NEAR VOICES

ASIA & THE PACIFIC LOCALISATION LAB

SPOTLIGHT ON ASIA & THE PACIFIC REGION



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Foreword from Asia and the Pacific Regional Representative

Dear NEAR members, partners, friends and allies,

Asia and the Pacific Region is at the heart of many of today's humanitarian challenges. Home to more than half of the world's population, the region bears nearly 70% of global disaster losses and is among the most exposed to climate and disaster risks. Yet it is also home to extraordinary local leaders. Across more than 3,200 languages and dialects, resilient local civil society organisations (CSOs) have long been the first to respond and continue to lead with knowledge, proximity, trust, courage and a strong spirit of service to communities.

For too long, however, their local leadership is reduced to crisis statistics, overlooked, or constrained by systems that concentrate power, funding, and decision-making elsewhere. In 2020, local leaders from across the region came together to change that. The **Asia and the Pacific Local Leaders (APLL)** was established to advance a shared vision: humanitarian action that is led by those closest to our communities. What began as a collective commitment has grown into a movement of more than 85 civil society organisations and nine partner networks. Through the **Asia and the Pacific Localisation Lab (APL-Lab)**, seven country labs, and the **AASHA Fund**, this growing movement has strengthened trust, expanded local leadership, and built the collective capacity needed to drive lasting, locally led change.

This edition of VOICES reflects how far we have come. Indonesia's transition to a CSO-led humanitarian coordination platform; growing regional recognition of Pacific civil society; and locally managed funds enabling rapid responses in Myanmar, where international systems faced access constraints; all point to the same reality: local leadership is not a future ambition, but today's most effective humanitarian pathway. This edition also reminds us that the work is far from complete. But across Asia and the Pacific, local organisations are not waiting for change – **we are leading it.**

We invite you to explore these stories of progress, persistence, and possibility. Together, they offer a glimpse of a different future for humanitarian action: one that is more equitable, more accountable, and more effective because it is led by those closest to the communities they serve.

In Solidarity,

Shahida Arif, Regional Representative, and the APLL



APLL and the Global Humanitarian Progress

1.1. The Grand Bargain and Its Unfulfilled Promises

"We are not learning localisation – we are leading it."

After a decade, the failure to deliver on the Grand Bargain's targets has also fuelled a growing regional consensus: reform cannot be designed and dictated from Geneva or New York. Local actors in Asia and the Pacific are no longer waiting for the system to change; they are building their own alternatives. As Ehsanur Rahman, APLL Convenor, notes: ***"The promises of reduced bureaucracy and genuine participation remain aspirational, not operational. We are still treated as implementers, not partners."*** As documented in the 2025 Regional Humanitarian Partnership Week (RHPW) in Bangkok, local organisations across the region report that funding remains unpredictable, inflexible, and tied to donor-defined indicators rather than community needs.



CAPTION: APLL and Nepal CSOs during Nepal Humanitarian Conference & APLL Summit 2025

1.2. Power Dynamics in the Humanitarian System

Localisation is often framed as a technical issue – about funding, risk, procedures, or capacity building – but across Asia and the Pacific, it is understood as fundamentally a political act: the redistribution of power, resources, and recognition. For decades, the humanitarian ecosystem has operated on deeply asymmetric terms: priorities are set by donors and institutions based outside the region, UN-led coordination structures replicate top-down hierarchies, and local actors are cast as "subcontractors" rather than equal decision-makers.

Dr Puji Pujiono, APLL convenor, captures this reality: "When responsibility is handed over without power, money, or support, it is not reform – it is a transfer of risk disguised as progress." This dynamic was starkly evident in Indonesia's 2025 transition, where coordination shifted from the UN-led Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) to the locally led Indonesian Humanitarian Coordination Platform (IHCP). While the handover

was presented as a milestone, local leaders pointed out that authority was transferred, but funding, systems, and legitimacy were not. Almost immediately, the fledgling platform faced the Sumatra floods and landslides – killing over 1,000 people and displacing 1.1 million – and had to respond without the resources previously available to the HCT.

