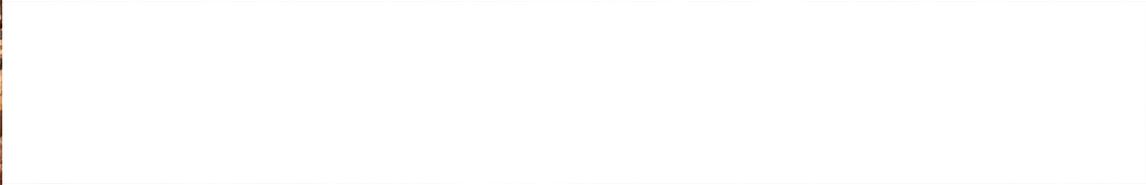


ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S LOCAL PARTNERSHIP PROJECT PHASE 1 & 2



The Local Partnership Project phase 1 & 2 was led by Action Against Hunger's Local Partnership Working Group, under the guidance of Robina Shaheen, Isabelle Moussard Carlsen and Juliet Parker.

This report was drafted by Elena Grüning and Julie Guillaume and reviewed by the Partnership and Localisation Advisory Board members as well as Agata Zanoletty Buitrago, Alice Ponsoero, A. Lucia Rodrigues Oliveira, Aurélie Ferial, Francois Goemans, Clément Boulier, Isabelle Moussard Carlsen, Javad Amoozegar, Jörg Mühlbach, Alison McNulty, Mathilde Lambert, Mike Bonke and Morgane Dussud.

The following people have also contributed to the Local Partnership Project: Ana Martin De Casto, Camille Guyot-Bender, Damaris Kahuri, Diainaba Seydi, François Parnaud, Hillary Dale, Mohammad Azreen Kamal, Paula Tenaglia, and Snigdha Sahal.

August 2021

Cover photo: Gonzalo Höhr for Action Against Hunger

Report design: Kim Winkler



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
II. INTRODUCTION	3
III. METHODOLOGY	5
i. DATA COLLECTION METHODS	5
ii. LIMITATIONS	7
IV. DEFINING "PARTNERSHIP"	8
i. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S CURRENT DEFINITION OF "PARTNERSHIP"	8
ii. UNDERSTANDING OF PARTNERSHIP ACROSS THE ORGANISATION	8
V. AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT POLICIES, TOOLS AND STRUCTURES	10
i. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIP POLICY 2011	10
ii. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIP GUIDELINES AND TOOLKIT	11
iii. TOOLKIT REVIEW	13
iv. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S CURRENT PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE	14
VI. WHY WORK WITH LOCAL PARTNERS?	16
i. MUTUAL SUPPORT	17
ii. A MEANS TO AN END OR A MEANS IN ITSELF?	17
VII. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S ADDED VALUE	18
i. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S TECHNICAL EXPERTISE	18
ii. TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE	19
iii. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S POSITION IN THE SECTOR	19
VIII. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO WORKING IN LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS	20
i. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY ACTION AGAINST HUNGER	20
ii. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY	21
IX. LOOKING FORWARD	23
i. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	23
ii. NEXT STEPS	25
X. ANNEX	26
1. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT SURVEY FOR COUNTRY STAFF	26
2. PARTNER SURVEY	26
3. DETAILED FINDINGS FROM THE PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT SURVEY	26
4. TOOL REVIEW RESULTS	26
5. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER PARTNERSHIP POLICY 2011	26
6. LOCALISATION PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK (NEAR, 2020)	26

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ISP3	International Strategic Plan 2021-2025
LPMF	Localisation Performance Measurement Framework
OPS IMG	Operations International Management Group
PWG	Partnership Working Group
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Action Against Hunger wishes to thank warmly Aydrus Daar (Executive Director, WASDA), Dr Colas Emilien Rafanoharana (Regional Coordinator, ASOS), Francis Iwa (Co-founder & Executive Director, CAFOMI), Khady Fall Tall (Chairwoman, AFAO/WAWA), Liliane Bitong Ambassa (Partnership Specialist, Independent), Mamadou Mangassouba (ACSADE /Actions pour la Santé et le Développement) and Mimidoo Achakpa (Executive Director Women's Right to Education Programme) for their advice and guidance as part of the pilot Partnership and Localisation Advisory Board.

A warm thank you also to the NEAR Network, in particular Alix Masson, for her collaboration with us in testing their Localisation Performance Measurement Framework in Turkey and Bangladesh and providing deeper insights into localisation in these particular contexts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Action Against Hunger recognises that local partnership is a critical part of its operational modality and that this is gaining increasing importance as the humanitarian sector changes. It has become evident that Action Against Hunger is lacking a clear and common approach to local partnership and that key questions must be addressed: Why should Action Against Hunger be working with local partners? What role should Action Against Hunger take as a partner?

In 2018, an international Local Partnership Working Group (LPWG) was set up to address these questions and review, harmonise and strengthen the organisation's approach to working with local partners. Whilst this work is situated within Action Against Hunger's broader localisation agenda, Action Against Hunger is yet to fully define our fullest ambitions on localisation and how we can embed this into our DNA. Therefore our Local Partnership Project gives us the opportunity to take forward what we know to be a fundamental pillar to localisation and, in doing so, showcase how this can be achieved. This report summarises the key findings of the review conducted from September 2019 to February 2020 and outlines recommendations and next steps for the third phase of the project.

PLEASE NOTE

THAT THIS REPORT PRESENTS ONLY THE FINDINGS DRAWN FROM THE DATA COLLECTION CONDUCTED WITHIN THIS TIME PERIOD AND THEREFORE REFLECTS THE ORGANISATION'S STATUS IN EARLY 2020. ANY DEVELOPMENTS AND INITIATIVES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE ACROSS THE ORGANISATION SINCE THEN, HAVE NOT BEEN INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT, BUT HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED IN THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS.

The review draws on primary and secondary data. This includes a desk review and an in-depth review of Action Against Hunger's partnership tools. Surveys were distributed to Action Against Hunger staff and Action Against Hunger's local partners and consultations were held with local civil society and Action Against Hunger staff. In this review, local partnership includes both local civil society and local authorities, which has been noted as a limitation due to their different roles in the sector.

Action Against Hunger has a [PARTNERSHIP POLICY](#) from 2011 and [PARTNERSHIP GUIDELINES AND TOOLKIT](#). From our review, we conclude that these key partnership documents need updating and specifying. Findings from the tool review show that only 33% of the tools are considered to be operational (rated by an internal review group. Tools are either not complete, practical or replicable. Findings from the staff survey show that country offices lack capacity to manage partnerships, especially because they lack tools and expertise.

Action Against Hunger has an official [DEFINITION OF PARTNERSHIP](#), but it is not specific to local partnerships. Yet, the current definition does reflect the understanding of partnership shared across the organisation: a bi-lateral, collaborative relationship working toward a common goal.

The [MOTIVATIONS](#) for Action Against Hunger to work with local partners can be grouped into three categories: 1 Access and implementation, 2) Strengthening local capacity and 3 Learning and gaining local knowledge. Findings show that the most common reasons for working in local partnership are to increase Action Against Hunger's geographical coverage, its access to and acceptance from communities, donor and Government requirements and increasing sustainability and long-term development.

Findings show that Action Against Hunger's technical expertise is regarded as its strongest [ADDED VALUE](#) to the humanitarian sector as a whole as well as to local civil society as a partner. Local partners also consider Action Against Hunger's position in the sector and global reach as an added value for them

The underlying **BARRIER FOR ACTION AGAINST HUNGER** is its weak partnership culture, which is closely linked to its identity as a humanitarian organisation that traditionally implements directly and alone. Other barriers to partnering on local level include the lack of time to set up partnerships in emergencies, lack of capacity to do so and generally a lack of strategy and communication around local partnerships in any context.

