ERICC SYNTHESIS REPORT

LOCALISATION AND EDUCATION IN CONFLICT AND PROTRACTED CRISIS CONTEXTS

December 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global humanitarian and development aid systems continue to be shaped by entrenched power asymmetries. Decision-making authority over education sector response priorities and programme design often remains concentrated among donors and international agencies, while voices from the Global South are more often positioned as downstream implementers rather than strategic actors. Frequently, global commitments to localisation modify the language around partnerships between the Global North and South, but the underlying distribution of power remains unchanged. This gap between intention and practice raises a key question: **What changes are required to genuinely shift power to local actors and strengthen local education responses in conflict and crisis settings?**

This report consolidates contributions from the Education Research in Conflict and Crisis (ERICC) consortium to respond to this question. This synthesis draws on empirical research from seven contexts of protracted crises: Bangladesh, Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria, drawing on ERICC studies (n=27) and interviews with ERICC country research teams (n=6) to identify the following actionable implications for the global agenda on localisation.

First, humanitarian and development sectors need to **recognise and resource existing community-led education efforts.** Across a range of conflict and protracted crisis settings, communities and households play a central role in sustaining education systems. Local actors mobilise scarce resources and develop low-cost strategies to maintain access and continuity of education within both state and non-state education systems (Akogun et al., forthcoming; Al Zawahreh et al., 2025; Dazberger et al., in preparation; Maalouf & Brun, 2025). The speed, flexibility and reach of local collective action are often greater than state and humanitarian responses. However, not all community-led initiatives necessarily advance inclusion, equity and conflict sensitivity. Localisation requires governments and donors to recognise, resource and integrate existing community-led initiatives into education system planning, drawing on clear safeguarding principles for engagement, so that promising local action is strengthened rather than sidelined by parallel systems. Further, localisation efforts should support participatory governance as a core education system function to move decision-making closer to schools and communities, build two-way accountability and expand inclusion (Tozan et al., forthcoming).

Second, **shift financing and resource governance** from highly fragmented, short-term, inequitable funding toward predictable, locally controlled financing systems that enable schools and communities to plan, adapt and sustain provision. ERICC evidence shows that centralised and short-term financing undermines the efficiency and sustainability of community-embedded education delivery (Bani Ata et al., 2025). Education systems in protracted crises often rely heavily on household contributions, with families devoting substantial portions of their income to sustain learning even amid severe economic strain (Homonchuk et al., 2025). Localisation efforts should support households as central education financiers, including cash transfers directly to households, where household educational spending reaches extreme levels and education supply already exists.

Third, **realign power, incentives and accountability** away from one-way upward reporting toward shared decision-making and community-facing accountability. Some of the greatest barriers to making localised responses a reality lie in the incentive structures that encourage external actors to set up parallel systems and keep power with international actors, often reducing local organisations to subcontracted deliverers and crowding out their representational and accountability roles (Homonchuk et al., forthcoming). Shifting to genuine localisation requires reconfiguring aid incentives and financing so local actors are rewarded for convening, advocacy and oversight, not just project outputs (Ibid.). In addition, externally-funded capacity-building efforts should be paired with structural transfers of authority and resources, otherwise, efforts to strengthen civil society will have a limited impact (Ibid.). Monitoring and compliance systems must likewise move from upward reporting to reciprocal practices that return information to teachers and communities to drive local decision-making, equity and learning (Borkowski et al., forthcoming).

Fourth, **follow through on commitments to long-term trust-based partnerships grounded in transparency, mutual respect and solidarity.** Localisation requires collaboration built on trust, enabling faster, context-appropriate solutions rather than centralised decision-making (Akogun et al., forthcoming). Participatory evidence generation paired with inclusive consultations can also drive governance reform, as shown by Adamawa State's 2024 teacher-management bill in Nigeria, co-developed through trusted researcher–policymaker partnerships and demand-driven ERICC research (Akogun et al., 2025). Bottom-up research processes strengthen local ownership and uptake but should be complemented by rigorous assessment of outcomes and value for money to ensure quality, effectiveness and sustainability (Diazgranados et al., forthcoming).

The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Research Programme Consortium is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world — ultimately to help improve holistic outcomes for children — through building a global hub for a rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.

ERICC seeks to identify the most effective approaches for improving access, quality, and continuity of education to support sustainable and coherent education systems and holistic learning and development of children in conflict and crisis. ERICC aims to bridge research, practice, and policy with accessible and actionable knowledge — at local, national, regional and global levels — through co-construction of research and collaborative partnerships.

ERICC is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with Academic Lead IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, and expert partners include Centre for Lebanese Studies, Common Heritage Foundation, The Inclusive Education Foundation (InEd), ODI Global, Osman Consulting, OTHERwise Research and Queen Rania Foundation. During ERICC's inception period, NYU-TIES provided research leadership, developed the original ERICC Conceptual Framework and contributed to early research agenda development. ERICC is supported by UK Aid.

Countries in focus include Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria.

Suggested citation

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Pacifico, A., Akogun, O., and Homonchuk, O. (December 2025). Localisation and education in conflict and protracted crisis contexts. ERICC Synthesis report. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.30887726

Supported by UKaid from the British people

MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH AIMS

In recent years, localisation has risen to the forefront of global debates on aid effectiveness and humanitarian action, promoted as a corrective to long-standing power asymmetries within the international aid system. Yet, evidence suggests that localisation efforts have largely failed to meaningfully shift persistent power asymmetries between the Global North and Global South[1] (Gómez, 2021; Lie, 2024; Obrecht et al., 2022). For example, the Grand Bargain target to provide 25% of humanitarian funding to local actors is far from realised. Despite many years of sustained advocacy, donor commitments and policy reform efforts, only 3.6% of tracked international humanitarian funds are received by local actors (ALNAP, 2025). This is reflected in the education sector, where in 2022 over half (59%) of Education Cannot Wait (ECW)[2] funding was provided to UN agencies, while national NGOs delivering education received less than 1% directly (Homonchuk & Nicolai, 2025). For the 2023/24 financial year, ECW reported that 29% has been allocated 'as directly as possible' to local actors, though this was still channelled to a large extent via sub-grants and foreign intermediaries (Ibid.).

Localisation is commonly defined as an effort to shift power, resources and decision-making closer to the communities most directly affected by conflict and protracted crises (Cliffe, 2025). However, global localisation efforts are still largely shaped by actors and institutions that control resources, lead global discourse and define policy priorities. The scope of what local action can be supported is constrained by accountability structures in the Global North, which are often unwilling or unable to accommodate what local communities prioritise.

