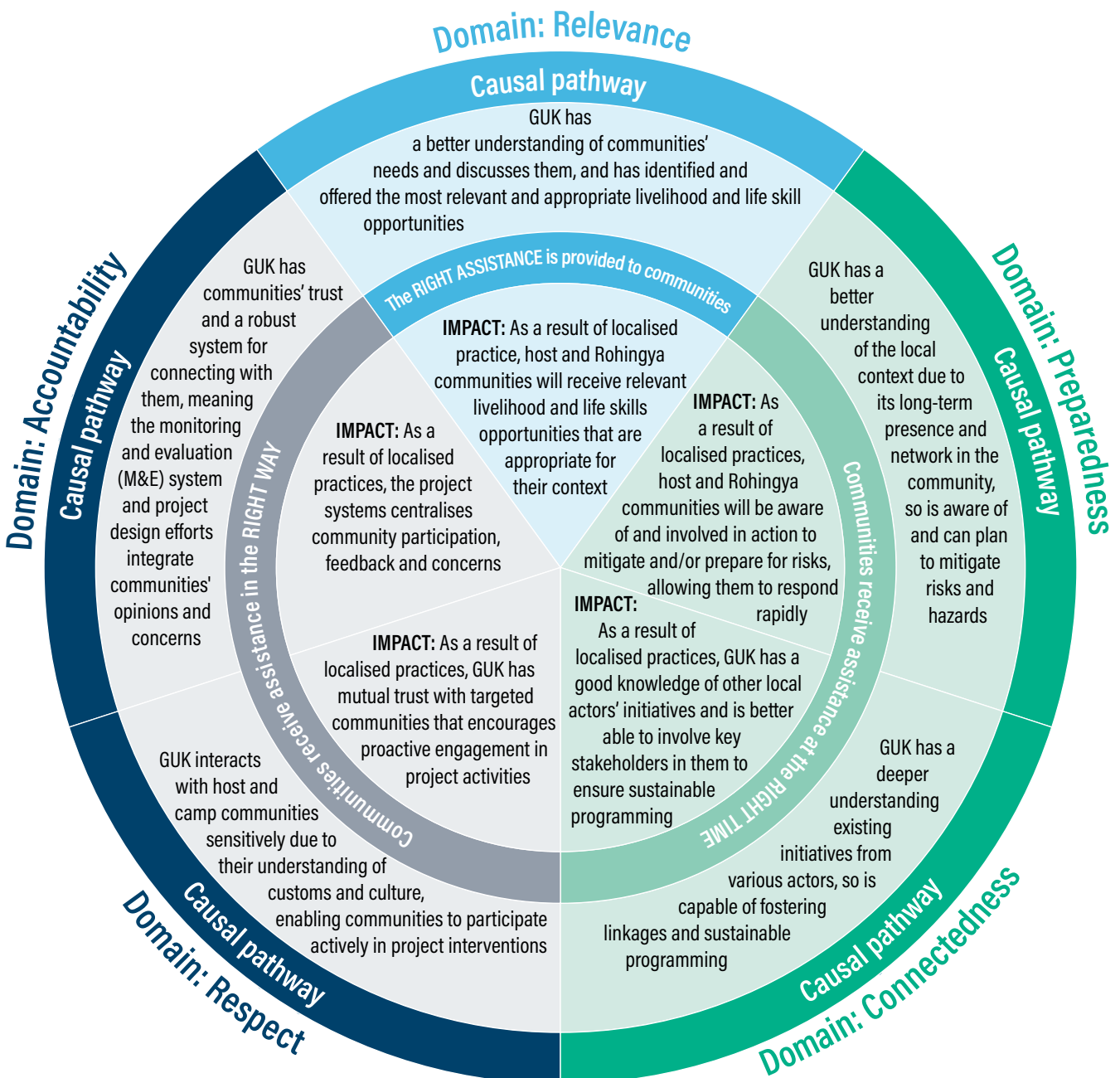
# OUTCOMES

The following domains, causal pathways and impact statements were developed, drawing on the approach outlined in *A Pathway to Localisation Impact*.

The five domains selected by GUK and inSights to test the model and process were relevance, preparedness, connectedness, respect and accountability.

Figure 4 provides an overview of the intended impacts, domain areas and causal pathways GUK test during its program.