The **CHALLENGES FACED BY LOCAL ACTORS** include cultural barriers and the rigid approach of INGOs to building and managing partnerships, a lack of decision-making power in partnerships with INGOs, a lack of commitment to the partnership itself (in terms of evaluation), the project-based partnership culture with no long-term vision, lack of capacity to uphold any long-term partnerships and finally “negative perceptions” of each other.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDED DEVELOPING AND UPDATING RELEVANT DOCUMENTS AND TOOLS, IMPROVING ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE, STRENGTHENING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, COLLECTING AND SHARING LEARNING, BUILDING ON ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS AND GOOD PRACTICES, AND ULTIMATELY BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A DEEP-ROOTED LOCAL PARTNERSHIP CULTURE ACROSS THE ORGANISATION. IN LINE WITH THESE RECOMMENDATIONS, THE NEXT STEPS FOR PHASE 3 OF THE LOCAL PARTNERSHIP PROJECT INCLUDE, FIRSTLY, A DISCUSSION SESSION TO AGREE ON THE UNDERLYING MOTIVATION OF ACTION AGAINST HUNGER TO PARTNER WITH LOCAL ACTORS AND THE ROLE IT SHOULD TAKE, AND THEN DEVELOPING KEY DOCUMENTS AND TOOLS THROUGH DEDICATED SUB-WORKING GROUPS, FORMALISING THE PARTNERSHIP AND LOCALISATION ADVISORY BOARD AND FURTHER COLLABORATING WITH THE NEAR NETWORK TO STRENGTHEN ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLECT LEARNINGS.

INTRODUCTION

Action Against Hunger recognises partnerships with local civil society and local government actors to be a critical part of its operational modality both currently and increasingly in the future. We understand that working with local actors is essential to fight hunger and undernutrition.

First steps have been taken to investigate our current approaches to partnership and our motivations for working with local partners. In 2018 Action Against Hunger's UK Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) team conducted a mid-term review of the organisation's International Strategic Plan 2016-2020, in which partnership was used as one of the evaluation benchmarks. The organisation has also been conducting self-assessments between 2017-2019 on the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), in which local partnerships play a key role.

It has become evident that Action Against Hunger is lacking a clear and common approach to working with local partners and that key questions must be addressed: Why should Action Against Hunger be working with local partners? What role should Action Against Hunger take as a partner?

Action Against Hunger has yet to position itself more clearly in the localisation debate. Various initiatives have been taken across Action Against Hunger member offices. Action Against Hunger UK has been involved in projects and initiatives around localisation, such as Start Fund Bangladesh, the Disasters & Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP) and the three-year project Shifting the Power. Action Against Hunger Spain and Action Against Hunger France have conducted a self-assessment against the Localisation Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF), designed by the NEAR Network, and Action Against Hunger US developed a localisation action plan. However, Action Against Hunger as an organisation lacks a clear and common position on the localisation agenda, which goes hand in hand with the question why and how we want to work with local partners.

In 2018 the Ops IMG set up an international Local Partnership Working Group (LPWG) to review, harmonise and strengthen Action Against Hunger's approach to working with local partners. The LPWG is supported by dedicated capacity in the organisation's member offices, including Canada, France, Germany, India, Spain, the UK and the US. The Local Partnership Project is key to the organisation's commitment to the CHS and the organisation's next International Strategic Plan for 2021-2025 (ISP3). The Local Partnership Project consists of three phases:

1. Reviewing existing structures, practices, policies and tools across the organisation on partnering and working with local actors;
2. collating and analysing findings of this review, and sharing the results with the organisation and informing the ISP3.
3. facilitating the revision/development of an organisation wide policy/strategy, tools and practices including due diligence procedures.

This report is the output of phase 2 and summarises the key findings drawn from the review of Action Against Hunger's local partnership approach conducted from September 2019 to February 2020 (phase 1). Based on these findings, we provide key recommendations and outline next steps for the third phase of the project.

Whilst this work is situated within Action Against Hunger's broader localisation agenda, Action Against Hunger is yet to fully define our fullest ambitions on localisation and how we can embed this into our DNA. Therefore our Local Partnership Project gives us the opportunity to take forward what we know to be a fundamental pillar to localisation and, in doing so, showcase how this can be achieved. This will add to a growing number of initiatives across the network which focus on localisation at strategic, regional and programme level.

METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of the review was to build the evidence base for Action Against Hunger's practice in working with local actors, specifically addressing the following 5 questions:

1. How does Action Against Hunger define 'partnership'?
2. Why does Action Against Hunger currently work with local actors and what should be the primary reason for working with local actors in the future?
3. What is Action Against Hunger's added value as a partner?
4. What partnership related policies, tools and practices are currently in place and how well do they perform?
5. What challenges and barriers do Action Against Hunger staff and local civil society face when working in partnership?

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The review draws on primary and secondary data and includes not only the perspectives of Action Against Hunger staff, but also those of local actors themselves.

DESK REVIEW (INCLUDING AN IN-DEPTH TOOLKIT REVIEW)

A desk review was conducted, mapping and reviewing all partnership related documents and tools available across the organisation.

As part of this desk review, we conducted an in-depth review of Action Against Hunger's partnership tools. For this purpose, we put together a small review group comprised of 8 Action Against Hunger staff working on partnerships in different capacities at either regional, mission, or international level and with different operational or expert backgrounds. The objective of such a group was to analyse the tools from an operational standpoint. Out of the 104 tools that were gathered across the organisation, the group reviewed 78.

Each reviewer was assigned up to 10 tools to review according to a review grid and guidelines provided by the PWG. Each tool was evaluated against three criteria (completeness, practicality and replicability). Reviewers were asked to provide ratings on a scale from 0 to 5 and to provide justifications for their ratings and/or suggestions for improvement to make the tool fully operational.

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER STAFF PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT SURVEY

We distributed a Partnership Management Survey to Action Against Hunger staff working in member offices (France, Spain, US)¹ (see annex 1). Country level staff received a slightly different version to Action Against Hunger staff working in member offices.

1 In this report, the term "member" is being used for "HQ".

In total we received 135 responses (39 responses from country staff across 32 country offices and 96 responses from Action Against Hunger member staff). Relevant findings from this survey are integrated into this report. Further findings can be found in annex 3.

PARTNER SURVEY TO ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S LOCAL PARTNERS

Through the Partnership Management Survey, we obtained the contact details of 31 local partners' representatives and asked them to complete a Partner Survey (see annex 2) aiming to assess their experience of working in partnership with Action Against Hunger.

LOCALISATION PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK WORKSHOPS IN BANGLADESH

In the framework of Action Against Hunger UK's long-term partnership with the NEAR Network, the PWG members in the UK collaborated with the NEAR Network to test their Localisation Performance Measurement Framework (see annex 6) in Bangladesh. We organised two workshops in Dhaka in January 2020 to test this framework with various local actors.

The first workshop was conducted with current partners of Action Against Hunger Bangladesh, including different kinds of local actors (such as NGOs, Government officials, academics, INGOs, etc.). Start Fund Bangladesh was also part of this workshop.

The second workshop was conducted with local NGOs, which are members of the National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors in Bangladesh (NAHAB). Given that these organisations are not Action Against Hunger's partners, the main objective of this particular workshop for Action Against Hunger UK was to gain a better understanding of how localisation looks like in Bangladesh and how Action Against Hunger is or could be contributing to this process as a partner. The discussions held throughout these workshops feed into this report, in particular with regard to the challenges faced by local actors.