Similar patterns play out across the region: in Afghanistan, local organisations operate under severe constraints yet manage 80% of frontline work; in Sri Lanka, Cyclone Ditwah in November 2025 revealed that local actors were first to respond but lacked training, contingency plans, and flexible funding. As Sameera Noori, convenor of the Afghanistan Localisation Lab, puts it: ***"Nothing about us without us is a slogan. It is the practice of handing back power to those who live the reality."***

Changing these dynamics requires more than policy statements. It means shifting accountability from donors to communities, accepting locally defined standards, and recognising that proximity to risk is itself a form of expertise. As the APLL regional strategy (2024–2030) emphasises: ***"Genuine partnership is not about doing things for us, but doing things with us – and eventually letting us lead."***

1.3. The AASHA Fund: A Regional Shift in Resource Architecture

Launched in August 2025 at the APLL Kathmandu Summit, the AASHA Fund – meaning "Hope" in many regional languages – is a work in progress poised to be a fully locally governed, regionally owned pooled humanitarian fund in Asia and the Pacific region. It was conceptualised explicitly to break the cycle where local organisations must repeatedly apply to international intermediaries for resources to respond in their own communities.

As the RHPW 2025 session confirmed, AASHA is not designed to be a competitor to existing international funds – it is a complementary, alternative architecture. It addresses the "everyday disasters" and slow-onset climate shocks often overlooked by global mechanisms, while proving that local actors can manage risk, ensure transparency, and deliver results. According to APLL: ***"AASHA is not just about money – it is about who controls the terms of solidarity."***