Figure 4: Domains of change as a result of localised practices



## Indicators:

### Relevance:

The community is satisfied with the relevant livelihood and life skills opportunities the project offers

% of community that report the livelihoods opportunities provided are relevant to them

# of discussions with communities to ensure relevance of GUK projects

### Preparedness

The community reports that project staff members are aware of their expectations. The project strengthens their capacity and equips them to respond to risk and hazards rapidly and become resilient to cyclone and fire emergencies

% of community members that feel better equipped to respond to risks and hazards

% of community members that feel that the right sort of risks and hazards have been included in preparedness programs

% of staff that have lived and worked in community for over three years

% of staff that have been involved in responses to previous hazards in this community

### Connected

Key stakeholders assert that GUK has strong relationships with the local government representatives in terms of promoting cohesive and sustainable interventions in the communities

% of community members who feel that GUK projects do not duplicate other projects

# of other local government and organisations that have been active partners in projects

### Respect

The community reports that they are engaged in project activities proactively

% of community members that feel GUK respects them in the project

Examples of changes to the project to take account of local customs and culture.

### Accountable

Communities report that their concerns and feedback are reflected in the M&E system, tools and reports

GUK staff report that targeted community people are aware of the process for raising concerns and giving feedback

% of community members that raise questions/concerns about project

% of community members that feel their questions/concerns about project were addressed

% of community members that trust GUK staff

Examples of changes to the project to incorporate feedback from the community

Examples of ways the project team has built trust with the community.

*Photo: Hasib Matior on Unsplash*



# Learning

This section outlines the lessons that emerged from the accompaniment process.

## PROCESS

### **Learning 1: The model and approach for measuring the impact of localised practices be further simplified for practical application by implementing partners.**

Through this accompaniment process, the model and approach as articulated in *A pathway to localisation impact: laying the foundations* was tested. In doing so, the partners identified opportunities to further simplify both the approach and model to make it more user-friendly for operational agencies. For example, the process of aligning the domains and localised practices with the local context and work modalities was time intensive, and required additional discussion to ensure that key concepts and definitions resonate with all involved.

Simplifying the process will make the forthcoming approach easier for a range of partners to utilise. The research team will take forward this important reflection to ensure that approach is user-friendly for a range of implementing partners.

Specific ways to improve the process are:

- ▶ Linking the project to the “big picture” of localisation - explaining how the project seeks to contribute to the localisation agenda
- ▶ Involve field level staff who are involved in collecting monitoring data and ensure that there is a common understanding of the types of localisation impact data that the project is seeking to collect
- ▶ Ensure that terminology is adapted to context – for example, that the domains of the model resonate and are relevant. If not, seek alternate definitions or terms that are more appropriate to context
- ▶ Look for approaches and tools that enable exploration of terms and concepts in different ways. This is particularly important when engaging with field level staff and communities – look for opportunities to undertake participatory, visual exercises and to link to past project approaches and activities
- ▶ Facilitators/leaders of integrating the model should have a diverse set of skills and knowledge, including understanding relevant key concepts, the ability to translate complex concepts into simple ideas, and expertise in participatory processes, including for M&E. Create a sense of ownership and interest about localisation impact measurement among staff involved, including at field level. Where possible include them from the beginning of the study design and team formation, and recognise their contribution to the study.



## **Learning 2: Defining intended impact and how change will be measured needs to occur at the very beginning of a project**

The accompaniment process for this project highlighted the importance of introducing localisation impact measurement – including defining intended impact and outcomes – from the initial project design stage. This reflection is consistent with findings in *A Pathway to Localisation Impact: Laying the Foundations*, therefore strengthening this finding. Whilst in this project the partnership was established before project implementation started, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) indicators and templates had already been agreed with the donor. This meant the team needed to establish indicators and measurement processes in addition to existing agreed systems, risking duplicating processes and draining time and resources.

The Bangladesh case study strengthens the existing evidence that shows meaningful identification of localisation objectives and meaningful impact should happen at project design stage. Critically, all project partners (donors, intermediaries and local and national actors) need to consider design-stage interventions so that project processes, frameworks and documents can be set up to define and measure change resulting from localised practices from the outset.