PARTNERSHIP AND LOCALISATION ADVISORY BOARD

As the project progressed and to further support the development of the ISP3, the Ops IMG piloted a Partnership and Localisation Advisory Board on 10th – 11th February 2020 in Madrid. This pilot Advisory Board was made up of seven representatives of local NGOs, put forward by Action Against Hunger staff. The objective was to tap into Board members' expertise to help us review our approaches, to provide advice on strengthening our contribution to localisation, and to hold us to account on progress against our PWG action plan. Next steps are discussed in the last section 'Looking forward'.

The discussions held with the Advisory Board, in particular their recommendations, feed into this report.

SECONDARY DATA SOURCES

While the above are our main data sources, the report also draws on findings from other partnership related initiatives and projects across the organisation:

- Research and consultations (in 2019) on our next International Strategic Plan for 2021-2025
- The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability Self-Assessments (2017 - 2019)
- The Mid-Term-Review (2018) of the International Strategic Plan for 2016-2020
- An evaluation of a local partnership in the response to Cyclone IDAI that hit Mozambique in March 2019

LIMITATIONS

We must take into account that the review considered both local civil society and local government actors as 'local partners' without differentiating between the two. It became clear throughout our research that these must be treated separately given the existing power dynamics and different roles and responsibilities. This was addressed by the Advisory Board as well as the local actors participating in the workshops in Bangladesh. The lack of differentiation between local civil society and government (as well as between different kinds of actors within the civil society) may have affected findings from the Partnership Management Survey.

Given the small sample size of the Partner Survey and the lack of global representation of the pilot Advisory Board, we cannot draw general conclusions on the experiences and views of local actors. Likewise, we would need to conduct several more Localisation Performance Measurement workshops across different countries to draw clear conclusions. Given that Bangladesh has a well developed NGO sector compared to some other countries, findings from these workshops cannot be generalised. The data does however provide us with some insights that give us an idea of what Action Against Hunger's added value may be, what is going well and what challenges may exist.

Another limitation is that this review was led by Action Against Hunger staff working in **Action Against Hunger member offices with only little involvement** of country level staff working directly with local partners.

Lastly, the report reflects the organisation's status in **early 2020**, meaning that any developments or improvements since then are not included in this report. This is due to the project being paused when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and the subsequent delay in the finalisation of this report. To mitigate this limitation, known initiatives and developments throughout 2020 are considered in the recommendations and next steps.

DEFINING 'PARTNERSHIP'

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S CURRENT DEFINITION OF 'PARTNERSHIP'

Before we can discuss and agree on a common approach to working with local partners, we need to understand and agree on what we consider a (local) partnership to be.

Action Against Hunger does not yet have an official definition of specifically local partnership, but there does exist a definition of partnership in general (as given in the Partnership Policy 2011), which reads as follows:

'A relationship between ACF-IN and one or more organisations that work together to achieve a defined and shared goal, which contributes to realising our mission to save lives by eradicating hunger and malnutrition. Such a relationship is based on shared interest, is constructive and dynamic in nature, and mutually beneficial: for ACF-IN, for our partners and, most importantly, for the people and communities we serve. It brings together the right combination of resources, experience and know-how needed to achieve the desired results or solve the problem at hand. By working together, we achieve more than if we had worked alone.'

On some level this definition reflects the understanding of partnership shared across staff (see next section), but it is very broad and can be interpreted in various ways. The need of a definition (and policy) specifically focusing on local partnerships has been expressed numerous times not only in the Partnership Management Survey, but also by the Advisory Board.

UNDERSTANDING OF 'PARTNERSHIP' ACROSS THE ORGANISATION

A BI-LATERAL, COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership Management Survey asked respondents to provide a definition of 'partnership' and the majority described a bi-lateral, collaborative partnership, highlighting at least one of the following aspects:

- working together toward a common goal (mentioned most often)
- pooling, sharing and combining of resources and expertise
- sharing responsibilities, ownership and risks
- principles and values such as respect, trust, appreciation, transparency
- long-term, strategic
- supporting each other, mutual learning, complementarity

In addition, the Advisory Board recommends using terms such as "mutual", "functional", or "equity" instead of "equal" as two parties can never be perfectly equal at the same time.

AN UNIDIRECTIONAL, SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIP

Three respondents described a unidirectional, supporting partnership, in which specifically the INGO is supporting the local actor. The bi-lateral, collaborative partnership may also entail a supporting component, but this support is considered to be mutual and complementary. It must be noted though, that the Partnership Management Survey did not ask respondents to define specifically local partnership, which may have brought about different findings.

DEFINING "LOCAL ACTOR"

When defining local partnership, we may also have to ask ourselves what we consider as "local". This was pointed out multiple times in consultations with local civil society (with the Advisory Board as well as with local actors in Bangladesh). The term "local actor" has in fact been questioned by one Advisory Board member, arguing that only those actually acting within the community (e.g. women) are to be considered as "actors" rather than organisations and governments. Interestingly though, these terms were not questioned in the Partnership Management Survey nor in the ISP3 consultations amongst Action Against Hunger staff.

AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT POLICIES, TOOLS AND STRUCTURES

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIP POLICY 2011

Action Against Hunger has a Partnership Policy published in 2011 (see annex 5) that provides a definition of partnership (as stated above) and describes why, when and how Action Against Hunger works with other organisations, including principles of partnership and risks to be considered.

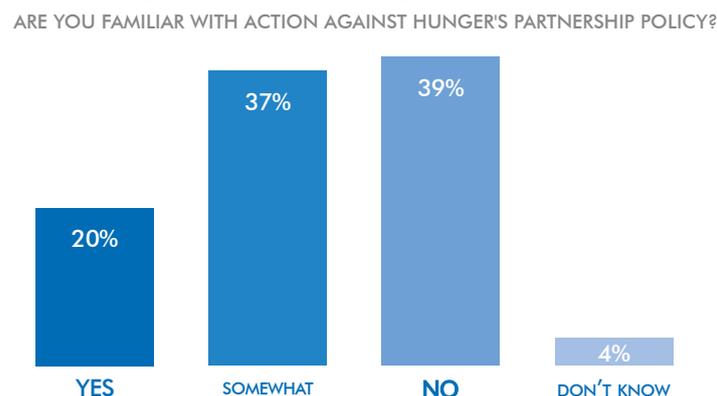
This policy implies that partnerships – whether local or international – can and should take various forms, in which Action Against Hunger can play different roles. It argues that the term “partnership” is often used to describe an “ideological inter-organisational relationship – one of strategic significance based on shared vision, mutual engagement and strong sense of solidarity”, but that this is only one form of a partnership.

Action Against Hunger staff as well as the Advisory Board are recommending to specify and update this policy, so that it reflects “new thinking” and our positioning on the localisation agenda. Further suggestions made by the Advisory Board and Action Against Hunger staff included:

- Shortening the policy (while specifying it and increasing its practicality)
- Rewriting it in a less top-down, inward-looking way
- Reviewing it through consultations with current local partners
- Developing an organisation-wide partnership strategy that facilitates this policy
- Sharing and communicating the policy across the entire organisation (to increase understanding, ownership and effective implementation)

The last point is significant, as the majority of staff is not or only somewhat familiar with the Partnership Policy:

FIGURE 1: PROPORTION OF ACTION AGAINST HUNGER STAFF THAT ARE FAMILIAR WITH ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIP POLICY



ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIP GUIDELINES AND TOOLKIT

The Partnership Policy goes along with Action Against Hunger's Partnership Guidelines and Partnership Toolkit². Those tools that were reviewed by the review group are listed in annex 4.

The Partnership Guidelines were first developed by Action Against Hunger France in 2012 and updated by Action Against Hunger US in 2019 (which is stored on the US internal platform). These are over 60 pages long, although various shorter versions have been developed. The Guidelines guide the reader through the 6 phases of the partnership management cycle, providing examples of tools from the Partnership Toolkit that can be used for each phase.