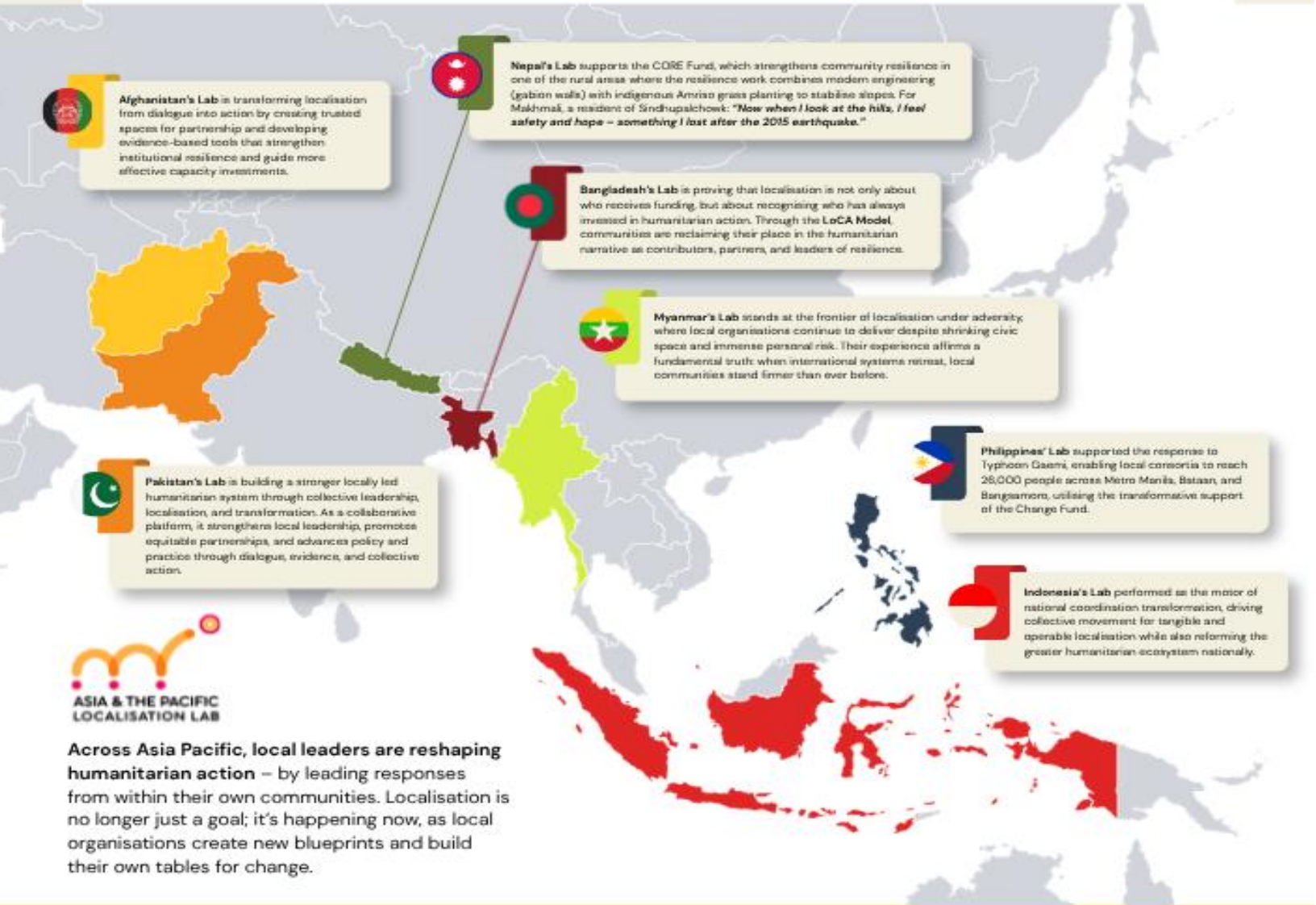


1.4. Building the Architecture - APLL, APL-Lab & the National Labs

Founded in 2020 under NEAR, the Asia-Pacific Local Leaders (APLL) coalition unites more than 85 civil society organisations across nine countries. It is not merely a network of meetings; it is a structured movement with a 2024–2030 regional strategy and four operational workstreams: Movement Building, Building Bridges, Local Solutions, and Learning. Together, these create the institutional foundation for systemic change. Supporting this work is the Asia-Pacific Localisation Lab (APL-Lab) and its seven country-level chapters: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines. Each lab adapts regional principles to local realities and generates evidence-based solutions.

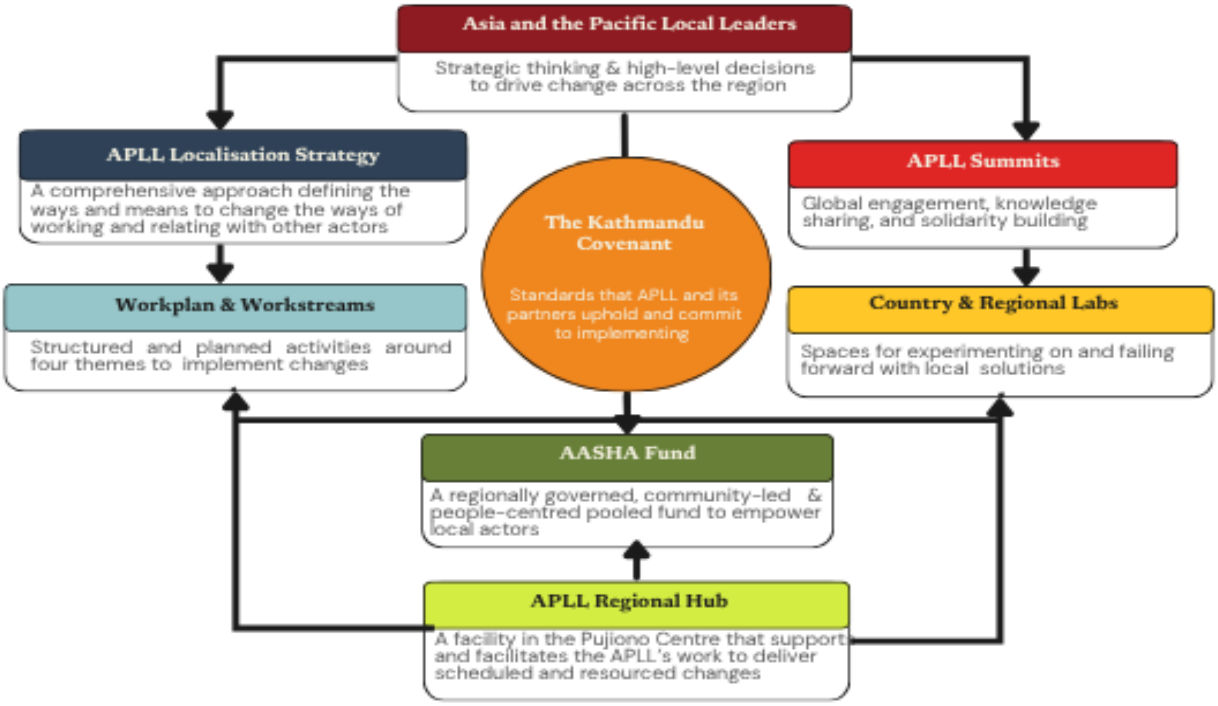
As Shahida Arif, NEAR Regional Representative, states: ***"These [Labs] are not experiments – they are blueprints for a new system where local leaders are not waiting to be invited, but building their own table."***

Graphic 1: Asia and the Pacific Labs across the Region



Across Asia Pacific, local leaders are reshaping humanitarian action – by leading responses from within their own communities. Localisation is no longer just a goal; it's happening now, as local organisations create new blueprints and build their own tables for change.