ERICC's research extends the definition of localisation by recognising that communities, local governments and local organisations in crisis-affected contexts are not passive recipients of aid, but active agents who continuously take action to sustain education access, quality and continuity. This is often the case long before external support arrives and is undertaken with greater consistency throughout the crisis and on a larger scale than external support. In this study, localisation is understood as a rebalancing of power where external actors progressively relinquish control and place greater trust in local actors to decide what matters, and how education responses are designed and implemented. In this view, localisation is not only a downward transfer of power from global-level aid actors to enable action that does not yet exist. Instead, it entails recognising, resourcing and validating the strategies that local actors already employ to address education access, quality and continuity.[3] In this way, our evidence supports a reframing of localisation that links global aid 'localisation' efforts to bodies of research and practice often omitted from the discourse including community collective action, locally managed financing (e.g. cash and voucher assistance) and participatory governance.

With rising numbers of out-of-school children and youth globally, coupled with drastic reductions in international aid to education, now is a critical window of opportunity to rethink and restructure the systems underpinning humanitarian and development aid flows to education, as donors and traditional implementing agencies can no longer afford business as usual. Against this backdrop, this synthesis report seeks to consolidate and articulate ERICC's contributions to the evidence base on localisation in education in conflict and protracted crisis contexts, and to identify actionable implications for policy,

[1] The Global North/Global South shorthand mirrors the problematic international/local binary, obscuring important differences and misclassifying countries whose incomes, histories and geopolitical positions do not align with the labels. We use these terms cautiously to avoid reifying simplistic categories.
[2] ECW is the UN global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises.
[3] In line with critical scholarship related to localisation (see, for example, Apthorpe & Borton, 2019; Banerjee et al., 2025; Khan, 2020).

programming, financing and partnership models. By drawing together findings from 27 ERICC studies, this piece seeks not only to highlight findings from individual studies but also to connect insights across research strands to generate broader implications. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. **What do ERICC research findings collectively reveal about the dynamics, challenges and opportunities of localisation in education in conflict and protracted crisis contexts?**
2. **What changes are required to genuinely shift power to local actors and strengthen local education responses in conflict and crisis settings?**

Together, these questions allow the synthesis to situate ERICC's findings within broader debates on localisation and to narrow in on the empirical evidence base – examining what forms of localisation work.

METHODOLOGY

To ensure this synthesis fully reflects ERICC's findings, methodological approaches and perspectives, we conducted a desk review coupled with a participatory approach with ERICC researchers. The approach ensured individual studies are well represented while also creating space for cross-study reflection. The following steps guided this process:

- Desk review of ERICC academic outputs, reports and policy briefs, as well as publications under review (n=27) to identify theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions.[4]
- Process to facilitate researcher contributions through a structured Google sheet where authors added relevant studies, themes and reflections.
- Interviews with authors from ERICC country research teams (n=6) to distil findings, deepen critical reflection, and situate implications in the current global education landscape.
- Internal presentation of preliminary findings and discussion to reflect collectively on themes, ERICC's distinctive contributions, and the articulation of broader implications for research, policy and practice.

Importantly, several ERICC studies relevant to the theme of localisation are in progress[5] and additional evidence and analysis will become available in the coming months. While preliminary insights from these studies have been incorporated where possible, more robust contributions to the localisation debate are anticipated.

[4] All ERICC publications included in this synthesis are listed together in the References.

[5] For the purpose of this report, manuscripts in draft are referred to as 'forthcoming'. Research in the data analysis stage is referred to as 'in preparation'. Research in earlier stages at the time of writing has not been included in this report.

SITUATING ERICC RESEARCH WITHIN CRITICAL LOCALISATION DEBATES

What is the purpose of localisation? What is now termed localisation builds on mid-20th-century calls for participatory development, which were rearticulated in the 2000s through ownership discourses that sought to shift decision-making closer to aid recipients (Vij, 2023). Localisation emerged prominently in global discourse following the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and in the subsequent Grand Bargain agreement when donors, NGOs and aid providers agreed to make humanitarian action 'as local as possible, as international as necessary" (IASC, 2016, p.5).

While the concept of localisation remains widely disputed, approaches can be categorised into two general schools of thought: on one hand, a technical-operational perspective to improve aid effectiveness, and on the other, a transformational decolonial approach to address long-standing power asymmetries in aid systems. The 'technical-operational' approach justifies the pursuit of localisation in relation to operational effectiveness (IASC, 2016; OECD, 2017). In this perspective, localisation aims to address a range of problems faced by aid systems including being over-centralised and remote from strategic, financial and operational decisions; financially overstretched and in need of greater cost-effectiveness; plagued by excessive hierarchy and fragmentation; and slower to respond and unable to support at-risk communities for as long as local actors can (Barbelet et al., 2021).

The second, 'transformational' approach to localisation takes improving the conditions of local communities as the starting point (Koch & Rooden, 2024) and underscores the need to address the international aid system's legacy of colonial logics, structures and racialised systems of inequality (Mihlar, 2024; Shuayb, 2022). Scholars have argued the focus on the technical adjustments to achieve localisation goals has led to minor tweaks of aid programmes to improve responses – as defined from the point of view of international aid actors – instead of meaningful shifts in power (Ayobi, 2017; Decobert et al., 2025). ERICC engages with both schools of thought by applying a systems-oriented, operational understanding of how localisation functions as well as a critical, decolonial lens that foregrounds local agency and power relations.

What constitutes 'local'? Critical discussions on localisation have highlighted ambiguities in defining what constitutes 'local'. Scholars have challenged the reductionist categories of 'international' and 'local,' emphasising that the two categories are more deeply interconnected, complex and multifaceted than such categories imply (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2022; Roepstorff, 2020; Rossi, 2004). Defining 'local' as a pure or untainted category is problematic, given the potential for elite capture of local voice and the inherently hybrid nature of the 'local' – where governance, customs and actors are shaped by overlapping subnational, national and international influences (Barakat & Milton, 2020). Moreover, scholars have also noted the binary framing risks reproducing colonial logics, where 'local' is associated with 'lacking capacity' and thereby reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge and practice that sustain the status quo (Mihlar, 2024). Defining who counts as 'local' is not an academic exercise but a central question that critically informs efforts to transfer power and resources within aid systems.