The Partnership Toolkit was initially developed by Action Against Hunger Spain in 2012, but has been refined by different member offices over the years, so that various versions now exist across the organisation. There are certain tools (17) that are included in all versions of the Toolkit. However, each version includes additional tools or its own versions of certain tools. Today, there exist over 100 tools across the organisation. In 2016/17, a "simplified civil society toolkit" was developed.

At the time of data collection, the majority of Action Against Hunger staff were not or only somewhat familiar with the Partnership Toolkit:

FIGURE 2: PROPORTION OF ACTION AGAINST HUNGER STAFF THAT ARE FAMILIAR WITH ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT

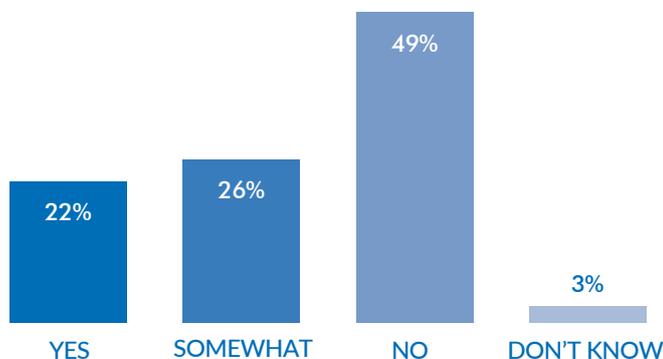
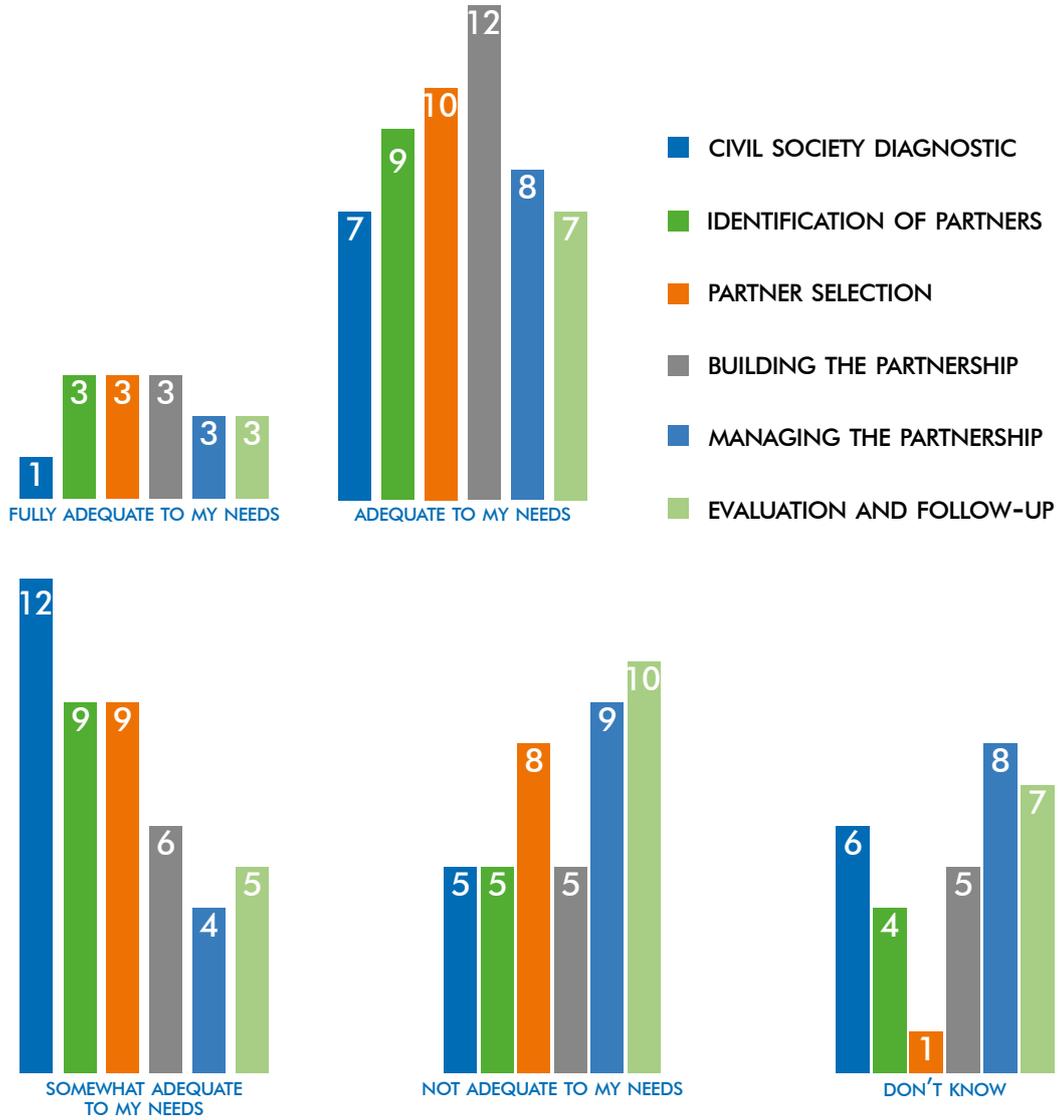


Figure 3 shows to what extent staff, that were familiar with toolkit, considered these tools to be adequate to their needs. Only a small number of respondents indicated that certain tools are fully adequate.

² update August 2022: all old and new tools and guidelines can now be found on Action Against Hunger's international site dedicated to Local Partnership and Localisation

FIGURE 3: RATING OF ACTION AGAINST HUNGER PARTNERSHIP TOOLS AMONG STAFF THAT WERE FAMILIAR WITH THE TOOLKIT



TOOLKIT REVIEW

Our review group rated 78 of the tools in the Partnership Toolkit (see annex 4). Reviewers were asked to rate each tool on a scale from 0 – 5 against three criteria: completeness³, practicality⁴ and replicability⁵. Overall, 33% of the 78 tools were rated 4 to 5 and could therefore constitute a basis for future work on the revision of Action Against Hunger partnership tools.

On replicability, 50% of the tools were rated 4 to 5. This is the criteria for which the highest number of tools were rated 4 to 5. On practicality, 42% of the tools were rated 4 to 5. On completeness, 31% of the tools were rated 4 to 5. Completeness would therefore seem to be a key issue to address when reviewing Action Against Hunger's partnership tools, followed by practicality.

Reviewers point out the need of ownership from relevant experts within the organisation over those tools that relate to legal and financial aspects as well as security and risk. This would ensure these tools are up to date, compliant, and accompanied with the necessary guidelines for proper use by partnership managers at all levels. Additionally, a formalised clearance and/or validation process would be helpful to ensure proper check and balances for all tools generally and more specifically for legal, financial, security and risk related tools.

Tools rated on average between 4 and 5 need limited adaptation to be fully operational. Necessary adaptations most often cited by reviewers included:

- the adaptation of the tool to Action Against Hunger's context,
- the addition of a security section to make the tool more comprehensive,
- and translation into English to ensure the tool can be replicated and used across the organisation.

Tools rated on average between 3 and 4 need more significant adaptations to be fully operational. Necessary adaptations most often cited by reviewers include:

- the addition of donor requirements sections or the adaptability of the tool to donor requirements,
- the addition of clear guidelines for using the tool,
- the addition of a clearance/validation process in both guidelines and sections of the tool,
- the merging of several tools and/or the re-organisation of tool sections to ensure practicality and completeness of the process,
- leaving room for partners' input (as tools are currently too "top-down").

