

## Organisational Learning for Localisation:

Evaluating the Impact of the  
Supporting Effective Humanitarian  
Partnerships Programme



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## **Cover Photo**

South Sudan NGO Forum





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## List of Acronyms

SEHP	Supporting Effective Humanitarian Partnerships
SCUK	Save the Children UK
HLA	Humanitarian Leadership Academy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ICCO	Inter-Church Organisation for Development Cooperation
ToT/F	Training of Trainers/Facilitators

## Executive Summary

Save the Children has long-standing expertise in securing children's rights and providing child protective services throughout the globe. This report has been commissioned by Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) team within Save the Children UK to inform their programme, "Supporting Effective Humanitarian Partnerships" (SEHP) in South Sudan and Yemen. This report has 3 main aims:

1. To identify the key enablers and challenges to organisational capacity strengthening.
2. Recognize how the SEHP programme furthers localisation agendas and what needs to be improved.
3. Determine whether the approach adapted by the SEHP programme has contributed towards achieving the stated aims of the programme.

Given the diverse nature of the above objectives this project aims to crucially review, analyse, and to recommend to HLA on the best approach to organisational learning with consideration for localisation, decolonisation, and empowerment to local NGOs.

### **Methodology**

Using monitoring and evaluation data from the SEHP programmes in South Sudan and Yemen, the report conducts a thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns in the implementation and outcomes of the programme. Key informant interviews were conducted with programme directors in both countries to establish an understanding of the effectiveness of the SEHP programme on an "on-the-ground" level, as well as the successes and failures of the programme regarding its institutional objectives. The thematic analysis will be used as an analytic approach to yield insightful interpretations for data that is contextually grounded.

### **Key Findings**

Following six key informant interviews with program leaders for both South Sudan and Yemen cohorts, combined with secondary survey data and evaluation reports provided by HLA, the research team identified eight key themes that represent both positive attributes and interesting challenges for HLA's consideration in moving SEHP forward.

1. The online platform KAYA permitted positive learning pathways, but internet connection is a major hindrance in both countries

2. Training of Trainers and facilitators promoted cascading learning throughout organisations
3. Organisational capacity was strengthened through the various trainings
4. Organisational learning improved and SEHP led to organisations developing their own formal learning policies
5. SEHP promoted and established positive strides towards strengthening the localisation of organisations that took part
6. Funding was a key challenge, and is needed to be reassessed moving forward
7. Equipment and internet issues were a common issue for all participants, and frequency of trainings needed improvement
8. External factors such as COVID-19, the varying socio-economic background of the learners, and the conflict situations in both countries affected the outcomes of the program

## Background & Introduction

Over the course of eight years, Yemen has dealt with conflict and large-scale famine leaving more than 21 million people in need of humanitarian assistance (UNICEF, 2022). The realities of famine have caused more than half of the Yemeni population to face food insecurity, with 7.4 million people suffering from malnutrition, 2 million of which are children (Oxfam, 2021). This dire condition in Yemen has produced one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world.

Since 2011, South Sudan has faced political tensions, economic crisis, and drought, resulting in 8.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance (Concern USA, 2021). The drought and resultant food insecurity have left an estimated 7.7 million people facing crisis levels of hunger (Mercy Corps, 2019). In addition, waves of floods have left parts of the country uninhabitable, internally displacing 1.7 million people (Concern USA, 2021).

Save the Children UK (SCUK), with the financial support of multiple donors and partnerships, has developed the Supporting Effective Humanitarian Partnerships (SEHP) programme to promote a more professionalised global humanitarian system that will enable countries to prepare for, and adequately respond to, the growing number of humanitarian crises. SEHP is overseen by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA), a capacity strengthening unit within Save the Children. Over the course of three years, SEHP has been implemented in two countries: South Sudan and Yemen. SEHP places localisation at its core with the aim to showcase and support the development of learning cultures in local humanitarian organisations. By doing this, SEHP aims to co-create, with local organisations, a model for organisational learning that responds to demand, and which is accessible, scalable, and sustainable in even the most challenging local contexts.

This report will examine how the impact of HLA's approach to organisational capacity strengthening can be measured to improve individual performance and outcomes, and how it is contributing to localisation and organisational capacity efforts in comparison with the discourse and good practice in the wider sector. Our research is guided by the following key research questions:

1. *What are the key enablers and challenges to organisational capacity strengthening?*
2. *How does SEHP further decolonisation and localisation? Is there anything that could be improved?*
3. *Has the innovative approach (as detailed in the terms of reference provided) of the SEHP programme helped achieve the stated aims of the programme?*

#### 4. *How does the HLA approach compare to other key actors in the humanitarian space?*

This report begins by presenting the methodological approach chosen for the research, followed by a literature review which discusses localisation, organisational learning and strengthening discourse in the wider humanitarian sector. It will then go into presenting our key research findings which are divided into eight thematic sections. The report concludes by proposing adjustments and suggested recommendations for future iterations of the SEHP programme.

## Methodology

### **Literature Review**

A literature review was conducted to provide an understanding of various theoretical approaches to organisational learning and capacity strengthening, along with a brief overview of its application to the humanitarian sector. Additionally, the literature review explores the concepts of localisation and decolonisation and their relationship to organisational learning and capacity strengthening.

### **Programme Data Analysis**

HLA provided monitoring and evaluation data from SEHP programme participants in Yemen and South Sudan. This data consisted of mid and end-programme evaluations, focus group discussions, and participant interviews. The HLA team utilised a variety of MEAL strategies between the two contexts, including ripple-mapping and most significant change analyses. This data was presented to the research team in a variety of formats, including spreadsheets, word documents, and Jam boards (digital interactive whiteboards). All the data was cleaned and organised by the research team before analysis.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

In addition to this data, the authors of this report conducted six KIs with relevant programme staff. HLA helped connect the researchers with the key informants. These informants included HLA staff members, based in London; programme staff based in South Sudan; programme staff based in Yemen; and a representative from the South Sudan NGO forum, which helped implement the programme. These interviews were conducted via zoom and lasted roughly 30 to 60 minutes. Although a list of interview questions was utilised, the interviews were semi-structured and occasionally deviated from the pre-determined list. Informants were asked about their experiences with implementing the programme, the localisation agenda, and



organisational learning. A list of interview questions can be found in the *Appendix 3*, although modifications were made in each interview as new topics arose.