ERICC contributes to this debate by revealing the diverse and complex nature of the 'local' and the vital role that local actors play in sustaining education amid crisis. Insights from Nigeria, for example, reveal how 'local' actors are not a homogeneous group and often disagree on education aims and priorities. This is evident as federal and most state-level government officials prefer the public Western-style

education while some local communities prefer religious education provision, given the long histories of limited and inequitable public service provision across the country (Sarwar & Homonchuk, 2024; Sarwar et al., 2024). The localisation evidence base and agenda focus heavily on institutionalised forms of aid including local and national NGOs with insufficient emphasis on local government and the role of governing authorities (Barbelet et al., 2024). ERICC's research expands the evidence base to identify a wide range of local actors – including community networks, education officers, school management committees, teachers and parents – and the strategies they employ to collectively fill operational gaps in education provision. These findings highlight how existing local capacities can be respected, supported and built on to strengthen education systems in conflict and crisis contexts (see Al Zawahreh et al., 2025; Datzberger et al., in preparation; Fean et al., forthcoming; Homonchuk et al., 2024; Maalouf & Brun, 2025).

How should localisation be measured? Several frameworks and targets have been developed to measure progress on localisation, though most build on a small set of foundational models. The Global Mentoring Initiative's *Seven Dimensions of Localisation* (Van Brabant & Patel, 2017) has been particularly influential, shaping subsequent tools such as the *Measuring Localisation Framework* (HAG and PIANGO, 2019), the *Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships' Pathways to Localisation* (ALP, 2019) and NEAR's *Localisation Performance Measurement Framework* (NEAR, 2017), which have been applied to assess localisation progress at organisational and country levels. These frameworks combine quantitative indicators to measure change with qualitative tools to explain the mechanisms and outcomes of localisation efforts. While there is variation in what is included, a few common areas to quantify and measure change include: partnerships, leadership, capacity, coordination and complementarity, funding, participation, and policy and advocacy (HAG & VANGO, 2019). However, the evidence is weak on the extent to which these frameworks have been effectively implemented to measure progress on localisation (Barbelet et al., 2021).

Scholars have argued that measuring localisation is limited by siloed metrics and a focus on short-term humanitarian impact, which can reduce the ambition for more meaningful change (Barbelet et al., 2021). Others have pointed out that donor or externally driven measures of success and outcomes do not necessarily match those held by local and national actors or communities, and that local communities are in a better position to identify the kinds of results they value (HAG et al., 2023). Measuring success solely through a humanitarian lens - as opposed to longer-term objectives of good governance, political participation and civil society influence - risks creating discrepancies between what is valued by international actors versus local and national actors and communities (Barbelet et al., 2021). The question of who decides what counts as evidence and what outcomes to prioritise are therefore critical ones for localisation. ERICC research contributes to this debate through a range of methodological approaches that align with the ERICC Methods Framework and attempt to respond to local needs and priorities through locally co-designed processes in ways that are feasible, desirable and culturally appropriate (Diazgranados et al., forthcoming). The framework presents a sequenced and context-sensitive approach to evidence generation in conflict and crisis settings that guides stakeholders in identifying what types of research are most needed to improve education outcomes, prioritising learning that is fit for purpose and grounded in local needs, priorities and ownership (Ibid.)

What is the state of the evidence on localisation? Rigorous evidence testing the outcomes of localisation practices on the quality and impact of humanitarian response is inconsistent, small in scope and often described through single programme evaluations (Ali et al., 2018; Barbelet et al., 2021; Barbelet et al., 2024; Howe et al., 2019). A 2024 ALNAP report identifies a number of evidence gaps including: (1) most existing evidence on localisation focuses on organisational practices related to

funding, capacity and partnerships, often examining individual initiatives rather than system-wide change; (2) very little evidence uses locally defined measures of success; (3) there is limited evidence on performance outcomes such as increased effectiveness, timeliness or relevance, and meeting communities priorities and needs; (4) evidence on financing focuses on how local actors access global aid funds while neglecting states' capacities to respond through domestic resource mobilisation; and (5) theories of change for localisation efforts are inadequate or lacking, which contributes to poor measurement and monitoring of change (Barbelet et al., 2024). Further, the localisation agenda is complex and multi-layered, rooted in shifting power relations, complicating 'what works' questions about specific interventions as they rarely have straightforward or linear answers (Ibid.). However, independent research, as opposed to self-evaluated findings, is growing and there is evidence to support the identification of a range of promising practices (see Barbelet et al., 2024).

The negative or unintended impacts of localising aid are well documented in the literature, including the perpetuation of unequal or predatory partnership structures where funding, project design and monitoring come from international actors while local actors' roles are reduced to implementation, reporting and compliance (Mulder, 2023). Scholars have argued that hierarchical relationships are further perpetuated as global actors favour partnerships with local actors with transnational qualities (Harb, 2025) and larger local NGOs that manage to meet donor requirements at the expense of community-based organisations (Koch & Rooden, 2024). In Myanmar, for example, efforts to localise aid were hampered by heavily bureaucratic compliance systems that undermined the type of rapid adaptive approaches that localisation efforts aim to achieve, while critically creating security risks and reproducing injustices in the international aid system (Decobert et al., 2025). Such examples have led to criticism that the global push for localisation fails to address the deep-rooted racism and ongoing legacies of colonialism endemic to the aid industry (Harb, 2025; Shuayb, 2022).

What are the implications of localisation in conflict-affected settings? Existing evidence has highlighted several potential risks associated with localisation in conflict-affected settings. Conflict contexts – often marked by polarisation or factionalism across local groups, distrust between government and communities, or patronage networks that make corruption pervasive – contribute to highly politically charged decisions around aid allocation that could exacerbate the drivers of conflict (Carter et al., 2022). Further, operational complexities in conflict-affected contexts such as sanctions, restrictions on engagement with government or failures in financial transfer systems (e.g. banking system collapse) can increase risks and compliance requirements (HAG & GLOW, 2023). In practice, some localisation efforts in conflict contexts have shifted security, legal and fiduciary risk onto local actors operating in some of the most remote and dangerous locations where threats to safety and security are greatest, raising critical ethical issues (HAG & GLOW, 2023; Moro et al., 2020). Finally, while concerns have been raised about local actors' relationships with warring parties and potential capture by political interests, empirical research from South Sudan finds that deep contextual knowledge can help local actors uphold humanitarian principles in politically charged environments (Moro et al., 2020).