Graphic 2: Presenting and Framing the Regional Context



2.2. Addressing the Long-Marginalised Sub-Region

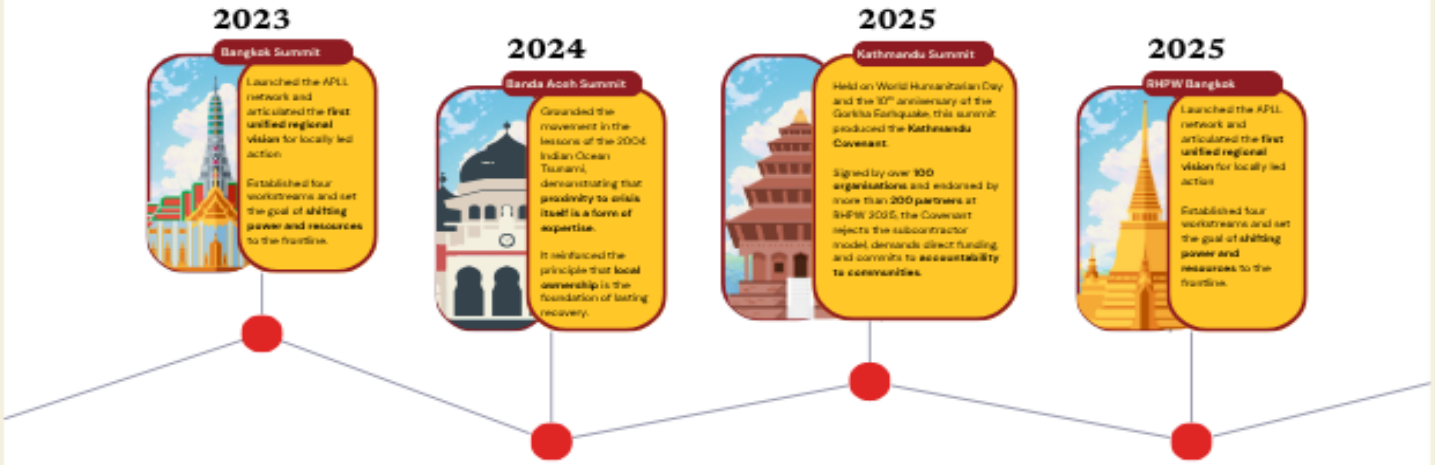
For decades, the Pacific was treated as an afterthought within Asia and the Pacific humanitarian structures. Regional summits were held exclusively on the Asian mainland; coordination systems were designed for large-scale, sudden-onset disasters; funding prioritised high-casualty events over the slow-burn, existential threats facing island nations. As one Pacific local leader put it: ***"The Pacific was always in Asia and the Pacific region – it just wasn't allowed to lead it until now."***

Pacific leadership brings invaluable lessons to the broader region. Vanuatu's customary governance systems – which have managed community resilience for generations – are now studied as models of sustainability. In Fiji and the Solomon Islands, local early warning systems combine indigenous knowledge with modern technology, proving that traditional wisdom and innovation work best together.

The APLL network now ensures that Pacific voices are embedded in every workstream, rather than siloed into a separate section. As the 2025 RHPW confirmed: ***"To a large part, thanks to APLL, the Pacific is no longer a footnote. It is a lens through which we re-examine what 'localisation' truly means – centring sovereignty, long-term resilience, and the right of communities to define their own future."***

2.3. Regional Summits as an Architecture of Solidarity

The APLL movement has grown and strengthened through a series of landmark gatherings, each building on the last to create a formal, binding structure of solidarity. These summits are not just events – they are the infrastructure of the movement, where principles are agreed, commitments are made, and collective identity is forged.



The Journey Of
Asia & The Pacific Local Leaders
2023 - 2025

What follows are national stories from:

1. **Afghanistan**
2. **Bangladesh**
3. **Cambodia**
4. **Indonesia**
5. **Myanmar**
6. **Nepal**
7. **The Pacific**
8. **Pakistan**
9. **The Philippines**

Read on to discover more about what local leaders are doing in each country.

The stories:

AFGHANISTAN: Advancing Localisation Through Collective Action

Localisation efforts in Afghanistan continue to be shaped through coordinated engagement, evidence generation, and collective dialogue under the Afghanistan Localisation Lab (ALL) in collaboration with ACBAR's Localisation Technical Working Group (LTWG) and a broad range of humanitarian stakeholders, including local and national NGOs, INGOs, donors, and coordination bodies.

In the last few months, the Lab supported the rollout of a capacity mapping assessment to strengthen the understanding of institutional capacities, priorities, and needs of local and national organisations. This exercise intends to inform more equitable partnership approaches and guide future investments in locally-led humanitarian action, with a focus on strengthening organisational systems and long-term sustainability.