### Approach: Thematic Analysis

This data was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis, aided by NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Thematic analysis is a six-step process used to analyse qualitative data and identify major themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Members of the research team began by reading the data, creating initial line-by-line codes, and generating themes based on these codes. The researchers reviewed these themes and further defined and named them. The process of thematic analysis allowed the authors to make sense of a large amount of diverse data, and to understand the impact of SEHP on localisation and organisational learning.

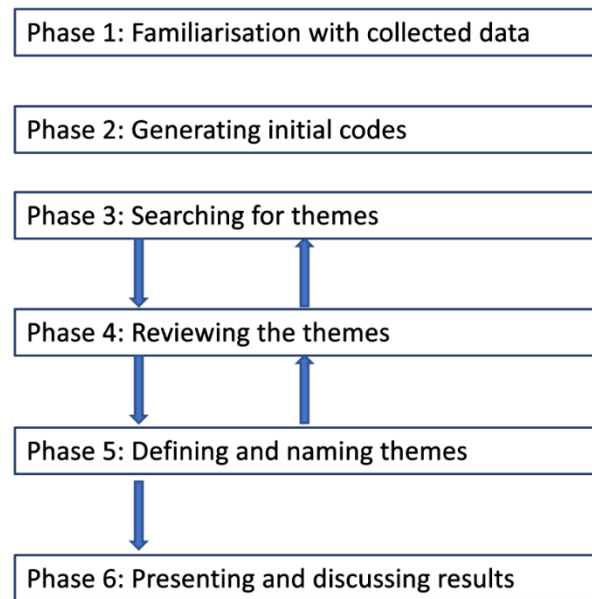


Figure 1, Adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006

### Scope and Limitations

Although the use of programmatic data and interviews allowed the researchers to explore a range of stakeholder perspectives, there were some limitations to the methodological approach. First, although the data collected by HLA detailed learners' experiences, no learners were directly interviewed by the research team themselves. Instead, the interviews were held with programme staff from Yemen, South Sudan, and the UK. As most of these informants work with HLA or SCUK, there is a potential for bias. Additionally, only a small number of individuals were interviewed, restricting the statistical significance of the results. Finally, because the data and analytical approach was qualitative, the authors cannot make any claims regarding the statistical significance of the results.

### Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Because the key informants interviewed were practitioners and not affected populations, the research was deemed to be low risk. However, the research team did provide interviewees with an information sheet regarding the aims of the study, the scope of their participation, the storage of data, and their right to opt-out of the interview at any time. All interviewees verbally consented to

be interviewed, and for those interviews to be recorded for the purposes of transcription.

## Literature Review

### Localisation

The term 'localisation' has become a buzzword for many actors in the development and humanitarian sectors. Most organisations have been on the fringes of localisation in the international development sector (HPN, 2021). It is widely acknowledged within the field that localisation can help solve problems faced in the international humanitarian system. Established by the Start Network and adopted by SCUK and the HLA the seven dimensions of localisation focus on improving the position of local organisations within the global framework of humanitarian support (Start Network, 2017). The dimensions take a deeper and more critical view of localisation, looking not only at the quantity, but the quality of funding, partnerships, capacity strengthening. Working on all seven dimensions is expected to aid in empowering and promoting the influence of local and national organisations, identify their organisational learning needs and equipping them with relevant and effective organisational learning policies, systems, and processes.

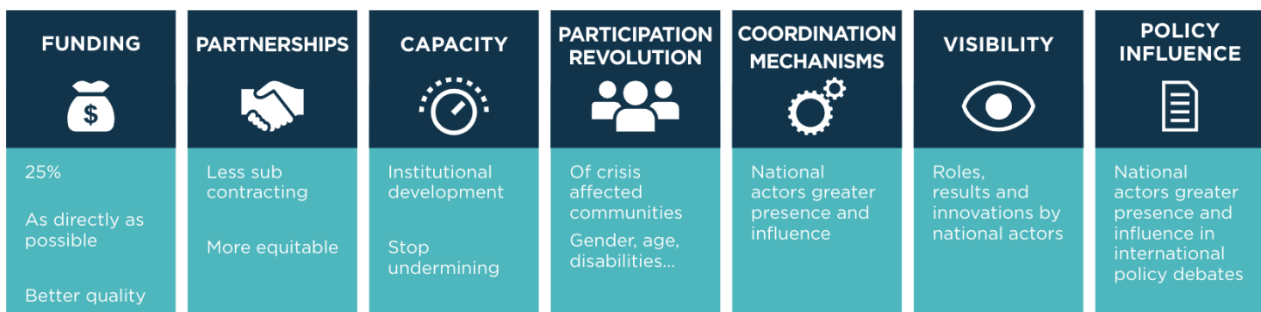


Figure 2 The Seven Dimensions of Localisation; The Start Network

### Academic definition of localisation in relation to organisational strengthening

Localisation is an increasingly important modality for humanitarian relief (Melkhout and Elgibali, 2020). Wall and Hedlund (2016) broadly define localisation as “all projects and initiatives that work with local actors.” Expanding on this, the OECD (2017) established that “it is a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses.”

Generally, when looking at the categories of NGOs involved in localisation there are two distinct groups:

1. National NGOs/CSOs': operate in the aid recipient country in which they are headquartered, work in multiple subnational regions, and are not affiliated to an international NGO.
2. Local NGOs/CSOs': operate in a specific, geographically defined, subnational area of an aid-recipient country, without affiliation to an international NGO/CSO.