3 Thorough content: the tool covers the whole process it is dedicated to (i.e. the title of the tool is coherent with its content, and the content covers the whole process designated by the title)

4 Clear and simple enough for mission staff to use it, actually enforceable, meets the needs of the mission

5 Can be adapted and used in other countries / contexts, is designed in a way that any country could use it (either because it is global enough or because it has built-in adaptability components)

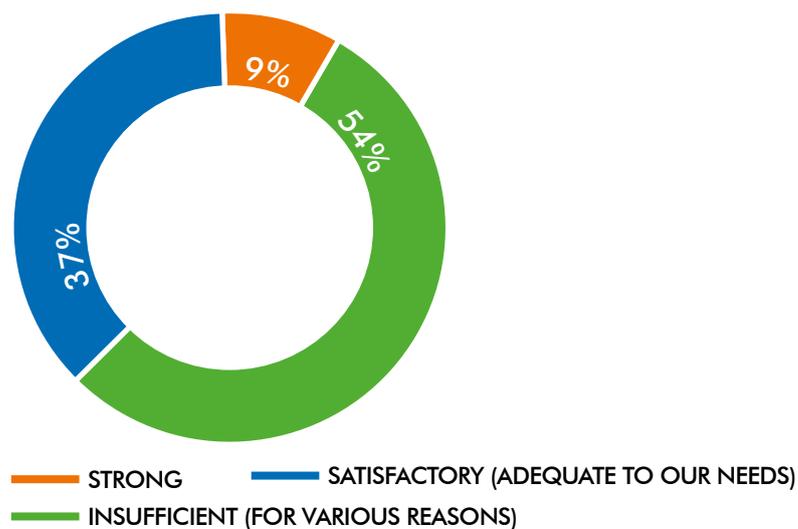
Tools rated on average below 3 are not operational as such and would require thorough review to become operational. Comments from reviewers indicated that these tools are “incomplete”, “too broad/general”, “empty”, “lack details/preciseness in all sections” and therefore do not meet the partnership management needs of Action Against Hunger. Other comments included the fact that the tools lack guidelines, which prevents proper use of the tool, that the tool's format is not adapted to its use, that the tools are not specifically dedicated to partnership management or that the uncertainty on the date of the tool's last update raised questions on compliance with current rules and practices.

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S CURRENT PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Action Against Hunger engages directly with local partners only at country level. Action Against Hunger member offices in Spain, France and US each support certain country offices in the management of their local partnerships.

Most respondents indicated that they do not have a specific post at country level responsible for partnerships. The Partnership Management Survey indicates that country offices lack capacity for managing partnerships for various reasons.

FIGURE 4: COUNTRY OFFICES' PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT CAPACITY



Findings show that capacity was lacking especially for developing and implementing a capacity development plan and for evaluations/following up. Even if project evaluations are conducted, the partnership itself would rarely be evaluated. The main reason for the lack of capacity was the lack of tools and expertise.

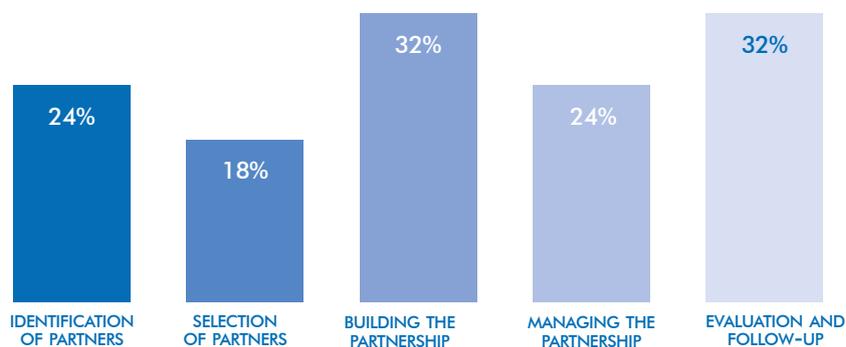
FIGURE 5: REASONS FOR INSUFFICIENT PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT CAPACITY



Action Against Hunger staff working in member offices (France, Spain, US) indicated that they feel best positioned/equipped to support country offices in building their local partnership and in evaluating and following up.

FIGURE 6: PHASES THAT MEMBER OFFICES FEEL BEST POSITIONED TO SUPPORT AT COUNTRY LEVEL

PHASES THAT MEMBERS FEEL BEST POSITIONED/EQUIPPED TO SUPPORT AT COUNTRY LEVEL



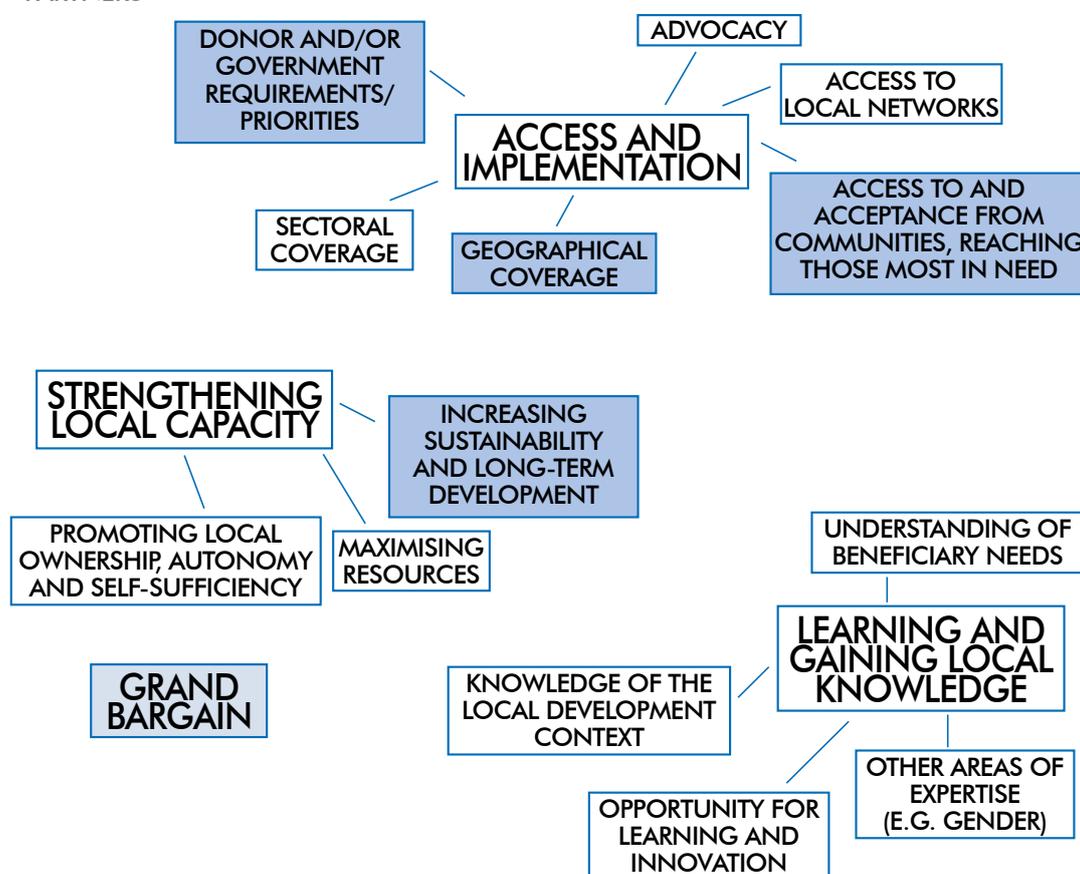
Just under half of the respondents (38) said their country office has developed a local partnership strategy. However, it seems that some of these respondents had considered partner specific (and international) strategies as a 'local partnership strategy'.

WHY WORK WITH LOCAL PARTNERS?

The reasons for Action Against Hunger to work in local partnerships can be categorised into three groups:

1. Access and implementation
2. Building local capacity
3. Learning and gaining local knowledge

FIGURE 7: ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S MOTIVATIONS TO WORK WITH LOCAL PARTNERS



The most common reasons mentioned in the Partnership Management Survey were to increase sustainability and long-term development (mentioned 11 times), to increase Action Against Hunger's geographical coverage (mentioned 7 times), to gain access to and acceptance from communities (mentioned 7 times) as well as to fulfil donor and/or government requirements (mentioned 7 times).