In parallel, **Trust-Building Café Dialogues** have been conducted with the participation of local NGOs, INGOs, government, and local leaders/elders. These dialogues provide structured spaces for open exchange on key localisation challenges, including trust in partnerships, due diligence requirements, risk sharing, and the need for more predictable and flexible funding. The discussions have reinforced the importance of creating safe and consistent platforms for dialogue between local and international actors.

Work under the ALL advocacy action plan has continued to focus on three core priorities: flexible funding, equitable partnerships, and strengthened local leadership. These priorities have guided ongoing engagement with humanitarian actors, including INGOs, donors, and coordination platforms, to explore practical steps toward more balanced and locally led approaches to humanitarian response in Afghanistan.





The Lab has also continued its active engagement with ACBAR's LTWG, contributing to collective discussions, supporting evidence-based advocacy, and aligning efforts with broader localisation initiatives in the country. This collaboration remains central to ensuring that lessons from practice inform advocacy and that localisation priorities reflect the realities of local and national actors.

BANGLADESH: Counting What Communities Already Give: The LoCA Model

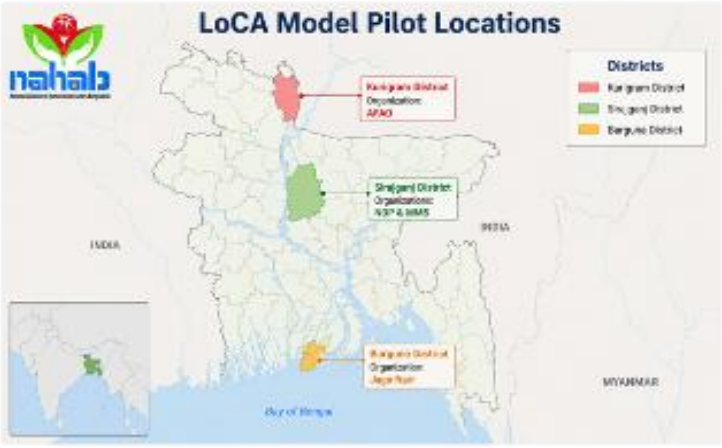
When disasters strike in Bangladesh, the first response rarely starts with an international appeal – it starts locally. Volunteers carry families to safety, community leaders open their homes as shelters, businesses donate supplies, and neighbours share food, transport, or labour. Formal humanitarian assistance arrives only later.

Communities already contribute food, health supplies, goods, spaces, materials, office space, volunteer time, vehicles, and equipment. Yet these contributions aren't valued at market price or recorded through standard accounting. So, they remain invisible – and we lose sight of how much communities actually invest in humanitarian response.

The LoCA Model offers a practical, transparent framework for documenting both cash and in-kind local contributions, through four steps (see The LoCA Model graph below):



Beyond improving accounting, the model strengthens localisation by recognising community philanthropy, encouraging volunteerism, and demonstrating local actors' significant role in humanitarian action. It is not just an accounting tool but an advocacy tool – to change how humanitarian action is understood and financed. Next steps include building organisational capacity, integrating the model into policies and financial systems, documenting lessons learned, and encouraging wider adoption.



The model was tested in three districts – Barguna, Kurigram, and Sirajganj – by four NAHAB and NEAR members (Jago Nari, AFAD, MMS, NDP), supported by the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF), the INSIGHTS team, and local organisations. The test confirmed that localisation isn't only about giving money to communities—it's about recognising and valuing the full range of resources they bring.

Bangladesh's experience is a reminder for Asia and the Pacific's localisation movement: communities have always contributed, but their contributions haven't always been counted. The LoCA Model shifts the narrative from dependency to shared investment and local leadership – recognising communities as equal partners in a more resilient, locally-led humanitarian system.

CAMBODIA: Local Leadership Tested: Cambodia's METRI Cafe Journey

Local leadership and community movements became vital lifelines for Cambodia as armed conflict along the Cambodia-Thailand border escalated in 2025. This direct confrontation deepened the fragility of local livelihoods, leaving those at "ground zero" in urgent need and putting the strength of civic space to the test.

Long before international aid could mobilise, local organisations, trusted and close to the crisis, were already assessing damage and coordinating relief for displaced families. This rapid, community-led response turned a humanitarian emergency into a real-world test of Cambodia's METRI Cafe Journey the transition of leadership and resources to domestic actors.