The responsibility to plan, make decisions, implement projects, and monitor resources should be transferred to local actors (De Geoffroy & Grunewald, 2017). Localisation has proven to be economical, functional, and at times, imperative in delivering humanitarian functions. Trends have made it evident that local organisations and individuals are almost consistently the first responders within relief operations. El Taraboulsi et al. (2016) argue that “regional actors, national governments and local communities are evolving into new central players in humanitarian action”, the world is witnessing an augmented number of countries effectively developing their capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies without international assistance. Local organisations have rescued thousands of people after the earthquake in Nepal, successfully erected evacuation centres in response to the cyclone in Vanuatu and continue to operate on the front lines of the Syrian conflict (Wall & Hedlund, 2016).

### **Organisational definition of localisation in relation to organisational strengthening**

Since the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, there has been a commitment to push for “more support and funding tools for local and national responders” (WHS 2016) and take a step away from the paternalistic approach to development within the developing world. There is a need to remove barriers that prevent organisations from participating within the development and humanitarian sectors within their own countries. Localisation is meant to mitigate, and if possible, fully resolve, how the humanitarian system traditionally operates. The implementation of localisation would contribute towards increasing the cost effectiveness of relief action (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017) and additionally increase the number of first receivers within regional situations.

### **Decolonisation and Localisation**

The push for localisation has been instigated largely by a movement to decolonise the sector. Decolonisation entails the disintegration of not only the colonial relationship but the dismantling of the previously longstanding global order (Hopkins, 2008). This new order led humanitarians to the question whether they were able to set conditions about their presence in the developing world when tied to interests that are not in line with their own (Thompson, 2005). When looking toward decolonising development, the sector is “questioning and unpacking how colonial

and hegemonic structures of power continue to produce contemporary inequalities and reflecting on how these highly unequal structures can be addressed.” (Krauss, 2018)

### **Capacity Strengthening & Organisational learning**

‘Organisational learning’ and ‘capacity strengthening’ are phrases frequently utilised in the development and humanitarian sectors<sup>1</sup>. There has been an increase in systems designed to improve organisational learning and capacity to promote localisation of humanitarian organisations. Therefore, understanding these terms and their practical application is a key component of understanding the localisation movement.

While both terms have distinct origins and meanings, many organisations have moved on to use the two interchangeably. Traditionally, capacity strengthening has been applied at multiple levels: from the individual to the organisational to the institutional. Capacity strengthening emerged as a popular approach to development in the mid-1990s. The approach has roots in Latin American Liberation Theology and originally stemmed from Paulo Freire’s work on ‘education for liberation’ (Eade, 1997) However, in practice, capacity strengthening has lost most of its radical origin and morphed into a form of training in which one organisation teaches another how to operate like itself. In many instances, this can replicate power imbalances between INGOs and local organisations (Eade, 1997).

Capacity strengthening is frequently reduced to basic training and addresses daily issues such as managing budgets and meeting deadlines (Baser and Morgan, 2008). However, capacity strengthening can also be defined in a transformational way, as “a human process of development and change that involves shifts and transformations in relationships and power” (James and Wrigley, 2007). Many have argued that this should be the ultimate focus of capacity strengthening. However, as applied by INGOs, capacity strengthening is seen as inherently foreign and Western, with some arguing that it is a condescending and paternalistic term (James and Wrigley, 2007). Despite the intention of capacity strengthening to develop two-way, mutual partnerships, INGOs have treated capacity strengthening as a one-way flow of expertise – from the “knowledgeable North” to the “ignorant South” (James and Wrigley, 2007). As a result, the use of capacity strengthening is a contested technique in international development, and many have questioned who it truly serves (Eade, 1997).

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<sup>1</sup> A note on terminology: Capacity building is the traditionally used term in the literature. However, the sector has shifted to using capacity strengthening to signify that local organisations already have their own capacities. Therefore, while the cited literature may utilise the term ‘capacity building,’ this report will utilise the term ‘capacity strengthening.’

Due to the issues associated with capacity strengthening, practitioners are turning towards organisational learning as a strategy to support organisations based in the global South. Although the term has only recently been applied to the development and humanitarian sectors, it has its own history. As a theory, before being adopted by the non-profit sector, organisational learning was originally developed to explain the behaviours of for-profit organisations (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Nonaka, 1991; Garvin, 1993). For NGOs, learning “implies the institutionalization of individuals’ and groups’ learning, a process by which such learning is reflected and embedded into the organization’s attributes; that is, its procedures, systems, structures, and strategy” (Boucher & Roch, 2017; Crossan et al, 1999). The theories developed to explain organisational learning collectively posit that learning is a process of evolution, learning from past experiences, and involves the interplay of various actors and types of knowledge.

As the terms ‘organisational learning’ and ‘capacity strengthening’ have no singular definition, are used interchangeably, and are implemented differently, it is difficult to evaluate the concepts overall. However, a number of common themes regarding organisational learning and capacity strengthening emerge from the literature. Much of the research done on organisational learning has determined that the process of learning and capacity strengthening is as important as the outcomes. For NGOs, learning is “reaction-in action” or “learning-by-doing” (Edwards, 1997; Schon 1987). This places more emphasis on the process of learning, with coaching, dialogue, and technical problem-solving as more successful ways of developing capacity (Edwards, 1997). Boucher and Roch (2017) identify four organisational learning mechanisms that are associated with capabilities development:

1. ***“Repetition or accumulation of experience***
2. ***Experimentation and exploration***
3. ***Knowledge articulation, which corresponds to a form of collective learning and occurs when individuals express their opinions and beliefs, constructively confront their interpretations, and develop shared understanding and joint actions; and, lastly***
4. ***Codification, which results in an artifact (document/product) reflecting shared understanding”***

By focusing on the process of acquiring knowledge, making sense of it, and applying it to future actions, NGOs accrue wisdom rather than just information. In order to retain this wisdom, organisational learning must be structured, and feedback mechanisms are necessary to ensure that lessons are linked across the organisation and put into practice (Edwards, 1997). Additionally, Argyris & Schon’s (1978) theory of single and double loop learning has been frequently applied to the NGO sector as effective feedback loops (Ebrahim, 2005). Single-loop learning refers to the



transfer of knowledge and skills in order to improve practices and solve problems in the short-term (Bond, 2006). Double-loop learning involves the challenging of existing assumptions and organisational mindsets through self-reflection and creative thinking (Bond, 2006).