ERICC research highlights a number of complexities that localisation efforts must grapple with in conflict-affected settings. First, while modern mass education is traditionally understood as a state-provided public service, in conflict-affected settings, meaningful education reform is often not feasible through government systems, and the capacity and legitimacy to sustain schooling instead frequently resides in community-led or non-state arrangements. Political economy analyses indicate that where power is fragmented and contested and the social contract is weak or absent, education is often not a priority to governing authorities (Homonchuk et al., forthcoming). Further, in some conflict contexts, the government may be unrecognised or perceived as illegitimate, ministries may be

functionally absent in marginalised regions, or authorities may be unwilling to acknowledge or address the education needs of vulnerable groups (Rinehart et al., 2024). In such contexts, local entry points to support education typically fall outside national government structures. Second, in conflict settings, education can become a site of struggle over power, identity and legitimacy. For example, in Myanmar, public education has been used as a tool to assimilate the country's ethnically diverse population, fuelling political opposition, rejection of public education and the expansion of non-state education systems as sites of resistance. There is a risk that local initiatives reproduce entrenched hierarchies, marginalising girls, learners with disabilities, and learners from ethnic and religious minorities or those who are economically disadvantaged. This raises critical questions about what localisation should look like in conflict settings and how to navigate who to work with and who to exclude. Consequently, there is a need for explicit, politically informed, and ongoing conflict-sensitive analyses to navigate the diversity of local initiatives.

WHAT OUR RESEARCH SHOWS: ERICC FINDINGS ON LOCALISATION

The findings are organised around four mutually reinforcing themes that respond to the question, "What changes are required to genuinely shift power to local actors and enable localised education responses in conflict and crisis settings?"

- **Recognise and resource existing community-led education efforts,** rather than building parallel systems.
- **Shift financing and resource governance** from highly fragmented, short-term, inequitable funding toward predictable, locally controlled mechanisms that enable schools and communities to plan, adapt and sustain provision.
- **Realign power, incentives and accountability** away from one-way upward reporting toward shared decision-making and community-facing accountability.
- **Commit to long-term trust-based partnerships** grounded in transparency, mutual respect and solidarity.

Together, ERICC themes reposition agenda-setting authority with local actors and strengthen the ability of local education systems to deliver contextually grounded learning in conflict and crisis settings.

Theme 1: Recognise and resource existing community-led efforts

Communities and households step in to sustain national education systems, even during crises, where government and external aid are stretched thin. Across diverse contexts, ERICC research shows that local actors are innovating and organising to fill operational, financial and institutional gaps in national education systems in the absence of sufficient state or donor capacity. In Jordan, for example, local schools, families and communities are compensating for limited government and humanitarian capacity by developing context-specific, low-cost and relational strategies to prevent dropout (Al Zawahreh et al., 2025). These ad-hoc school-led strategies rely on staff goodwill and parental support through one-to-one tutoring, resource room teacher support, outreach to fathers to encourage them to help keep children in school and community-led fundraising. The findings suggest that localisation

works best when schools have autonomy and support to adapt interventions culturally and contextually.

Evidence from South Sudan and Nigeria shows how communities assume roles traditionally associated with government functions in national education systems – recruiting volunteer teachers, paying teacher salaries, managing informal learning spaces, and mobilising resources for school rehabilitation (Akogun, et al., forthcoming; Dazberger et al., in preparation). Rigorous evidence on the impact of these initiatives is limited, although available evidence points to potential substantial gains. In Nigeria, community-led efforts helped to reduce the out-of-school rate to 7.5% from its 21.7% (UNESCO, 2022) pre-conflict level by recruiting volunteer teachers from within the community, rehabilitating school buildings, and converting private residences into classrooms for children (Akogun et al., forthcoming).

Evidence from Lebanon and South Sudan shows how families and local communities, not central authorities, are the principal drivers of education continuity in acute crises, especially during displacement and school closures. Under conditions of acute crisis, Lebanese public schools, teachers, parents and communities acted as the first line of response, supporting education financing, transportation and psychosocial support – effectively outsourcing what are traditionally considered government responsibilities downward (Maalouf & Brun, 2025). In South Sudan, flood-affected zones merged multiple schools into one safe 'union school' to support continuity of learning until flooded schools were rehabilitated (Datzberger et al., in preparation).

These examples highlight how, despite severe economic strain and intersecting insecurities, communities remain highly motivated to mobilise material, human and social capital to sustain learning through formal systems. While these actions demonstrate remarkable local agency and adaptability, they often occur under conditions of precarity and place increased burden on marginalised populations. This reliance on local coping mechanisms indicates a structural failure of both the formal education systems and humanitarian responses. This means that systematic investment in education during times of crisis cannot be replaced by community agency alone, as this may mask inequities and place a disproportionate burden on already struggling communities to maintain the learners' right to education. This underscores that sustainable localisation requires stronger partnerships between communities and government, where governments are better prepared to respond to shocks and community-led initiatives are formally recognised, supported and integrated into education system planning. Localisation efforts should consider how to recognise, resource and scale endogenous capacities within local communities.

SYRIA: AL-TAL CITY'S LOCAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (LDC) SUSTAINING EDUCATION AMID CONFLICT[6]

Al-Tal City in Rural Damascus experienced significant strain during the Syrian war, serving as a refuge for displaced families and burdening its services. By 2015, the public education system was in freefall: many teachers had fled or stopped working due to unpaid salaries, and schools were closing or barely functioning. Sensing impending collapse, local community leaders transitioned the local mediation council into an LDC to prevent public education from collapsing entirely in Al-Tal. By anchoring authority within a trusted local body, the initiative was able to act quickly, maintain

[6] From Nasser et al. (Forthcoming). Education and the solidarity economy in conflict-affected Syria: Al Tal and Hajin. ERICC.

legitimacy and re-establish basic education services where formal institutions were failing.

Early actions focused on reclaiming school buildings occupied by armed groups, repairing war damage to classrooms, and persuading teachers to return. The LDC also established a community-managed teacher support programme. With Syria's economic crisis, teacher salaries had become nearly worthless; the committee raised money to give active teachers modest monthly bonuses and in-kind support (food baskets, transportation stipends) to retain them. Additionally, the initiative arranged for volunteer staff to fill critical gaps including teachers and classroom aides. Another focus was absorbing the influx of displaced students: the committee expanded capacity by opening additional shifts and temporary learning spaces.

The initiative's sustainability rested on community trust and diversified local financing – through remittances, donations and volunteer labour – rather than depending on external aid. However, severe resource limitations were an ongoing challenge. Syria's hyperinflation eroded the value of donations and the community was under extreme economic strain so the committee had to continuously gather contributions to keep the schools running. This highlights the limits of community solidarity when structural poverty and lack of capital are extreme.

The LDC also faced political and security pressures. Operating in a fiercely contested political environment, it worked hard to be recognised as apolitical. When political control shifted in 2025, the new authorities were initially suspicious of the committee, seeing it as linked to the previous regime as it had operated in a regime-controlled territory. However, the Al-Tal community's strong defence of the committee led to a compromise where 'old' committee members were allowed to continue their work under a newly named council. The committee's ongoing role underscores its legitimacy and the value of rooted, locally owned institutions in maintaining education continuity during transitions of power. At the same time, local governance can be perceived by national and subnational officials as a challenge to central authorities. This can complicate investment in participatory governance, which can be perceived as politicising service delivery or undermining the state.