This leadership did not emerge in a vacuum. Prior to the escalation, the NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGOF) had invested in local institutions through its METRI Learning Lab to promote a trusted localisation hub for multi-stakeholder engagement for a transformative, resilient and inclusive society. By focusing on governance, disaster preparedness, climate resilience, and advocacy, NGOF ensured that member organisations possessed the institutional readiness to move instantly from planning to action when the crisis broke.





As the emergency unfolded, Cambodian civil society demonstrated the power of collective effort. NGOF convened a Civil Society Coordination Taskforce, uniting humanitarian and development actors across six border provinces. These organisations conducted rigorous joint assessments – using interviews, focus groups, and legal fact-finding – to ensure that community experiences shaped both immediate relief and long-term recovery strategies.

The collaboration was not limited to aid delivery. Over 400 civil society organisations, professional associations, and cooperatives issued a joint call for a peaceful resolution and the protection of civilians. This unified front proved that the METRI Cafe Journey is as much about amplifying local voices in high-stakes decision-making as it is about distributing supplies.

However, the crisis also highlighted significant systemic barriers. While local actors led the frontline response, the humanitarian financing system remained largely traditional. Direct funding to Cambodian civil society stayed limited, with financial resources and decision-making power still concentrated within international intermediary organisations. The scarcity of flexible, multi-year funding continues to hinder local groups from investing in the permanent systems required for sustainable leadership.

Cambodia's experience provides a masterclass: investing in local leadership before a crisis pays massive dividends during one. Years of institutional strengthening and network building enabled a fast, credible response. The remaining challenge is for global humanitarian governance and financing sectors to evolve, ensuring that resources finally match the proven capability of local leaders.

INDONESIA: Sailing the Localisation Boat While Rowing It, Then Warning Everyone Else

Launched at the National Localisation Conference in Banda Aceh – on the twentieth anniversary of the 2004 tsunami – the Indonesia Localisation Lab (INALocLab) was never meant to be a talking shop. Within months it became the operational backbone of the country's most consequential humanitarian coordination reform in a generation, and, as Secretariat Lead Romero Ignacio argues, *a live demonstration of what happens when reform outruns resourcing.*

The Lab's first task was shaping the National Reference Group through consultations. Deliberation gave way to execution: the Lab facilitated the transfer of national humanitarian coordination from the UN-led Humanitarian Country Team to the CSO-co-led Indonesian Humanitarian Coordination Platform (IHCP) – then became IHCP's interim secretariat for nine months, since a transfer of responsibility is not a transfer of capacity.

"What we are doing is hollow localisation, and perhaps a borderline moral failure," Pujiono said at AidEx 2025, arguing that genuine transfer of power requires planned handover, transferred capacity, donor advocacy, and funding. Indonesia confirmed this starkly: barely three months in, still assembling its own governance documents, the Lab had to serve as secretariat for the Sumatra landslide and flash flood response – roughly 1,150 dead, 1 million displaced. Responsibility had moved; funding and capacity had not.

Following the response, attention turned to strengthening those foundations. INALocLab supported the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs), a five-year strategic plan, sub-national consultations, and the Third Indonesian Humanitarian Congress, producing the Titi Moektijasih Declaration – a nationally-owned commitment on local leadership backed by sustainable resourcing.





MYANMAR: Localisation Under Political Earthquake

Myanmar is one of the most complex and high-stakes environments for localisation in the Asia and the Pacific region. The Myanmar Localisation Lab operates in a context where the international humanitarian system has been severely curtailed, and where the risks of operating for local organisations include arrest, detention, and asset seizure by state authorities. Yet it is precisely under these conditions that Myanmar's civil society has demonstrated the indispensability of a locally led response.

Community-based organisations in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, and Chin states have sustained health services, food distributions, and protection activities where international actors could not reach, using indigenous networks, local knowledge, and deep community trust as their primary assets.

Recognising that the conditions facing Myanmar CSOs are most probably not a temporary deviation but a sustained feature of the current political reality, we document:

- How Myanmar CSOs have adapted to operating under severe civic space restrictions, developing risk mitigation protocols, secure communications, and alternative financing mechanisms that allow principled humanitarian action to continue
- The particular burdens and leadership of women-led organisations, which have been at the forefront of community-based response despite facing heightened risks and targeted restrictions
- What Myanmar's experience reveals about the absolute necessity of locally-led systems when international actors are unable or unwilling to operate, and the moral imperative for regional solidarity networks to support their most constrained members

Myanmar also reveals something uncomfortable about the fragility of the localisation agenda. The international system's retreat from Myanmar was not a principled transition of power but a withdrawal driven by political and security constraints. We distinguish carefully between these dynamics: genuine localisation is a transfer of power and resources under conditions of choice and partnership; what has occurred in Myanmar is, in many respects, a forced devolution that places extraordinary burdens on local organisations without commensurate support. This is where we found regional networks crucial in supporting members operating under these conditions, and where solidarity became more than rhetorical.