While responses to the Partnership Management Survey indicate the current reasons for Action Against Hunger to work with local partners, ISP3 research and consultations rather bring forward what Action Against Hunger staff and partners think should be the primary reason for working in local partnership – capacity strengthening to promote sustainability and ownership.

Action Against Hunger is not yet a signatory of the Grand Bargain, but it

was mentioned once as a reason for partnering with local actors. Becoming a signatory may be one of the key next steps.

MUTUAL SUPPORT

Note that the majority of respondents to the Partnership Management Survey described a bi-lateral relationship, in which both parties support and learn from each other. However, the reasons for currently working with partners only touch upon this aspect.

In our consultations however this has come up more often. For example, some see an opportunity for building Action Against Hunger's knowledge in areas it is not an expert in (e.g. gender). Others see the opportunity to strengthen the organisation's advocacy work, for example through women-led organisations. The evaluation of Action Against Hunger's response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique also shows that the local partner's contextual knowledge and programmatic capacity in WaSH was considered a key reason for partnering. In our discussions with local actors in Bangladesh, the value of local knowledge and expertise also played a significant role. When discussing what working in partnership means to them, the following terms came up repeatedly: local or "indigenous" knowledge, local participation and bottom-up approach. Likewise, the Advisory Board stresses the need to ensure there is sufficient cross learning and that capacity strengthening is mutual, progressive and tailored.

On the other hand, Action Against Hunger's approach and policy has been criticised for being too "self-centered" and for focusing too much on building its own capacity instead of local capacity. The direction of support thus remains a question to be addressed in more detail, as is the question of what we mean by "building capacity".

A MEANS TO AN END OR A MEANS IN ITSELF?

The underlying motivation for Action Against Hunger to work in local partnership remains unclear. Is it about increasing the organisation's impact and reach? Or is working in local partnership ultimately driven by an ethical obligation and the end-goal to "not exist one day"? This was mentioned in ISP3 consultations as well as in the Partnership Management Survey. One respondent criticised the Partnership Policy to be "reading through the lens of a means to an end". One of the members of the Advisory Board, on the other hand, pointed out that a local partnership **should** be a 'means to an end', implying that it should not simply be a way to fulfil certain obligations or tick certain boxes. This is a question remaining open for Action Against Hunger to discuss, which may also further shape its position on the localisation agenda.

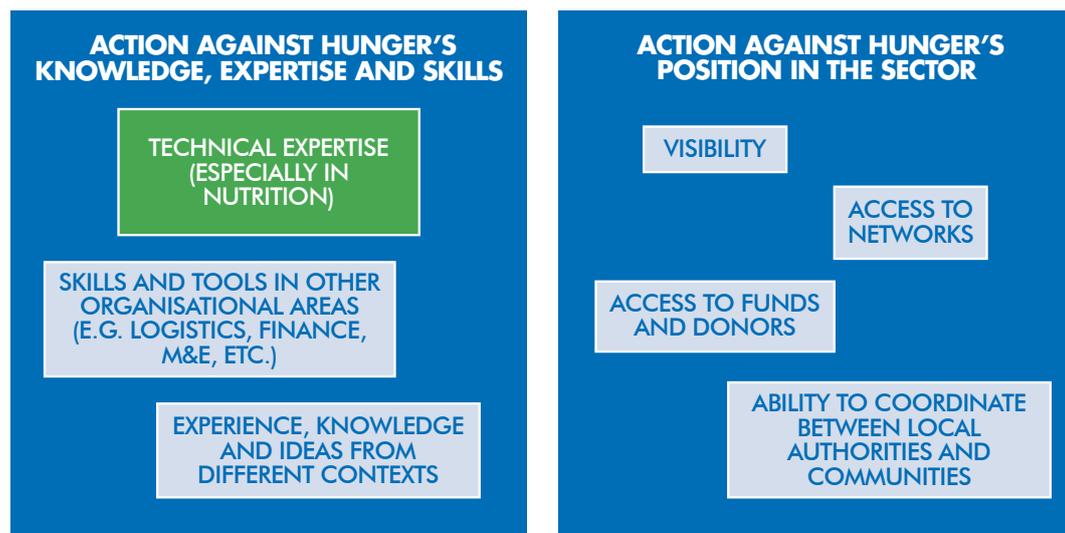
ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S ADDED VALUE

Action Against Hunger's added value – what it currently is and what it could be in the future – has been one of the main discussion points within the ISP3 consultations. The Partner Survey also sheds light onto what the organisation's added value may be.

We must take into account though, that the “added value” is sometimes discussed in terms of the organisation's added value in the sector and sometimes as the organisation's added **value as a partner** for local actors. It may be that the latter equals the former, but not necessarily.

With this in mind, Action Against Hunger's added value (from the perspective of Action Against Hunger Staff as well as local civil society) can be categorised into two areas: 1) Knowledge, expertise and skills (that may or may not be transferred onto local actors) and 2) Action Against Hunger's position in the sector (which is of value specifically to local actors).

FIGURE 8: ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S ADDED VALUE AS A PARTNER



ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

Action Against Hunger's technical expertise (especially in the nutrition sector) is considered to be a strong - or possibly **the strongest** - added value, both to the sector as a whole and to local civil society specifically. This becomes clear in the staff survey distributed to inform the ISP3 as well as in the ISP3 consultations. Technical expertise had the highest frequency of responses to the question regarding what Action Against Hunger's added value is. Technical expertise was also mentioned most often in interviews with external stakeholders (including local partners).

The technical expertise has been called the “DNA” of the organisation. It is argued to also have the potential to **transform** the organisation, in the sense that it will help the organisation in adapting to the changing humanitarian landscape – that is by “placing our knowledge more at the centre” and transferring this to local actors. Through this, Action Against Hunger's added value as a humanitarian organisation becomes an added value as a partner.

TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE

Findings from the ISP3 staff survey show that the ability to transfer knowledge is perceived to be relatively weak, but worth strengthening. This indicates that staff consider the organisation's technical expertise to be an added value to the sector in general, but not necessarily for a local partner as it is not often transferred. Partners that were interviewed to inform the ISP3 cited the organisation's 'ability to transfer knowledge' more frequently than Action Against Hunger staff.

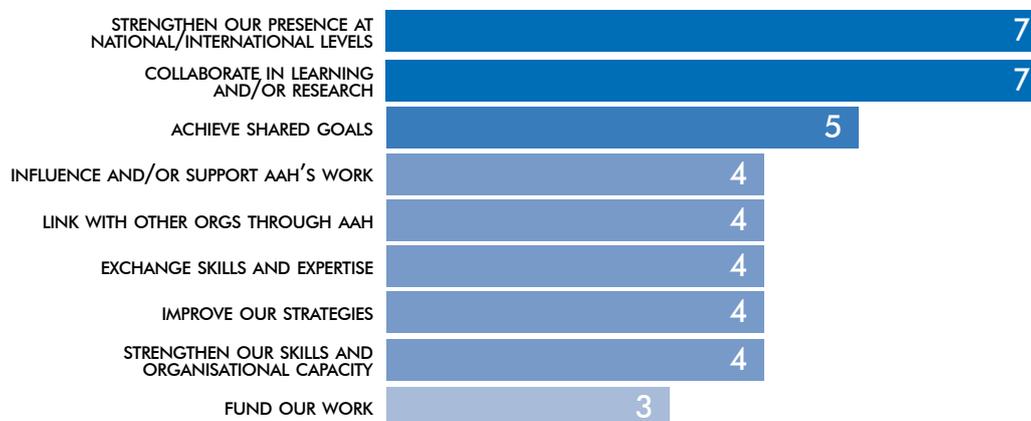
Findings from the Partner Survey and the evaluation of Action Against Hunger's response to the Cyclone Idai in Mozambique show that the knowledge transfer goes beyond technical expertise and also pertains to areas such as logistics, finance, M&E, compliance etc. It is important to have a focal point for these specific areas, working directly with the focal point in the partner organisations. Partners have also mentioned that they had gained knowledge from other contexts, countries and cultures due to Action Against Hunger's experience across the world.