Despite the breadth of literature that explores capacity strengthening and organisational learning, implementing these processes in NGOs is still challenging. In partnership contexts, when one organisation is promoting capacity strengthening within another, the readiness of the recipient organisation is crucial. Frequently, capacity strengthening can be undertaken in contexts where the recipient organisation is not ready or the providing organisation cannot effectively deliver learning itself (Petruney et al., 2014).

Additionally, the needs and wants of the recipient organisation can be ignored in favour of donor priorities (Petruney et al., 2014). James and Wrigley (2007) assert that recipient organisations must have a sense of ownership. This requires the provider to have skills to provide and facilitate quality capacity strengthening and skills while not exerting control of the process. Donors and provider organisations can also hinder the process of organisational learning by remaining too focused on external perceptions of programme success. Edwards (1997) and Power et al. (2002) argue that there is a pervasive need for NGOs to produce success stories in order to receive more funding from donors. There is a perception that donor organisations will not fund ambiguous or complicated projects, and this discourages the self-reflection required for organisational learning. This fear of demonstrating failure is a product of the deep power imbalances reflected in the relationships between donors and the organisations they fund, especially when those organisations are small and locally based (Bond, 2006).

### **Examples of Organisational Learning**

The current academic literature lacks examples of organisational learning and capacity building initiatives in NGOs. Discussion surrounding efforts to disseminate organisational learning, especially in large NGOs, is sparse. This report will help to build on the learnings from the few case studies of smaller NGOs that are available. This lack of literature can be accounted to the fact that organisations have interpreted and implemented organisational learning in many ways; some organisations have carried organisational learning and capacity building through interviews and consultations, whilst others consider it in terms of training and skills-based courses (Pulford et al., 2020). Whilst there is a distinct lack of organisational learning and capacity strengthening examples from the larger players in the third sector, there are some lessons that can be taken from smaller ones.

Pearson (2011) looks at the case the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), a Dutch organisation which works with numerous partners worldwide including NGOs (Pearson, 2011). An external review of their work, carried out over 18 months, illustrated significant areas of weakness in their operational and organisational management. Key issues were financial management, organisational structure, and governance (ibid). In response to these findings, ICCO explored alternative ways with which to strengthen the capacity of their partner organisations. They began by contracting an NGO, VBNK, to examine long-term strategies to increase organisational capacity for programme delivery (ibid). This was done by focusing on partners' organisational management, project management and strategic relationships (ibid). They carried out assessments of 15 partners, reviewing key documentation, and interviewing staff and focus groups (ibid). In response to findings for each organisation, ICCO designed a 2-year project to tackle the issues that had arisen. Partner organisations could communicate which issues were of greatest priority to them, and it was stressed that involvement in the assessments would not affect funding. (ibid).

In response to the shortcomings highlighted in the assessments, ICCO conducted training with management and project level staff (Pearson, 2011). Partners committed to two days per month for training (ibid). Activities were based on different topics including financial management and monitoring and evaluation (ibid). The learning from these structured sessions was solidified with follow up sessions at partners offices. This enabled organisations to implement the theoretical knowledge they had gained, and to develop a culture of continual learning (ibid). These strategies were overwhelmingly successful, with staff demonstrating increased confidence and ability to do their jobs, improved internal and inter-organisational communication, better cohesion between different departments within the organisations, and an improved understanding of good practice. Some partners also adopted capacity building through continued learning as a key long-term strategy, incorporated into their strategic plans (ibid). Overall, the participating partner organisations realised both the value of both individual and organisational learning in positively impacting programme quality as well as the sustainability of the organisation itself.

## Findings

Drawing on the information on localisation and organisational learning presented in the literature review, the authors conducted a thematic analysis of the data using NVivo. This process yielded eight key themes: online learning with Kaya, training of trainers and facilitators, organisational capacity, organisational learning, localisation, funding, programme management and logistics, and external factors. Graphic representations of these themes and their sub-themes can be found in Appendix 5.

### Online Learning with Kaya

Overall, learners had positive views of the learning pathways on the Kaya platform. Many found the courses to be informative and tailored to their learning needs. The safeguarding and governance courses were particularly popular among learners in South Sudan. Learners also appreciated the opportunity to engage in online learning, although many faced difficulties. However, learners in South Sudan expressed issues with the length and number of courses, and some found the material to be unnecessarily complex. In Yemen, learners requested that courses be made more diverse, more customized to their context, and include more practical examples.

*"Kaya online was the best program that includes everyone of staff in the organization, which [helped] learners to [develop] their knowledges on the coordination, advocacy, and planning."*

*-Participant from South Sudan*

### Training of Trainers and Facilitators

Learners found the ToT/F sessions extremely useful for organisational learning and sharing knowledge. The sessions helped transfer knowledge to field workers that could not access online learning. However, learners in Yemen and South Sudan stated that more than one focal point should have been present at the sessions. Only having one focal point made the organisations vulnerable to staff turnover, and more staff members wanted to receive the training. Learners in Yemen expressed issues with the large gaps in time between the trainings, and the long duration of the training sessions themselves.

*"...the TOF course was excellent, and I benefited from it at the individual level and tried to spread it in the foundation in order to apply what we learned."*

*- Participant from Yemen*

### Organisational Capacity

#### *Organisation culture*

The data collected for both South Sudan and Yemen frequently highlighted changes in organizational culture due to the knowledge acquired from the SEHP

programme. Respondents indicated changes in their values, behaviours, and attitudes, which shaped their organization's thinking and learning. Moreover, respondents also highlighted that, through knowledge transfer, there was increased commitment to internal knowledge cascading. However, there were some respondents who cited that it was somewhat difficult to influence change in the organization based on their position within the organization. Additionally, some respondents in Yemen also mentioned that language barriers, specifically the lack of hard-copy learning materials in Arabic, hindered knowledge transfers.