## **MODEL**

### **Learning 3: The model needs to be flexible enough to capture a range of contextual nuances around what approaches and practices are localised, and for whom**

Within the context of the protracted displacement of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, many international agencies have moved towards approaches that leverage the presence, skills and expertise of both local and national actors and local and national staff members. Reflections from this research process questioned the extent to which the approaches of international and national and local actors differ in the context of this crisis, especially when international actors draw on local knowledge and experience – and the implications of this for how localised approaches are tested and measured. Moving forward, the framework provides an opportunity to understand the impacts of non-formal project activities, such as traditional approaches.

The research team recognised the importance of leveraging local and national knowledge and expertise at the highest levels, including in strategic decision-making and program design. To measure the impact of localised approaches for affected communities, it will be important for the measurement approach to be applicable and useful for different types of organisations (local/national NGOs, international NGOs, the United Nations, intermediaries, donors) and across the different areas of expertise within organisations (e.g., for generalists, as well as specialist M&E personnel).

Within the Bangladesh case study, a question was raised about the roles of local and national actors when working with different population groups. For example, an organisation may deliver support and services to both a host community and a refugee population, but not be considered a local organisation by both groups. Therefore, an approach to measuring the impact of localised practices needs to unpack the assumptions underpinning the causal pathways that are expected to lead to better outcomes and impact for affected communities. There is also a need to consider the expertise and knowledge that is brought by members of the community who are supporting the project but may not be considered staff, such as volunteers.

# What's next?

This case study is the second in a series of case studies across different contexts in the Asia-Pacific region. The case studies will be launched individually between November 2023 and May 2024. Upon the conclusion of the accompaniment process in each context, the research team will reflect on what has been learned about the model and accompaniment process, and prepare an approach to guide localisation impact measurement across the sector.

If you'd like to learn more about our localisation impact measurement work, or to get involved, please contact Sara Phillips – [sphillips@humanitarianadvisorygroup.org](mailto:sphillips@humanitarianadvisorygroup.org), Pamela Combinido – [pcombinido@humanitarianadvisorygroup.org](mailto:pcombinido@humanitarianadvisorygroup.org), or Jess Lees – [jlees@humanitarianadvisorygroup.org](mailto:jlees@humanitarianadvisorygroup.org)

*Photo: Sabbir Rahaman on Unsplash*



# Acknowledgements

The research team would like to express sincere thanks to the GUK team, in particular, M. Abdus Salam (Founder and Chief Executive), Subir Kumar Saha (Coordinator) and Shuranjit Barman (Project Manager), for their time and contributions to the research.

**Research team:** Suman Ahsanul Islam, Nahid Siddiqui (inSights); Madeline Baker, Jess Lees, Sara Phillips and Kate Sutton (Humanitarian Advisory Group)

**Copy Editor:** Campbell Aitken

**Design:** Jenny Moody, A&J Moody Design

**Cover photo:** Shutterstock

**Suggested citation:** inSights and HAG (2024). A Pathway to Localisation Impact: Testing and Learning in Bangladesh. Melbourne: HAG.

## About Humanitarian Horizons 2021–2024

Humanitarian Horizons 2021–2024 is a three-year research initiative that adds unique value to humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific by generating evidence and creating conversations for change. It is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The research program for 2021–24 builds on the achievements of the Humanitarian Horizons pilot phase (2017–18), the previous iteration of the program (2018–21) and Humanitarian Advisory Group's experience in supporting the sector for almost 10 years. The research is structured into three interlocking streams: 1) Power, People and Local Leadership, 2) Greening the System, and 3) Real-Time Analysis and Influence. It is underpinned by a fourth stream that considers governance, accountability, and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

This publication was funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the authors' alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Government.

## About the project team

**inSights** (the Institute of Innovation for Gender and Humanitarian Transformation) is a Bangladesh-based social enterprise providing insights that challenge the current ways of working in humanitarian aid and gender affairs. inSights aims to transform ideas within the humanitarian, social and businesses sectors, turning them into innovations, knowledge and strategies.

**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 contributes to excellence in humanitarian practice.



*Humanitarian Advisory Group is BCorp certified. This little logo means we work hard to ensure that our business is a force for good. We have chosen to hold ourselves accountable to the highest social, environmental and ethical standards, setting ourselves apart from business as usual.*