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S POSITION IN THE SECTOR

Action Against Hunger's position in the sector, being seen as an expert and having the ability to advocate widely, is also considered as especially valuable amongst local actors. The ability to amplify the voices of local civil society and "shed light onto the communities" was brought up several times by the Advisory Board when discussing the role of Action Against Hunger as a partner. Through the organisation's visibility, far-reaching impact and international network, local actors can access more funds or can strengthen their own visibility and advocacy work. Local NGOs have also pointed out that Action Against Hunger could support them in communicating between local authorities and communities. The Advisory Board recommends that international organisations should amplify the voice and interests of the partners in their conversations with donors and others.

The value of Action Against Hunger's position in the sector is also illustrated in the findings of the Partner Survey:

FIGURE 9: REASONS FOR CHOOSING TO PARTNER WITH ACTION AGAINST HUNGER

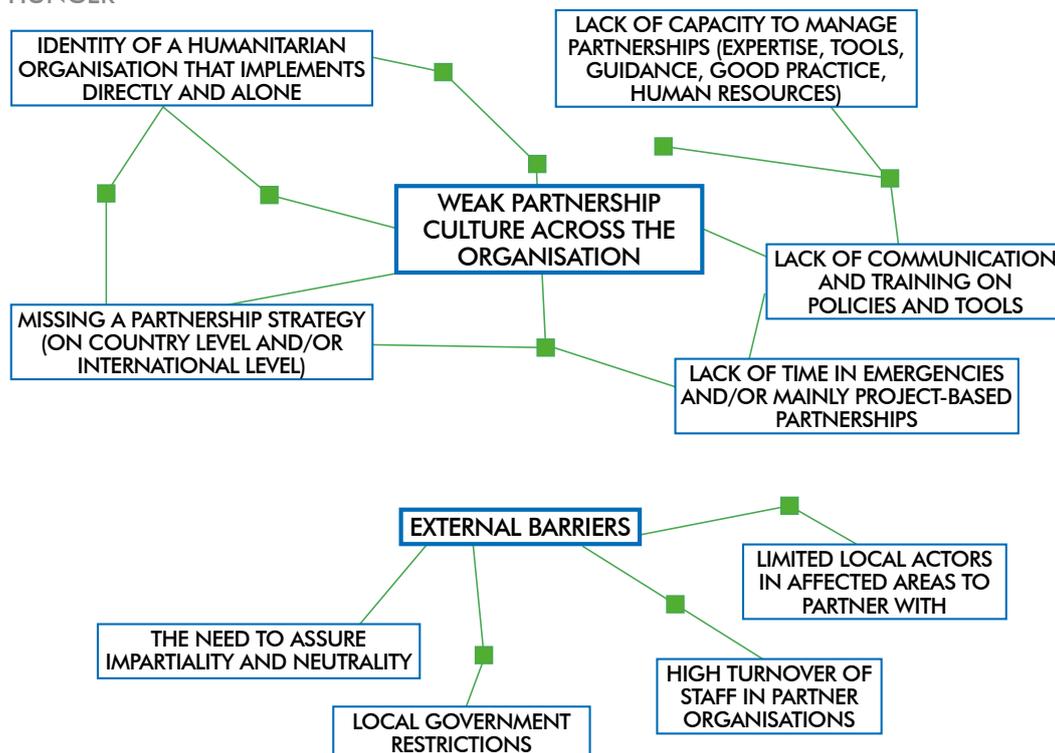


Seven out of the nine partners that responded to the Partner survey indicated that Action Against Hunger's added value is 'better' or 'much better' than other organisations.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO WORKING IN LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY ACTION AGAINST HUNGER

FIGURE 10: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY ACTION AGAINST HUNGER



Barriers and challenges mentioned by Action Against Hunger staff were dominantly internal, sitting within the organisation and in their control. Only two respondents (from Nigeria and Syria) mentioned external barriers to partnering with local actors that are out of their control: Local Government restrictions for INGOs to partner with local actors, limited local actors in affected areas to partner with and certain contexts that create the need to assure impartiality and neutrality of the response. The latter (impartiality and neutrality) is controversial though and has been advised by the Advisory Board to look into in more depth. Although internal barriers were at the centre of these discussions, external barriers may in a few cases be the primary issue.

For most of staff, Action Against Hunger remains a **HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION** rather than a development organisation. Direct implementation and response to emergencies seems to be a deep-rooted way of working for the organisation. This was mentioned 6 times in the Partnership Management Survey. A few respondents pointed out that in emergency contexts, in which humanitarian organisations mostly work in, there is a **LACK OF TIME** to identify and coordinate with partners.

Action Against Hunger still lacks in long-term partnerships and a network of existing local partners to work with when crisis strikes. This would allow Action Against Hunger to respond faster. Action Against Hunger has also recognised that it must also start focusing more on prevention, moving beyond emergencies, and tackling the underlying causes of hunger. This has been a key discussion point for the ISP3.

This also explains the limited focus up until now on developing a **PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY** and **DEDICATING CAPACITY AND BUILDING EXPERTISE** in partnership (as illustrated in section V). Although policies, strategies, guidance and tools do exist, they lack ownership and are **NOT SHARED OR COMMUNICATED EFFECTIVELY** (as illustrated in section V). Findings from the Partnership Management Survey show that the Policy and Toolkit, let alone any updates or revisions, are not shared and communicated successfully across the entire organisation and do not reach country level. Even if they do, there seems to be a lack of understanding and various ways of interpreting and implementing these. Staff have suggested to provide training and to include the Policy in a 'staff orientation package' to assure that this knowledge and understanding is maintained despite the **HIGH STAFF TURNOVER**. When recruiting country directors, it has also been suggested to consider their positioning in the partnership and localisation discourse.

The key barrier is the organisation's **WEAK 'PARTNERSHIP CULTURE'**, which is shaped by the barriers mentioned above, but also **stands in the way of addressing these** at the same time. A strong partnership culture is characterised by staff that value and actively promote local partnerships as well as organisational structures, policies and practices at every level across every department that allow and promote working in local partnerships. The importance of promoting a partnership culture was a key discussion point with the Advisory Board. The question is where – at what level or in what practices – this change should or could be initiated.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY

In our consultations with local actors (in Bangladesh as well as with the Advisory Board) it has become apparent that local organisations often struggle with the **RIGID APPROACH OF ACTION AGAINST HUNGER TO BUILDING AND MANAGING PARTNERSHIPS**. There is a large amount of paper-work and compliance requirements that ask for documents and policies, which local actors cannot always provide. Different INGOs use different versions of the same tool, which duplicates work for local actors. As a result, processes take long, which is a barrier in emergency contexts.

The **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES** between northern and southern organisations are not taken into account. It seems that international (northern) organisations often impose their practices onto local (southern) organisations.

Another challenge brought up is the **LACK OF DECISION-MAKING POWER** among local actors in partnerships with INGOs. One member of a local NGO said she has had “two types of experiences: being a partner and leading a partnership”. In most cases, the project has already been designed by the INGO. Findings from the Partner Survey show that some partners feel disengaged in the development of Action Against Hunger's strategy in the field, not being asked for advice or guidance and feeling unable to voice disagreements.