### *Technical skills*

Respondents indicated that the programme helped them access skills and tools for improved programme delivery. Learners discussed improvements in their technical skills such as report and proposal writing. Respondents stated that they were able to design competitive project proposals, that improved individual skills as well as the overall organisational performance. Participants improved their communication skills, both internally and with external stakeholders, such as donors, other organisations, and affected populations. Advocacy skills were also improved as respondents spoke of improvements in designing and implementing campaigns.

### *Securing Funding*

Results showed that after the training, many organisations felt empowered to explore new funding opportunities. Some respondents reported their organisations developed clear procedures for acquiring funding and effectively communicated these procedures with staff. However, only a few respondents indicated that their organisations secured new funding opportunities, despite many organisations having improved their proposal writing skills. It is important to note, however, that securing new funding opportunities is often a lengthy process and that this data was collected during and shortly after the programme was implemented. As a result, the number of organisations that secure funding may continue to grow. Some respondents also noted that building partnerships and strong networks were key components to help them secure funding and saw the importance of continuing to engage with other organisations.

### *Organisational Policies*

Participants expressed that the SEHP programme allowed their organisations to improve institutional structure and operations. Many respondents discussed the importance of streamlining procedures from the trainings, resulting in increased accountability and clear structures to dictate the values and mission of their respective organisations.

### *Improved Coordination*

Many learners found that participation in the programme facilitated better coordination within their organisations and among other local partners. This was particularly evident in South Sudan, where the South Sudan NGO Forum mandated participation in the SEHP programme and provided opportunities for networking

*'We [ensured] SEHP program [was] mandatory [for members] to go through key training and especially the leadership model to help advance the capacity of the organization and competency.'*

*– Staff from South Sudan NGO Forum*

### **Organisational Learning**

Learners and informants indicated that the SEHP programme did help facilitate a culture of learning within participating organisations. This culture, however, varied among organisations and between contexts. For example, the involvement of the South Sudan NGO Forum helped integrate learning culture and policies by requiring that member organisations create and implement organisational learning policies and strategies. As a result, many respondents from South Sudan stated that their organisation had developed formal learning policies which made it mandatory for every new staff member to participate in learning.

*"At the organizational level, the necessity of adhering to a culture of learning has been circulated within our organization, and we have implemented several courses for employees. Believing in the importance of learning, we will start a training program for all the organization's staff starting next Sunday for a period of two weeks, where we will train employees on TOT, a digital tools course, a M&E course, and a project management course, and this is one of the results of this program."*

*– Participant from Yemen*

Learners in South Sudan also indicated that the integration of learning into organisational operations also facilitated open discussions among staff, especially on important issues related to GBV and PSEA. Unlike in South Sudan, there was no external NGO forum in Yemen, which may have hindered the uptake of formal learning policies and processes among organisations. Despite this, some organisations in Yemen developed formal learning policies and now implement learning programmes regularly. However, some respondents in Yemen pointed to a lack of buy-in from focal points, which made it difficult to cascade learning.

Learners indicated a strong desire to learn and felt that the certificates and badges provided helped to motivate learning. However, some felt that these were



inadequate incentives and expressed interest in a more formal kind of certification or even monetary incentives. Many organisations attempted to integrate regular learning into their operations but felt that more funding was necessary to facilitate this process.

Specifically, respondents in Yemen stated that training materials and manuals would be useful for them to transfer what they learned in the programme within their own organisations and among other organisations in the community. Both cohorts appreciated the opportunity to communicate and share learning with the other cohort, and multiple respondents indicated that more opportunities for knowledge sharing would be beneficial.

In comparing the organisational learning outcomes of the SEHP programme to the literature, while some progress has been made, it is still too early to determine whether a learning culture has been ingrained in participating organisations. Although learners have realised the importance of learning to operational excellence, it is unclear whether there has been an adequate focus on the process of learning and the application of learning to all organisational activities. Additionally, it appears that the programme has principally focused on single-loop learning, or the transfer of knowledge and skills for short-term impact. To fully institutionalise a learning culture, double-loop learning would be necessary, which would encourage critical thinking and questioning of organisational practices.

## Localisation

*"The learning has led to improved partnerships and coordination of humanitarian services [in] South Sudan."*

*-Participant from South Sudan*

Learners who completed the SEHP programme in both South Sudan and Yemen indicated that the programme positively impacted localisation. However, there were distinct and varied results between the two programmes.

Learners and respondents from both locations agreed that the programme facilitated a better understanding of affected populations and improved coordination between organisations. In Yemen, for example, learners gained a greater understanding of their varied population, made up of nationals, Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and refugees.

*"The program contributes significantly to localisation. For example, before training in the TOF course, we used to hire a facilitator from outside the organization when there was any training, but currently I am doing the training and facilitation task within the organization".*

*-Participant from Yemen*

Respondents from South Sudan largely praised the SEHP programme for improving localisation, but respondents from the Yemen cohort were more critical, citing issues of collaboration with INGOs. Yemeni participants reported a disconnect between their skills and knowledge of the context and the confidence of INGOs to fund and trust them with implementing projects.

This discord in experiences between the two cohorts could in part be accountable to the NGO Forum that supported the South Sudan initiative. The NGO Forum provided a space for local organisations to collaborate, share experiences and knowledge. In Yemen however, there was no member organisation of this nature to facilitate collaboration.

Yemeni participants also recognised that this programme is only the beginning on a long road of shifting the attitudes of international organisations towards local partners' capacity. They recognised that the evaluation of the SEHP programme was being carried out not long after the programme itself, at which stage localisation had not wholly been achieved. However, they were hopeful that they would continue to improve localisation, using the SEHP programme as a foundation.