This case illustrates how local governance and community-led action can, at least temporarily, sustain education amid conflict and under significant resource strain. It also underscores the importance of investing in and protecting local governance mechanisms, which not only keep education functioning amid instability but also lay the groundwork for rebuilding more inclusive, accountable and resilient education systems in post-conflict settings.

Advancing localisation requires broadening the definition of education systems to recognise community-driven, non-state education as legitimate forms of provision (Homonchuk et al., forthcoming; Pacifico, forthcoming). In crisis-affected contexts where many learners lie beyond the reach of formal services, education delivery should depend on asset-based approaches that identify, value and build on existing locally driven systems. This is particularly relevant in contexts where governing authorities are conflict actors or do not have incentives and/or capacities to provide inclusive, quality public education (Homonchuk et al., forthcoming). In such contexts, non-state provision might be the most reliable and sustainable route to ensuring access to education where state provision fails, compared to short-lived humanitarian sector provision. In a similar fashion, before establishing new education provision, external actors should aim to recognise and adequately resource

promising, locally embedded forms of civil society and collective action, including youth-, women- and teacher-led initiatives. In conflict and protracted crisis settings, many existing systems of education provision and representation are driven by strong local commitment and engagement yet operate with minimal foreign institutional, financial or technical support (Datzberger et al., in preparation; Zaw et al., 2024).

In addition to non-state systems, families and local communities, not central authorities, are often the primary line of resilience in response to shocks, especially during displacement and school closures (Datzberger et al., in preparation; Maalouf & Brun, 2025). The 2022 Pakistan floods illustrate how women-led action sustained learning when state and humanitarian provision lagged (Fean et al., forthcoming). Although UNICEF established 500 temporary learning centres nationwide, none operated in the most severely affected districts of southern Punjab in the early months. In overcrowded shelters, the practice of *purdah* (seclusion) further limited girls' mobility and access to safe, gender-sensitive learning spaces. In response, women and community members organised informal 'drawing-room' study groups and mobilised basic materials; painted planks and cardboard served as blackboards; and teaching was largely oral due to scarce textbooks. Despite the trauma of displacement, caregiving responsibilities and limited education resources, many women engaged in these informal study groups (Fean et al., forthcoming). This case underscores the speed, flexibility and reach of community collective action as a core component of gender-responsive approaches and community resilience to environmental disruption.

However, political economy analysis exposes why external support to local non-state education systems may be actively resisted by school-level actors. For example, in Nigeria, some community schools prefer to be independent to avoid taxation or levies that make small schools unsustainable, and prevent curricular imposition (e.g. Western curricula that includes content on gender and reproductive health) (Homonchuk & Buba, forthcoming). This highlights that local communities care more about preserving their autonomy and the sustainability of their culturally and contextually grounded models of educational financing and governance.

Communities in conflict and protracted crises are often operating under extreme economic pressure and insecurity, with limited resources to sustain education opportunities or guarantee equitable learning outcomes. A localisation agenda that recognises local agency must also confront its limits, ensuring that local initiatives are supported through partnerships grounded in mutual respect and solidarity and accompanied by broader structural responses that address the systemic barriers inhibiting inclusive quality education.

COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH: COMMUNITY-LED NON-FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM EXPANDING ACCESS, QUALITY AND CONTINUITY

Evidence from Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, one of the world's most challenging contexts for education, illustrates the value of community-led systems. Madrasa systems have provided critical access to education for both Rohingya refugees and host community learners, yet they face persistent challenges – operating with poor infrastructure, inadequate teacher training and limited collaboration with humanitarian education providers (Hasan et al., forthcoming; Zaw et al., 2024). Madrasas have been largely excluded from recognition and funding because they were framed by governing authorities, particularly the Awami League, as sites at risk of radicalisation,

despite the absence of robust supporting evidence (Homonchuk et al., 2024). Host-government sensitivities over control of refugee education, international secular policy preferences, and bureaucratic incentives to fund familiar partners all align to favour parallel, UN/international NGO-run models over engagement with the locally legitimate madrasa system.

Similarly, Rohingya-led informal tutoring networks emerged organically to fill education gaps, often operating on the premises of the madrasas in the afternoons, after the religious teachings took place (Homonchuk et al., 2024). Despite the lack of published statistics comparing learning outcomes across education providers in Cox's Bazar, most parents (87%) in 2021 reported preferring to send their children to private tutors, perceiving it as higher quality and more relevant than the humanitarian-led non-formal learning centres (ISCG, 2021).[7] However, this carries equity implications as the most economically disadvantaged families are at risk of being left out. These examples highlight that, in the absence of high quality national systems, communities invest significantly in education initiatives they perceive as legitimate and of higher quality. However, rather than leveraging these systems, international investments often overlook community assets and weaken prospects for sustainable, locally owned education ecosystems.[8] Greater collaboration between madrasas, community educators, humanitarian actors and government stakeholders could have promoted a more balanced approach to education that includes religious learning as well as foundational numeracy and literacy skills.

Support for participatory governance in education systems can drive representative, transparent and accountable local education systems. The experience of the Local Development and Small Business Support Office (LDSPS) in Idleb, Syria illustrates how civil society can engage local actors as agents of systemic education reform even amid severe instability (Tozan et al., forthcoming). LDSPS is a civil society organisation that made notable advances in North West Syria during the conflict by supporting a participatory governance system that connects Syrian civil society, parents, teachers and policymakers to develop education policies and plans for the region. Since 2019, LDSPS has engaged with 300 schools in Idleb, where civic participation in education had previously been limited to state-controlled teachers' unions. The initiative helped establish independent associations for parents, parents of children with disabilities, and women working in the education sector – each with elected governance structures at school, local, regional and national levels. These networks have strengthened community trust, improved the participation of marginalised groups, and fostered practices of transparency and accountability such as regular public reporting and community dialogue. Its theory of change perceives that stronger, better-coordinated civil society actors in education can contribute to governance across all sectors, ultimately leading to improved services, greater civic engagement and greater social cohesion among local community members (Tozan et al., forthcoming).

[7] At the time, the non-formal learning centres were using the UNICEF-developed, unaccredited Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LFCA). The shift to the Myanmar curriculum started in 2021, following government approval in 2020 (Homonchuk et al., 2024).