NEPAL: Scaling Local Solutions: Turning Community Leadership into Lasting Resilience

In Nepal, disaster risk is a daily reality – fires spread quickly through dense southern settlements, monsoon rains trigger landslides in the hills, and earthquakes remain a constant threat. Disaster Risk Reduction and Management therefore needs localised approaches placing communities and municipalities at the centre of planning and response.

The Community Resilience (CORE) Fund responds to this need, supporting locally led risk reduction. Implemented by the National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET) and civil society partners under the Nepal Localisation Lab, and supported by NEAR, its prototype phase tested one idea: communities facing risk should have the resources, authority, and institutional support to reduce it before disasters occur.

In Aaurahi Rural Municipality, Mahottari District, the Fund supported a "Creating Fire Resilient Communities" initiative—identifying ponds as emergency water sources, prepositioning firefighting equipment, and training municipal police, volunteers, and community members. Awareness activities reached nine settlements, and the municipality committed to integrating fire risk reduction into its annual budget.





In Panchpokhari Thangpal Rural Municipality, Sindhupalchowk District—exposed to earthquakes, landslides, floods, and forest fires—the Fund helped establish a DRR Localisation Resource Centre as a municipal hub for preparedness, coordination, and early warning. The municipality provided space and resources, while ARSOW Nepal, NSET, and community stakeholders equipped it. Committee members and volunteers were trained in preparedness and search and rescue; in Ward 6, landslide mitigation work directly benefited more than 25 vulnerable households.

The CORE Fund demonstrated four strengths: localisation grounded in municipal priorities; local leadership by municipalities, committees, and volunteers; innovation through simple, context-specific solutions; and sustainability via municipal budget commitments.
This shifts resilience work from activity delivery to systems change – linking fire preparedness to municipal budgeting, and creating an institutional home for DRR learning. Nepal's experience shows locally led financing is about more than transferring money: it changes who defines risks, designs solutions, and remains accountable. Resilience isn't built for communities—it's built with them, led by them, and sustained through institutions they trust.

THE PACIFIC: Building a Humanitarian System That Begins at Home

For generations, Pacific communities have understood a simple truth: when disaster strikes, the first response comes not from outside but from within – families, churches and local leaders responding long before international assistance arrives. For too long, the humanitarian system failed to recognise this, treating local organisations as implementers rather than leaders, with decisions made elsewhere and Pacific knowledge dismissed as mere experience.

FALE Pacific was created to challenge that narrative. Coordinated by the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO), the Facility Aiding Locally-led Engagement is built on a principle: those closest to a crisis are best placed to lead it. The word fale means "house" – a place of belonging and collective decision-making – and that spirit lies at its heart, bringing together civil society, faith-based, women's and youth groups, governments, academia and humanitarian partners in one platform that strengthens, rather than replaces, existing systems.

National platforms operate in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Palau, with new ones being prepared in Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands and Timor-Leste. FALE is also reshaping how knowledge is shared, contributing research with partners such as the Humanitarian Advisory Group to influence policy on Pacific terms.

FALE's true measure lies in communities: platforms coordinating local responses before international assistance arrives, and organisations trusted to lead preparedness, recovery, advocacy and learning, as seen after the Vanuatu earthquake and severe weather in Fiji. Local actors need no invitation into humanitarian action – they are already leading it, needing only investment, trust, equitable partnerships and direct access to resources.

As climate change accelerates disasters across the Blue Pacific, localisation must become the foundation of humanitarian systems, not an aspiration for conference rooms. FALE Pacific shows communities can be trusted, not merely consulted, and partnerships built on respect rather than dependency. This is Pacific leadership. This is Pacific solidarity.



PAKISTAN: From Global Framework to Local Practice: Pakistan's Journey of Contextualising Localisation

Global commitments have placed localisation at the centre of humanitarian reform. But one question remains: **Can a single global framework capture the realities of every context?**

The Pakistan Localisation Lab believed the answer was **NO**.