*"Our organization has a complete cadre and an office working throughout the year with self-financing. We do not receive any project, although we have submitted many proposals, but they do not agree with our proposals and do not mention the reason for the non-acceptance so that we can avoid it in other projects. After a while we get surprised that an organization with less capacities has received and implemented the project we proposed."*

*-Participant from Yemen*

## **Funding**

Funding was a frequent topic of discussion among respondents. The SEHP programme included two distinct kinds of funding: the donor funding to run the

*"The funding was very small. Though they tried by giving ~\$3,900. With that you'll find that somebody was able to buy a laptop, but it cannot cover all costs. So, in future, I think there is a need to increase funding for the local partners to facilitate their learning."*

*- SEHP staff in South Sudan*

programme itself and the SEHP Fund. The SEHP Fund was a supply of money that was given directly to participating organisations for the purposes of strengthening organisational capacity and/or cascading of learning. The above quote refers to the SEHP Fund, not the donor funding.

Many learners specifically identified issues with the SEHP Fund as a central limitation to the SEHP programme. They reported delays in disbursement and expressed that the funds were often insufficient to cover internet fees and laptop costs, or to encourage their staff to actively engage in the programme. Other respondents also felt that more of the funding should be specifically allocated for organisational learning.

Regarding the overall donor funding, respondents indicated that the amount provided limited the number of organisations that could participate. Particularly in South Sudan, more than one hundred organisations applied to join the cohort, and just 40 were selected. Now that the programme has been implemented and evaluated in both South Sudan in Yemen, donors may increase the funding allotted for future iterations of the programme to help satisfy demand and allow more organisations to participate.

### **Programme Management and Logistics**

Although learners found the online learning pathways and trainings useful, there were significant issues with programme management and logistics. First, many learners in the Yemen cohort remarked that the programme's purpose was not communicated to them, and that coordination was sporadic throughout the programme. Yemeni learners also expressed issues with the Arabic translation of workshop training materials, which hindered their ability to deliver SEHP workshops within their own organisations.

Both cohorts indicated a lack of follow-up and support from consultants and other staff to help translate their learning into action. Although Learning Circles were established amongst the cohorts, these were not a formalised part of the project and learners requested more formal support. Learners also felt that the programme would benefit from an extended period of monitoring and evaluation so they could track their progress as organisations. Overall, learners stated that the programme needed to continue for a longer period to see an impact in organisational learning and operations. Some also suggested that learning should be spread over a longer period of time to avoid over-burdening staff.

*"The main challenge was the internet due to poor network and at some time this dragged and affected our speed in learning and accomplishing the courses on time."*

*-Participant from South Sudan*

The most significant issue faced by both cohorts was the instability of the internet connection and lack of technology. Although the quality of internet service provision is not within HLA's control, future efforts should be made to make

asynchronous courses on Kaya more accessible without stable internet connection. Additionally, additional funding could be made available for organisations to purchase additional computers or tablets so that learners do not have to share one or two per organisation.

## **External Factors**

### *COVID-19*

Due to the state of the pandemic, trainings that were intended to be in-person were moved online. Many participants indicated that they preferred in-person trainings and that they faced challenges in accessing and using technology in both countries.

### *Education Levels*

Respondents in South Sudan expressed that differing education levels among staff members made the learning process more difficult for some. There were also discrepancies in technology capabilities going into the program, and multiple participants suggested preliminary workshops on digital literacy prior to the start of the programme.

### *Country Conflict*

In the case of Yemen, there were security issues which caused delays in SEHP program implementation.

*"We couldn't do training workshops in the North of Yemen then we moved the workshops to East of Yemen, because of that it somehow delayed the implementations of the programs, so we divided the cohorts in the south and second in the East, which affected the design of the programs."*

*- Yemen SEHP program staff*

### *South Sudan NGO Forum*

This already existing entity served as a supporting body for SEHP efforts. By requiring local NGOs to participate in the program and facilitating coordination and partnerships, the NGO Forum cultivated a better organisational learning culture.

## Reflections and Recommendations

The findings from the data have highlighted several areas in which there is room for improvement in the SEHP programme. The outcomes from the data, compared with the two key ambitions of the programme; to improve localisation and organisational learning, provide key learning that can be taken away to assess how effective the programme was in meeting these objects as well as measures HLA can implement to further these ambitions.

### **Localisation**

As aforementioned, the data illustrates noticeable improvements in localisation in both Yemen and South Sudan. However, it also highlights key areas of improvement. These are simple measures, which have the potential to have widespread impact on the capability of organisations coming out of the programme.

When comparing the outcomes of the programme to the seven dimensions of localisation, several of the dimensions were met. To an extent, the programme met each of the dimensions. It is clear however that there is room for improvement, especially within the dimensions of funding, partnerships and policy influence, as covered earlier in the report. To combat these shortcomings several recommendations can be implemented: a greater focus on advocacy and working outside of existing power structures, to allow organisations to tackle existing power imbalances. Respondents of the programme noted that even after completing the training, INGOs still felt as though they were not trusted to be capable to deliver local projects and thus did not receive funding. Future rounds of training should work to strengthen this power dynamic to increase INGO confidence in local organisations.

Localisation could also be further improved through increased monitoring and evaluation following programme completion. As called for by participants, M+E, especially but not limited to field visits to their respective organisations would be beneficial in ensuring continued learning and capacity. This technique worked particularly well in the case of ICCO, as covered on page 15.

Finally, in order to improve localisation an effective measure is the implementation of a member organisation of local NGOs, as can be seen in South Sudan with the NGO forum. Both the survey data and the interviews conducted highlighted the beneficial contribution the South Sudan NGO forum had for the program and organisations taking part. Yemen and other new cohorts should look to replicate a similar leadership structure. Where a system is established to give local actors the



opportunity to work in collaboration with international organisations to improve their own capacity. The leadership structure will make sure to communicate with local organisations that taking part in SEHP learning is a key pillar for their organisations to thrive. The structure will make participation in the SEHP program mandatory and highlight which trainings must be completed in order to be given membership into the leadership structure and assist in advancing the capacity and competency of the local organisation.