[8] In this case, political barriers in Bangladesh frustrated efforts to support Rohingya-led learning. In December 2021, the government prohibited community-led schools and tutoring by Rohingya educators, citing their informal status and alleged security concerns (Foyez & Rahman, 2022). While international rights groups have publicly condemned restrictions on Rohingya-led teaching and learning, it is unclear how firmly development and humanitarian actors are advocating behind the scenes with the government (Amnesty International, 2022).

In Myanmar, a highly fragmented environment where most donors operate through non-state partners, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and Global Partnership for Education programmes include a focus on empowering local-level school management (Stenning, 2025). To enable sustainable economic support, local education management groups are supported through a revolving fund where the communities are given 'seed' money to invest (e.g. buying and selling local produce) and use the profits for school operating costs. They are also supporting the use of UNESCO's MyClass App to support local management to use their own data for education decision-making. In addition to acting as a simple education management information system, the app is designed to use the inputted data to support school improvement plans. The current programme provides each of the 15 pilot schools with a grant of USD 2,000 to implement its plans. These efforts show potential to embed decision-making at the local level, increase community engagement with the school and encourage resource-sharing. Part of the education management groups' role is to develop school improvement plans; these often include establishing safe school teams which help reassure parents that their children will be safe in and around school. However, a persistent challenge is that the cost of education provision is more than vulnerable communities in Myanmar can shoulder in the current economic climate, risking the sustainability of community schools (Stenning, 2025).

In contrast, experiences from Lebanon show how donor-funded responses (e.g. Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) I and II, Crisis Response Plans) had limited systemic impact, despite significant investment, as the resources bypassed or overwhelmed local capacities (Maalouf & Brun, 2025). At the national level, after the Syrian refugee influx there was a shift in policy influence from local towards international actors. Donor-funded governance structures were developed outside the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which managed international funds and influenced policy processes. The development of a donor system adjacent to the government system, staffed by individuals paid by international funders and short-term consultants tasked with policy development, led to a system more accountable to donors than to the ministry and yielding few durable system gains despite significant investment (Brun & Maalouf, in preparation).

Theme 2: Shift financing and resource governance from fragmented, short-term, inequitable flows to predictable, locally controlled mechanisms

Education systems in protracted conflict contexts often rely heavily on household contributions. ERICC research finds that households devote significant shares of their budgets to education, even when experiencing severe material deprivation. This is especially common in contexts with broken social contracts and de facto governing authorities with few incentives to finance or improve the quality of public schools. For example, "in 2021, household spending on education in South Sudan was about $144. This is extremely high relative to the 2021 GDP per capita of $419 and given the fact that nearly half of people living in South Sudan experience acute food insecurity" (Homonchuk et al., 2025, p.14). For refugees in host countries, the financial strain is typically less severe, but refugee households often spend more on education than host communities. In Jordan, refugee families spend more than 10% of household budgets on education, more than healthcare costs and significantly more than host populations (Ibid., p. 16). Given the high levels of household commitment to education, localisation efforts should ideally entail transferring resources to households in contexts where household expenditure on education is reaching catastrophic levels and where a responsive supply of education exists, for example from community or private schools. This would require greater efforts to collect data and monitor household education spending (Ibid.).

Centralised and short-term financing undermines the effectiveness and efficiency of community-embedded approaches to education anchored in devolved financial management and community ownership. The example of pastoralist education in South Sudan highlights the inefficiencies of centralised short-term financing systems in channelling resources to local communities in a protracted crisis setting (Bani Ata et al., 2025). Children living in pastoralist communities are among the most marginalised learners in South Sudan, grappling with frequent migration, remoteness, limited infrastructure and poverty, leaving 56% of pastoralist children out of school. The Pastoralist Education Programme (PEP) emerged within the Ministry of General Education and Instruction to address this gap by delivering mobile schooling adapted to pastoralist lifestyles. However, centralised disbursement through Juba-based entities caused long delays and leakages, as funds often failed to reach counties or schools in time, interrupting teacher payments and material supply. Internationally driven, short-term funding was inefficient on its own: when donor cycles ended, PEP could not be sustained, leading to wasted initial investments and eroding community trust. This 'start-stop' pattern led to duplication and constant re-mobilisation of communities and teachers, undermining cost-effectiveness. Locally managed and community-embedded delivery proved more efficient in sustaining continuity with minimal resources. Data indicated that when chiefs, local education officers or communities are involved in planning and oversight, then resources are better targeted and protected (Bani Ata et al., 2025).

Theme 3: Realign power, incentives and accountability away from one-way upward reporting toward shared decision-making and community-facing accountability

Current approaches to localisation are shaped by incentive structures that maintain power asymmetries between international and local actors. At present, localisation often reduces local actors' roles to subcontracting and delivery, keeping power in the hands of international organisations and reinforcing competition among local civil society organisations (Homonchuk et al., forthcoming). This dynamic strips local organisations of their political role and discourages the collective action and effectiveness needed to represent the needs of communities, put pressure on governing authorities to provide better quality education, and keep external actors operating in crisis contexts accountable. Genuine localisation requires reconfiguring the underlying incentives of the aid system so that local actors are rewarded not only for service delivery but for their representational, convening and accountability functions – representing and spending time with communities, convening inclusive fora, and holding governing authorities and external actors accountable – not just delivering projects. This shift requires moving from a culture of compliance to one of influence where aid investments build advocacy capabilities and technical skills among mid- and lower-level ministerial staff, civil society organisations, and parent and teacher unions, so they can actively lead education response dialogues (Ibid.).

In many humanitarian contexts, technical capacity development and mentorship for local civil society partners and sub-awardees has long been part of all education projects. These efforts are often perceived to strengthen individual knowledge and skills, and improve organisational capacity and implementation efficiency. However, building the technical and managerial capacity of civil society has limited system-wide impact without structural reforms to transfer power, responsibility and financing. These gains may be limited at the system level as international financing continues to be channelled

through international NGO prime contractors rather than directly to local actors.[9] Without a clear vision for transferring power and responsibility, such as direct responsibility for managing resources at scale and leading on agenda-setting and strategy, efforts to strengthen civil society risk entrenching dependency rather than shifting power (Pacifico, forthcoming). However, this transfer of responsibility is often in tension with incentive structures that prioritise avoiding corruption (real or perceived), and demonstrating financial oversight and accountability to taxpayers, which can make donors reluctant to devolve meaningful decision-making and financial authority.