Some respondents have also said their independence is not encouraged by Action Against Hunger, such as in conducting M&E or adapting their activities to lessons learnt. The lack of financial transparency was also mentioned as a challenge. Likewise, the Advisory Board recommends involving the partner at every stage, including in decision-making processes. The partner should have a clear voice, including in project development and contracting.

A further barrier is the lack of commitment to the partnership itself in terms of **REFLECTIONS, FOLLOW-UPS AND EVALUATION**. Local actors in Bangladesh have said that it is always the project that is subject to evaluation, but never the partnership and cooperation itself. One of the key recommendations of the Advisory Board has been to introduce a two-way feedback mechanism.

INGO's **LACK OF LONG-TERM VISION** for partnerships and the project-based partnership culture has come up multiple times. The Advisory Board has recommended to build on those project-based partnerships that worked well and use these as opportunities to build long-term partnerships. Findings from the Partner Survey also confirm that Action Against Hunger is missing a long-term vision. However, some local NGOs have said that even if there were opportunities for long-term, strategic partnerships, they **LACK CAPACITY OR FUNDS** to uphold these.

Partners have also communicated to an Action Against Hunger mission that logistical processes in emergencies are too slow for them to cooperate with Action Against Hunger.

Finally, a barrier for both INGOs and local actors seems to be the "**NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS**" that each can have of one another and the lack of "serious investment" in local actors.

LOOKING FORWARD

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented in this report and follow-up discussions held in 2020/21, we have drawn the following key recommendations:

DEVELOP AND UPDATE KEY DOCUMENTS:

- Develop a definition of local partnership which is validated and applicable across the organisation (considering the use of certain terms, such as “actor”, “local” or “partner” and differentiating between local civil society and local Government actors).
- Develop an international local partnership policy that communicates clearly the underlying motivation for Action Against Hunger to work with local partners and the role it must take as a partner and thereby positioning the organisation more clearly in the localisation agenda. While this policy shall determine the overall and common approach of Action Against Hunger as an international organisation, each member office and country office may develop this approach further depending on the context they are implementing in. Possibly develop this policy in cooperation with current local partners.
- Develop an international local partnership strategy and action plan.
- While developing the above, assure that these are in line with Action Against Hunger's overall approach to localisation and fits into Action Against Hunger's wider localization agenda. Also assure that the above are in line with the now final ISP3 which states that Action Against Hunger is to “act as an amplifier of the voice and agency of individuals and communities” and “use [its] global reach to act as a catalyst for change, empowering local and regional actors to increase their impact and raising awareness about movements and allies that share our goals of fighting hunger”.

REVISE THE PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT:

- Review the Partnership Guidelines and adapt them to the new local partnership policy.
- Improve and adapt partnership tools to the current needs of Action Against Hunger country offices, taking into account the Partners' Management Protocol developed and launched in mid 2020.
- While developing the above, take into account the challenges faced by local actors (by loosening the rigid procedures by simplifying tools as much as possible, strengthening cultural competence, providing a long-term vision for partners, sharing decision-making power and risks, etc.). Also, take into account the opportunities they represent, the strength and expertise they bring to the table.

IMPROVE ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE:

- Communicate the new policy and provide trainings on local partnership. Develop a training module for this purpose; systematically organise partnership briefings for new staff before their deployment.
- Clarify and define roles and responsibilities across member and country offices.

- Dedicate resources to partnership management on country level.
- Encourage country offices to set up a partnership department or introduce at least one post dedicated to partnership.
- Strengthen and enforce the new local partnership policy especially at country level and encourage country offices to specify this policy depending on their context.

STRENGTHEN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT:

- Share one common toolkit, guidelines and policy across the organisation. Different versions for different contexts (country, type of local partner, level of emergency, etc.) will be necessary, but this should be made clear. Updates and additions must be communicated and followed-up.
- Increase oversight by shifting all 'knowledge' to the Global NHF page dedicated to partnerships and assure that it is actively used by all (<https://nohungerforum.sharepoint.com/img/partnership/SitePages/Home.aspx>). This will need a dedicated person/team to take ownership and assure the page stays useful and up to date. The process for uploading additional tools and documentation should also be discussed, such as the possibility of scoring new tools before they are uploaded.
- Capture and share learnings and good practices.
- Consider accessibility and cultural sensitivity of all tools and platforms.
- Establish processes that assure learning within the partnership (on both sides) and allow Action Against Hunger to identify/measure this learning. The latter will enable Action Against Hunger to better demonstrate the effects of the partnership and its added value.

BUILD ON ACTION AGAINST HUNGER'S CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS:

- Build on Action Against Hunger's own good practice (for example the Right2Grow Project or the Action Against Hunger Lebanon's response to the blast in Beirut).
- Develop a two-way feedback mechanism to hold us to account but also to assess and learn from existing partnerships.
- Accept failure and don't reject the entire partnership model.
- Build on those project-based partnerships that worked well and transform these into long-term partnerships. Also find a way to showcase these examples for learning.

BUILD A LOCAL PARTNERSHIP CULTURE:

In the long run, Action Against Hunger needs to build and maintain a local partnership culture. As soon as we are clear on what localisation means to Action Against Hunger and how our local partnership approach fits into our wider localisation agenda, we need to communicate and integrate this into our strategies. And we need to build these understandings and approaches into all parts and at all levels of the organisation. Becoming a signatory of the Grand Bargain could be a first step.

NEXT STEPS

This report closes phase two of the Local Partnership Project. The ToR for phase three is soon to be finalised along with dedicated human resources. The following activities will be included in phase three:

1. HOLDING A DISCUSSION SESSION WITH THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

- To clarify what localisation means to Action Against Hunger (which may initiate separate activities/projects around localisation outside the remit of the Local Partnership Project). A common understanding of localisation for Action Against Hunger at this stage is required to facilitate the activities of the Local Partnership Project's third phase.
- Agree on the underlying motivation for Action Against Hunger to work with local partners and the role it should take as a partner that is in line with Action Against Hunger's overall approach to localisation.
- The discussion will be held among LPWG members. Outcomes of the discussion will be shared with the IMG for approval. The goal is not to form official policies, but to assure that the project's third phase is in line with the organisation's understanding of localisation.

2. FORMALISING THE LOCAL PARTNERSHIP AND LOCALISATION ADVISORY BOARD (which was piloted in February 2020):

Action Against Hunger anticipates to meet with this Board on an annual basis and have 6-monthly online meetings to review policies and tools, highlight good practice, and hold us to account on progress against our local partnership policy and action plan. The new Board will be globally representative and made up of current local partners that are experts in either Action Against Hunger's thematic area or in localisation/partnership.

3. DEVELOPING A LOCAL PARTNERSHIP DEFINITION, POLICY, STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN (through a dedicated sub-working group).

4. REVISING THE PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT (through a dedicated sub-working group):

current tools will be improved and adapted based on the comments and suggestions made by reviewers, with the aim of putting together a new Partnership Toolkit that is complete, practical and replicable. Action Against Hunger Spain's protocol and its revised Due Diligence will be part of this process. The LPWG will be working closely with the RMG for this purpose.

5. FURTHER COLLABORATING WITH THE NEAR NETWORK

as a means to learn from existing partnerships, to gain further insights into localisation and our contribution as a partner, and to receive support/guidance on our approach to local partnership.

6. BUILDING A COMMUNICATION PLATFORM

dedicated to learning around local partnership.

ANNEX

1. [Action Against Hunger Partnership Management Survey for country staff](#)
2. [Partner Survey](#)
3. [Detailed findings from the Partnership Management Survey](#)
4. [Tool review results](#)
5. [Action Against Hunger Partnership Policy 2011](#)
6. [Localisation Performance Measurement Framework \(NEAR, 2020\)](#)