### **Organisational Learning and Capacity Strengthening**

In addition to furthering the localisation agenda, the SEHP programme aimed to strengthen organisational capacity and create a culture of learning. Although both aims were achieved to a degree, several improvements could be made to support organisations in fully institutionalising a culture of learning. Learners from Yemen and South Sudan expressed that their organisations developed more effective policies, systems and processes because of the programme. However, the data indicates that learning was more formally incorporated into organisational practice. Although Yemen had several complicating factors, including the ongoing conflict, this cohort lacked an existing leadership structure to facilitate uptake of learning. In South Sudan, the NGO Forum played a tremendous role in ensuring that learning was a key pillar of organisational operations by mandating participation in the SEHP programme. In future iterations of the programme, a similar structure in Yemen would monitor participation, ensuring members attend all trainings and set up a feedback channel to help understand organisations' needs. The structure would also be able to provide space to conduct trainings and use internet, as was the case in South Sudan as accessing physical locations to safely conduct trainings in conflict zones scrutinized by bureaucracy. A forum structure can assuage the burden of accessing training locations via working with local authorities.

As discussed in the literature, there are multiple layers to organisational learning. This iteration of SEHP facilitated single-loop learning, which focuses on skills and knowledge for practical application. However, the programme did not promote double-loop learning, where learners critically reflect on their organisations' operating practices and develop strategies for improvement. Likewise, the programme could be adapted to better facilitate Boucher and Roch's (2017) four organisational learning mechanisms. Whilst the programme had participants learn by repetition and accumulation of experience and provided fora for the discussion of opinions and beliefs, the programme did not encourage experimentation and exploration or codification of learning. These learning mechanisms would need to be incorporated to facilitate a sustainable culture of learning in addition to capacity strengthening. Learners clearly identified ways in which their capacities were strengthened through improved writing skills, financial management skills, and

programme implementation skills. However, most organisations were in the early stages of cascading learning. At the time of providing feedback, respondents said that learning had become an important part of their organisational structure but that limited time and resources frequently prevented full engagement and participation. Furthermore, learners indicated that organisational turnover hindered cascading of learning and the retention of institutional knowledge. These findings indicate that future versions of the programme must allow for more time, funding, and feedback to sustain organisational learning beyond the scope of the programme.

## Conclusion

The nature of COVID-19 has made it clear that adjustments need to be made in the ways we engage in the humanitarian and development sectors. There needs to be greater emphasis on building local capacities to effectively respond to crises. With this understanding, Save the Children UK's Humanitarian Leadership Academy developed the Supporting Effective Humanitarian Partnerships (SEHP) program in efforts to promote localisation and foster an organisational learning culture in South Sudan and Yemen, with the goal of strengthening organisational capacity of their local NGOs. The SEHP program is an innovative approach to addressing capacity strengthening and organisational learning. It places the local organisations at the forefront of the project as they are the co-creators of the programme's strategic planning and program design. Drawing on the suggestions of local collaborators, the program also puts an emphasis on how organisations are best suited to learn. The unique design of SEHP sets it up perfectly to be implemented in a variety of contexts, including some of the most difficult environments. This report assessed the program implementation in South Sudan and Yemen and examined how well it met the aims identified by the HLA team.

Following our research, this report identifies eight central themes across South Sudan and Yemen within which program participants and staff highlighted outcomes, raised concerns, and presented suggestions. The themes are Online Learning with Kaya, Training of Trainers and Facilitators, Organisational Capacity, Organisational Learning, Localisation, Funding, Programme Management and Logistics, External Factors. After assessing our findings, we determined that the SEHP programme succeeded in improving the technical capacity of organisations and fostering an interest in learning. However, not all organisations embraced organisational learning equally, and the programme did not fully address the power imbalance between donors and local organisations. In order to cement a culture of learning and promote localisation of humanitarian programming, future iterations of the programme will require more time, funding, and follow-up with local organisations.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Original Terms of Reference

<b>Organization and Department</b>	Save the Children, Humanitarian Leadership Academy
<b>Project Working Title</b>	Organisational capacity strengthening & localisation agenda: Impact Evaluation of the SEHP programme in Yemen and South Sudan.
<b>Background:</b> Two short paragraphs. In the first, please provide a brief description of your organisation and its objectives. In the second, please provide a brief introduction to the topic to be addressed by the project. Why is the organisation interested? Why is the subject itself interesting?	<p>Save the Children is driven by our belief in the rights of children and their potential to change the world. Everything we do is focusing on ensuring more children survive, more children have the chance to learn, and more children are protected when they're in danger.</p> <p>The Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) is committed to localisation of humanitarian response because we believe more localised responses can ultimately do better to fulfil the rights of children affected by crisis. As a capacity strengthening unit within Save the Children, we partner with local organisations in countries affected by disaster or conflict to share learning.</p> <p>The SEHP programme we are running in Yemen and South Sudan is unique in our portfolio as it is focusing on addressing capacity of local organisations as whole rather than targeting individuals, contributing to making the responses as local as possible and as global as necessary.</p>
<b>Question:</b> (One or two sentences. What is the motivating question? What is it, specifically, that your organisation would like to know?)	<p>We want to understand the benefits and caveats to strengthening capacity of the local organisations and how this approach speaks to the global localisation agenda.</p> <p>We want to understand if the SEHP programme achieved its objectives in 2020-21 and has had impact on the local organisations we partnered with in Yemen and South Sudan.</p>
<b>Objective:</b> (Short paragraph that explains what you hope to get out of the answer and how you may use the students' work to advance organizational objectives.)	We are hoping to learn how to measure and communicate impact of capacity strengthening on the local organisations and how this approach contributes to our localisation efforts vs. the impact our learning has on individual learners. The findings from this evaluation will help us to reshape the model if needed and provide recommendations for the SEHP programme as well the HLA's wider strategy and Theory of Change in that space.
<b>Methodology:</b> How the students are expected to answer the question. E.g., desk research, interviews, survey, review of internal documents, etc. If you wish the students to define the methodology, please say so.	The SEHP project has quite robust data collected from the three cycles that we run which will require further aggregation and analysis. In addition, there is a robust evaluation framework designed that haven't been properly tested. Therefore, we would want the students to consider applying one of the suggested evaluation methods (i.e., outcome harvesting). The whole work would be underpinned by desk research on organisational capacity strengthening in the humanitarian space.
<b>Contact:</b> The name and contact information (email address) of the person within your organisation who will be responsible for liaising with the students.	<p>Pawel Mania, REMEAL Lead, HLA <a href="mailto:p.mania@savethechildren.org.uk">p.mania@savethechildren.org.uk</a></p> <p>Seema Patel, REMEAL Advisor, HLA <a href="mailto:se.patel@savethechildren.org.uk">se.patel@savethechildren.org.uk</a></p>