Data systems in crisis settings often focus on upward accountability, feeding data to donors and central authorities, rather than using data to support local decision-making and improvement. Teachers and schools carry the primary burden of data collection but seldom see direct benefits from the information they provide. In northeast Nigeria, for example, educators are required to submit frequent reports on attendance and infrastructure to multiple agencies, yet they are typically not informed about the use and impact of aggregated results (Borkowski et al., forthcoming). This dynamic creates perceptions of data collection as a top-down exercise, disconnected from classroom realities and local priorities. Advancing localisation therefore requires reimagining data systems as reciprocal and empowering tools – where information, or at least accounts about its benefits and use, flows back to teachers and schools to guide local action and enhance education quality and accountability (Ibid.).

In contexts with substantial non-state education services, data from non-state providers is essential for visibility, planning and accountability. In Myanmar, for example, where ethnic education departments, monastic and faith-based schools are the primary (or preferred) providers in many areas of the country, it is very difficult to construct a reliable national picture of education access (Daly, 2025). Data collection challenges are compounded by ongoing conflict, regular disruptions, mass displacement and shifting territorial control. These conditions contribute to education data that are often inaccessible, inconsistent or incomplete. ERICC research highlights the importance of co-developing national and subnational data strategies with ethnic education administrations and other parallel providers, valuing localised knowledge and data practices – even where they do not conform to standardised indicators, and investing in the capacities of non-state providers in order to enable comprehensive data collection and sharing (Daly, 2025).

Theme 4: Commit to long-term trust-based partnerships grounded in transparency, mutual respect and solidarity

Localisation requires the facilitation of collaboration among diverse groups through relationships built on mutual trust. Collaboration built on trust over time can yield faster and more contextually appropriate solutions than centralised decision-making. For example, in Nigeria, the long-standing overcrowding problem was resolved after local government officials met directly with community representatives, permitting them to construct additional classrooms – an action that had been stalled for five years under formal bureaucratic processes (Akogun et al., forthcoming). In Lebanon, mutual mistrust between government officials, donors and local civil society has weakened the education sector's response, driven by a range of factors including lack of transparency, top-down approaches and external actors pushing for programmes that overlook local capacity limitations, requiring local actors to take on unrealistic timelines and success indicators (Mazzilli et al., 2025).

[9] This aligns with research that argues that intermediaries can add value but their current role needs to fundamentally shift to better support local action (HAG, CoLAB & GLOW, 2021).

Participatory evidence generation paired with trusted coalitions and inclusive consultations offers a scalable pathway for locally led education reforms. Adamawa is one of the states most affected by the insurgency that has ravaged the educational and social infrastructure of northeast Nigeria. In 2021, as part of efforts to reform teacher management, the Governor of Adamawa State formed a committee to tackle teacher shortages and patronage in recruitment processes. This culminated in a 2024 bill, developed through the generation and use of local evidence and a contextually appropriate consultative process that engaged a diverse range of actors and interest groups in defining the policy problem and formulating the chosen policy instrument. Through the co-construction of the country-level research agenda, ERICC was able to respond to timely evidence gaps and support the legislation process through demand-driven research (Akogun et al., 2025). First, ERICC conducted an implementation assessment of a recent teacher-management policy in another state, Kaduna, to gauge fidelity, effects on teacher numbers and quality, and enabling or hindering factors. Second, ERICC carried out a design-research phase that translated Kaduna lessons into an Adamawa-appropriate model for identifying, recruiting and retaining quality teachers in conflict- and crisis-affected states, while testing enablers and constraints to uptake and feeding relevant provisions into the bill. This was a novel approach to policy development in a setting where legislative use of research and public participation are limited. The success of this process rested on trusted researcher–policymaker partnerships producing credible, cost-conscious evidence; strong political commitment and stakeholder buy-in; and inclusive consultations across interest groups – offering transferable lessons for adapting education policies in other crisis contexts (Akogun et al., 2025).

Bottom-up research processes are central to localisation as they support local research priorities, ensure culturally valid methods and increase evidence uptake by local actors. ERICC research is grounded in consultative processes within each target country. First, country research teams reviewed and mapped existing evidence to ground each country-level research agenda study in the existing data evidence base to ensure complementarity. Second, a diverse range of stakeholders were invited to join national consultations to identify, prioritise and validate research questions. Participatory processes ensure research priorities reflect country needs and support ownership by participants who may be well-placed to apply ERICC findings. While participatory, co-designed approaches enhance contextual relevance, legitimacy and uptake, they do not in themselves guarantee efficiency, effectiveness or cost-effectiveness. Relevance and equity considerations should be complemented by robust evidence on holistic education outcomes and value for money. ERICC also places emphasis on formative research that aims to uncover the root causes of poor access, learning and service continuity, to identify existing community-driven practices that often go undocumented, and to map the values, practices and lived experiences shaping education. Skipping this step risks generating interventions misaligned with local priorities, lacking community ownership, and failing to address key barriers, thereby undermining impact, cost-effectiveness and sustainability (Diazgranados et al., forthcoming).

SOUTH SUDAN: PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH ON EDUCATION FOR HISTORICALLY MARGINALISED PASTORALIST COMMUNITIES[10]

In South Sudan, OTHERwise research adopted a participatory approach to ensure a locally driven research agenda, create space for local agency, and strengthen data quality, relevance and

[10] From Wilson, N. et al. (Forthcoming). From Interviews to Impact: Critical Reflections on Participatory Research into Pastoralist Education. ERICC.

uptake. Research topics and questions were identified through a widely consultative process which involved stakeholder mapping, a systematic evidence review and 41 interviews, where education for marginalised pastoralist communities emerged as a top priority (Wagner Tsoni et al., 2024). To engage local stakeholders through regular participatory workshops, a Country Advisory Committee (CAC) was constituted including around 15 technical staff from the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI), I/NGOs, civil society and academia. CAC meetings were held three times a year to deliberate on topics such as research question setting, site selection and developing recommendations. MoGEI staff reported seeing CAC meetings as an important quality control and accountability mechanism. In addition to the CAC, co-creation workshops were conducted with local stakeholders at the beginning (to design the study), middle (to discuss emerging findings) and end (to distil recommendations).

Six South Sudanese field researchers from pastoralist communities were involved at all stages of the project: from tool design to conducting interviews, to presenting findings and co-authoring outputs. Researchers were deployed to communities where they had similar but sufficiently distant ethnolinguistic backgrounds so that they shared a language and common cultural reference points, but were not at risk of being exposed to local conflict dynamics. A flexible approach to data collection was critical in allowing in-field pivots proposed by the researchers themselves. For example, almost all of the field researchers independently decided it was necessary to engage someone from the local community as a field guide to direct them on where, when and how to access the cattle camps. In two locations, field guides changed the cattle camp being visited for security reasons, and in all locations field guides provided useful direction and cultural context.