Rather than applying NEAR's Localisation Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF) unchanged, the Lab contextualised it by adapting it to Pakistan's humanitarian realities while preserving its core principles. Members reviewed the LPMF's six global components and piloted three foundational areas: Partnerships, Humanitarian Financing, and Organisational Capacity. Indicators were adapted to reflect issues that Pakistani organisations repeatedly raised: sustainability planning, equitable partnerships, duty of care, risk sharing, and province-level coordination.



Member organisations piloted the contextualised framework through evidence-based self-assessments, translating findings into practical action plans rather than simple scores.
A clear pattern emerged: localisation in Pakistan is constrained less by the commitment of local actors than by the systems within which they operate. Partnerships remain largely project-based with limited local influence over programme design and resourcing.

Financing was identified as the most significant barrier: limited direct donor access, short-term funding, and inadequate overhead support. Strong institutional systems governance, MEAL, leadership, and resource mobilisation emerged as essential for sustainable local leadership.

Most importantly, the process moved beyond measurement. Each assessment produced action plans, turning the LPMF into a mechanism for organisational learning and systems change and generating one of Pakistan's first collective evidence bases on localisation.
Pakistan's contribution to the regional movement is not that it piloted the LPMF, but that it demonstrated a practical method for turning global commitments into national action. As humanitarian systems evolve under the Humanitarian Reset, Pakistan's experience offers a simple message:

Localisation succeeds not when frameworks are copied, but when they are owned, adapted and shaped by local organisations.

PHILIPPINES: Forging Locally-Led Humanitarian Futures

The Philippines, an archipelago at the crossroads of typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and floods, has transformed adversity into innovation — building one of Asia's most sophisticated local humanitarian systems. Civil society has long demanded accountability from both government and international actors, and when accountability fell short, communities themselves rose to the challenge, developing robust response capacities rooted in resilience and solidarity.

Within this context, the Philippines Localisation Lab stands as a pioneering force. Operating in a country where localisation debate carries real political traction, the Lab engages national and local CSOs equipped with technical expertise, legal acumen, and advocacy sophistication to meet international humanitarian actors on equal terms. Its work aligns with government disaster risk reduction frameworks while advancing priorities that ensure sustainability of locally led systems. The Philippine experience offers not only a national model but also vital contributions to regional understanding — demonstrating what it takes to build humanitarian systems that are equitable, enduring and truly community-driven





What these stories are saying

Across Asia and the Pacific, one message resounds clearly through each story in this edition: humanitarian action is strongest when it is led by the people closest to the crisis. Whether responding to conflict, climate disasters, or protracted humanitarian emergencies, local organisations, community networks, municipalities, and civil society leaders are not waiting to be empowered – they are already leading. The challenge before the humanitarian system is to recognise, resource, and trust that leadership.

The experiences shared here demonstrate that local leadership is not an aspiration for the future; it is the reality of humanitarian response today. In **Afghanistan**, collective dialogue and evidence-building are laying the foundations for more equitable partnerships. **Bangladesh** reminds us that communities have always invested their own resources in humanitarian action, even when those contributions have gone unrecognised. **Indonesia** offers a powerful lesson that transferring responsibility without transferring resources risks replacing reform with frustration. **Cambodia** shows that years of investing in local institutions before a crisis enabled an immediate and coordinated response when conflict erupted. **Myanmar** underscores the indispensable role of local civil society in contexts where international actors cannot safely operate, while also exposing the heavy burdens placed on national organisations when power is not matched by support. **The Pacific** demonstrates that when humanitarian systems invest in locally led coordination, communities are not only first to respond but are empowered to shape preparedness, response and recovery on their own terms. **Pakistan** demonstrates that global commitments only become meaningful when they are adapted and owned locally. **The Philippines** illustrates how sustained civic engagement can shape resilient humanitarian systems.

Taken together, these stories move the conversation beyond localisation as a technical agenda or funding target. They point instead towards a vision of humanitarian action grounded in local leadership – where communities shape decisions, institutions build long-term resilience, and partnerships are defined by mutual accountability rather than hierarchy. Local leadership is not simply about who implements projects; it is about who defines priorities, manages resources, generates evidence, and holds humanitarian systems accountable to the people they serve.

This journey ahead involves building more locally-led ecosystems. And this requires that donors, international organisations, governments, and regional networks align financing, governance, and decision-making with the leadership that is already being demonstrated across the region. Flexible, predictable funding, equitable partnerships, and sustained investment in local institutional capacity are no longer optional reforms – they are essential building blocks of a more effective humanitarian system.

The stories in this newsletter remind us that the future of humanitarian action will be built by recognising that local leaders have always been at the forefront, and by ensuring the global system has the courage to follow where they are already leading.