## Appendix 2 - Revised Terms of Reference

**\*Terms of reference was revised to narrow the scope of the project and make it more feasible for the time given to conduct the research.\***

**Title:** Organisational capacity strengthening & localisation agenda: Impact Evaluation of the SEHP programme in Yemen and South Sudan.

### Objectives

Using SEHP as a case study, we want to understand how the impact of our organisational capacity strengthening approach can be measured to improve individual performance and outcomes, and how it is contributing to localisation and decolonisation efforts in comparison with the discourse and good practice in the wider sector. We also seek to understand how our approach, methodology and tools compares with the broader discourse and practice in the humanitarian space. We will also utilise the findings and recommendations to develop the HLA's Theory of Change, strengthen the SEHP programme and inform the wider HLA strategy.

Key research questions for consideration (which are not exclusive) include:

1. What are the key enablers and challenges to organisational capacity strengthening? - literature review
2. How does SEHP further decolonisation and localisation? Is there anything that could be improved?
3. Has the innovative approach (as detailed in the background/context section and the initial scoping call) of the SEHP programme achieved the stated aims of the programme? *The stated aims of the programme can be found as an annexe to this ToR.*
4. How does the HLA approach compare to other key actors in the humanitarian space?

### Deliverables

- Literature review
  - The literature review will provide an understanding of the theory of organisational capacity strengthening, and its application in the development and humanitarian sectors, along with a brief overview of other examples of organisational learning within these sectors.
- Data analysis
  - Using existing monitoring data from the SEHP programme to answer research question 3 above.
  - As a minimum, the data must be disaggregated by gender and by the country where SEHP is being implemented, but the HLA are open to further disaggregation to provide any insights the consultants think are relevant
- Primary data collection
  - Dependant on the initial findings of the data analysis, the consultants will undertake primary data collection, likely to be Key Informant Interviews but not limited to KIIs, to further answer the research questions listed above.
  - The HLA will provide a list of organisations that have participated in the SEHP and contact details for focal persons, and any other contacts that the consultants think would be of interest to include in any primary data collection.
- Final report



- A final report bringing together the above elements into one research piece with clear findings and recommendations
- Presentation to the HLA

### Appendix 3 - Interview Questions

1. What does organisational capacity look like to you?
2. What does localisation look like to you?
3. How was the programme run and what was your involvement in the programme?
4. From your perspective what were the objectives of the programme?
  - Do you think that the programme was successful in meeting these objectives, or did they go beyond that?
5. How were learners involved in shaping the programme's structure and content?
6. How have learners changed practices since undertaking the course?
7. Have you seen a tangible difference in the strength of organisational capacity after NGO staff have undertaken the course? Please share a specific example if you can.
8. Did the programme increase further the localisation agenda?
  - If the programme furthered localisation agenda, how? What indicators have you witnessed that would suggest this?
9. How do participants ensure that once they complete elements of the SEHP programme it is disseminated among the organisation?
10. Do you think participating organisations of the course would recommend it to other organisations?
  - What pathways are there for inter-organisational knowledge beyond the official programme?
11. How has the conflict in your country impacted the design and implementation of the SEHP program?
12. Given the conflict in your country, do you think the programme would be applicable in other environments?

What recommendations would you make to ensure that the outcomes were positive if another SEHP cohort was to be delivered?

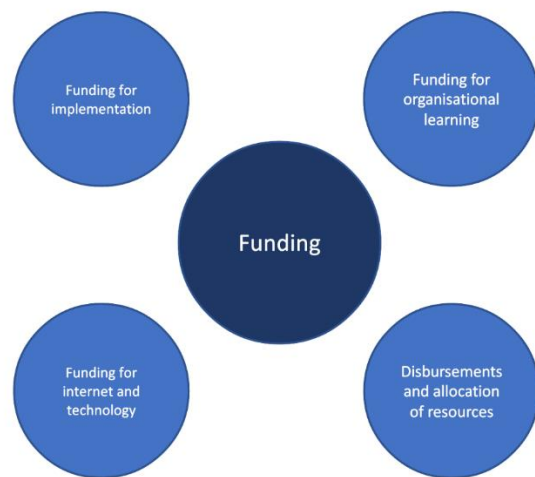
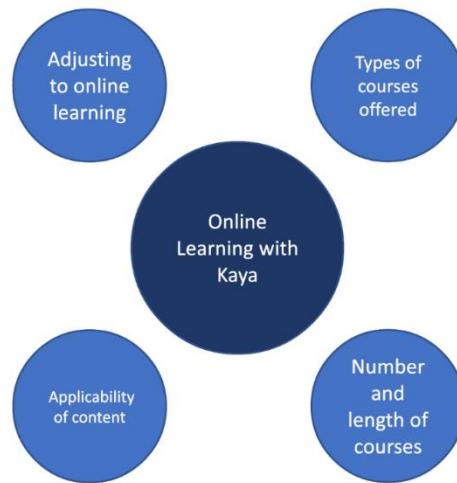
#### Yemen Specific

1. How did language barriers with educational material impact the programme's implementation and outcomes?
2. How did you overcome these challenges?

#### South Sudan Specific

1. How did the size of the cohort impact the programme's implementation and outcomes?

### Appendix 4 - Themes and Sub-Themes





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