The co-creation process with local stakeholders, chiefly MoGEI staff, meant that they had chosen the topic, validated the site locations and contributed to developing the research questions. As such, interest in the findings, outputs and follow-on research flowed naturally rather than being engineered ex-post. Yet, in a system where policy influence is centralised and needs are highly diverse, participation and legitimacy do not automatically guarantee uptake, and ongoing engagement and targeted advocacy remain important to translate participatory research into policy and practice.

DISCUSSION

ERICC challenges the dominant definition of localisation as an "effort to shift power, resources and decision-making" closer to communities, a framing which implies the transfer of external aid to populations in need – aid that needs to be made 'local'. Much of the existing discourse on localisation assumes a top-down shift of power from global to local actors, where international agencies hold the resources and expertise while local actors await empowerment. ERICC's findings, however, demonstrate that across crisis contexts, it is the absence of international and governmental capacity that prompts local actors to step into the vacuum, mobilising scarce resources to try to meet educational needs. This implies that meaningful localisation requires a reconceptualisation of power and capacity that foregrounds local action as the foundation of education system resilience and reorients aid to embed support within existing initiatives rather than developing parallel systems. In this way, our evidence

supports an expansion of the localisation debate to include evidence and action that are often omitted from the discourse, including community collective action, locally managed financing (e.g. cash and voucher assistance (CVA)) and participatory governance.

While ERICC findings underscore the centrality of local action in sustaining education amid crisis, it cannot be assumed that all local initiatives advance quality, inclusive or equitable education reform. Local responses may, in some cases, mirror or reinforce existing social hierarchies, marginalising certain groups (e.g. girls, learners with disabilities, ethnic or religious minorities) or contribute to social division or extremist ideologies – although there is limited evidence on the prevalence of such dynamics. Still, this underscores the importance of developing clear criteria for identifying and supporting local initiatives that promote sustainable conflict-sensitive access to quality education.

Current incentives in education in emergencies (EiE) research, policy, programming, data systems and partnership models remain predominantly oriented around upward accountability to donors, international agencies and central authorities, rather than to learners and their communities. This vertical orientation reinforces power asymmetries in the aid system by prioritising reporting, compliance and visibility over responsiveness, trust and mutual learning. Localisation efforts require a fundamental shift in incentives towards downward and two-way accountability where communities, schools and local actors have a meaningful ability to define priorities, monitor outcomes and hold state and non-state education actors accountable.

Taken together, these insights point to a practical reframing of localisation efforts to genuinely shift power to local actors and enable localised education responses in conflict and crisis settings. This requires recognising and resourcing existing community-led education efforts; shifting financing and resource governance toward predictable, locally controlled mechanisms; realigning power, incentives and accountability toward shared decision-making and community-facing accountability; and committing to long-term trust-based partnerships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For donors, UN and international NGOs

Recognise, resource and support community-led initiatives. Funders should target and strengthen established community-based efforts and non-state education programmes that have demonstrated the capacity to sustain learning under crisis conditions. Employ asset-based approaches that start with what is working so that existing systems and initiatives are reinforced and not substituted by parallel systems. Additionally, funding flows should shift from short-term, centralised sources to predictable, multi-year, flexible financing structures anchored in local institutions that enable education continuity while strengthening local ownership and two-way accountability. While prevailing humanitarian logics equate success with the capacity to scale and absorb larger budgets, community-driven initiatives may follow a different model of success. These may prioritise improving local services over increasing scale, which can erode the relational and adaptive qualities that make local approaches effective. At the same time, recognise that not all community-driven initiatives support inclusive, equitable or conflict-sensitive education, and establish principles and safeguards for engagement grounded in do-no-harm, conflict-sensitive and inclusion standards.

Support participatory governance as a core education system function. Embedding representative civil society in education governance increases transparency, inclusion and accountability – key localisation outcomes. Strengthen family and community engagement at the school level by establishing – or investing in existing – networks that enable community participation in the educational process. Recognise traditional councils, parent and caregiver, disability and women's associations across levels as decision-making bodies within the education system. Reserve seats for these elected networks in policy forums, planning and budget committees and coordination groups. Multi-year core funding can sustain and scale participatory governance models, enabling more resilient civil society networks that can facilitate systemic reform during conflict and protracted crises (Akogun et al., forthcoming; Tozan et al., forthcoming).

Support households as central education financiers. Where household education spending reaches damaging levels and a responsive supply of education exists, channel resources directly to families through locally led CVA. CVA offers a cost-effective modality that centres households and supports local economies. There is a growing evidence base on the benefits of locally led cash responses, underscoring the importance of local actors leading CVA programme design, decision-making and management of resources (CALP, 2023). Increase efforts to collect data and monitor household education spending in order to understand household contributions to education and when they reach crisis levels.

Design education data systems to be reciprocal and school-facing in ways that support local decision-making and school improvement. Timely information should flow back to local actors and school leaders in usable formats that support evidence-based decisions and advance local learning and accountability. Support schools with the time, resources and capacities to use school data. Include non-state education providers in national and subnational data systems where relevant, and co-develop data strategies with these providers to ensure ownership, contextual fit, intentional design, long-term sustainability and practical uptake.

Coordination mechanisms should be reoriented to engage and transfer decision-making authority and leadership to local NGOs, teachers' unions and community-based organisations. By embedding local actors at the centre of coordination structures, responses become more contextually grounded, inclusive and sustainable. Empowering local organisations in this way not only enhances their institutional independence but also builds the foundations for locally led and resilient education systems (Tozan et al., forthcoming).

For researchers and funders of research

Redefine research 'success' through locally valued outcomes, not narrow pre-set indicators. Shifting incentives for researchers away from Global North-focused indicators (e.g. academic publication targets or citation counts) towards measuring the types of results that are valued by local actors may help to realign knowledge production with the aims of localisation. This is not to discount the value of academic publications from advancing global debates, but to recognise that from a localisation perspective these are secondary to outcomes that matter directly to local communities.

Research should prioritise direct benefits to local education communities. This includes considering, from the outset of the project, how the study may contribute to improving local educational conditions,

practices and opportunities. Accountability to research participants should be built into study design, and followed through after the project ends.

Prioritise equitable, trust-based partnerships across all stages of the research cycle. Local stakeholders should be meaningfully involved in all phases of research, from defining problems to dissemination and uptake to ensure that studies address community priorities and generate actionable evidence. To enable this, funders of research should build in time and resources to co-create research agendas with affected communities; support reciprocal knowledge exchange between Global North and Global South researchers (recognising that capacity strengthening is bi-directional); and create incentives and governance arrangements that enable Global South academic leadership within research consortia.

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