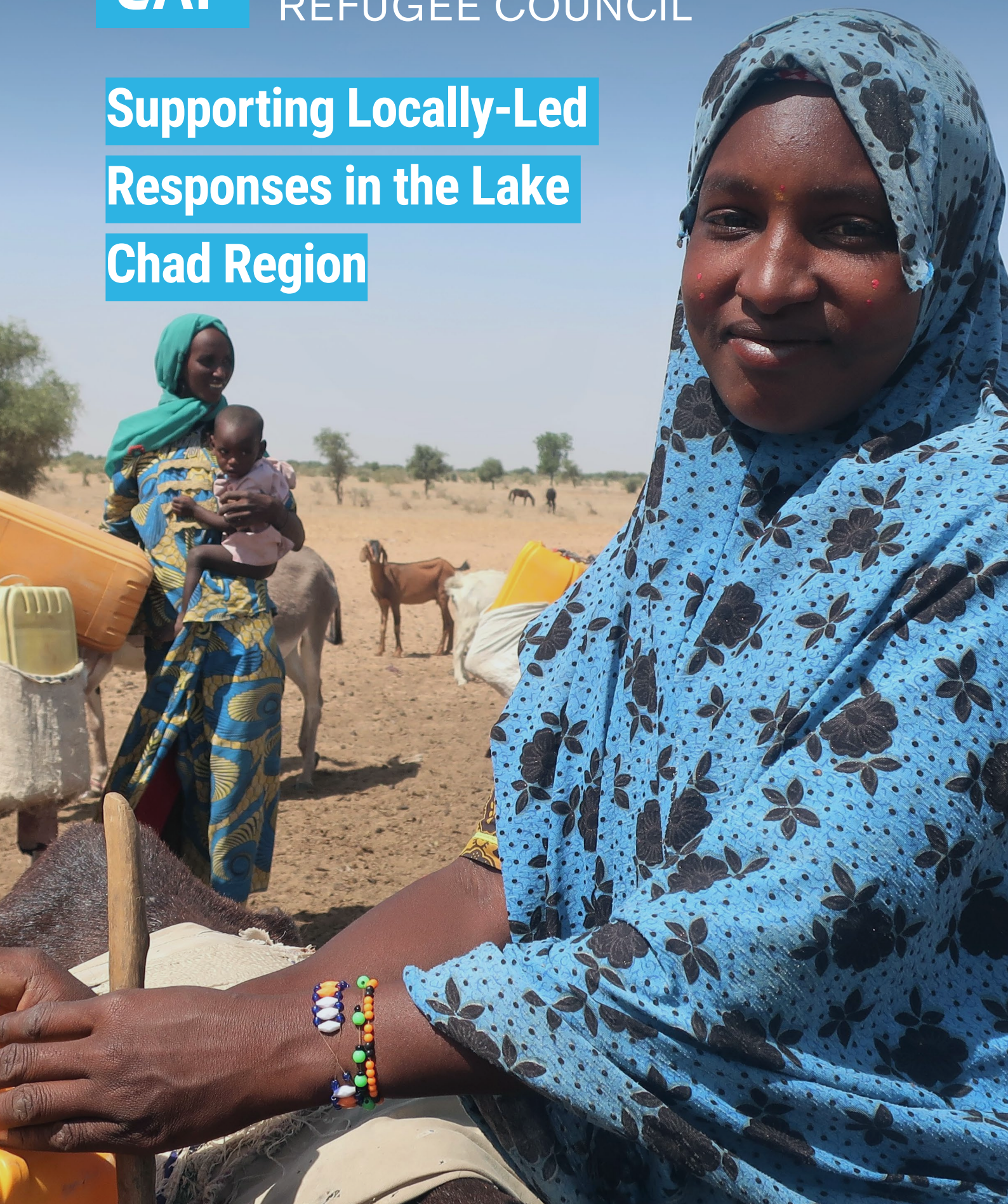


**NOR
CAP**

PART OF NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

**Supporting Locally-Led
Responses in the Lake
Chad Region**



NORCAP: Who we are

NORCAP works to improve aid and better protect and empower people affected by crisis and climate change. We do this by providing expertise and solutions to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding partners.

NORCAP improves aid in two complementary ways:

1. We provide targeted expertise to strengthen our partners' response.
2. We collaborate with partners to develop solutions to unmet gaps and challenges.

NORCAP is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

NORCAP

Norwegian Refugee Council
Prinsens gate 2, 0152 Oslo Norway
www.nrc.no/norcap • norcap@nrc.no

author: Murray Garrard
designed by: GPS - Garrard Powell Solutions
cover photo: Mika Issa/NORCAP
publication date: February 2025

Huge thanks to NORCAP's localisation and gender specialists who gave up their time to contribute to this report.



Co-funded by
the European Union



PART OF NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

The Lake Chad Localisation Programme is funded by the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (NMFA) and the European Union (ECHO). Views and opinions expressed herein are, however, those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect those of NMFA or ECHO. Neither NMFA, ECHO, nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Supporting Locally-Led Responses in the Lake Chad Region

Contents

<u>Building a United Voice: Women-Led Organisations in Northeast Nigeria</u>	10
<u>Fostering the Agency of Women in the Humanitarian Response in Niger</u>	13
<u>Strengthening Local Humanitarian Leadership in Cameroon</u>	16
<u>A Seat at the Table: Transforming Humanitarian Leadership in Nigeria</u>	19
<u>Developing a Localisation Strategy for Chad</u>	22
<u>Promoting Women's Leadership in Peacebuilding Processes in Cameroon</u>	25
<u>Raising the Voice of Civil Society at the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum</u>	28
<u>Breaking Barriers and Enabling Local Organisations to Access International Funding</u>	31



TORSTEN PURSCHE/ADOBE STOCK



PART OF NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL



POCO.BW/ADOBE STOCK

Lake Chad Localisation Programme

The NORCAP Lake Chad Localisation Programme launched in 2017 following the 2017 Oslo Humanitarian Conference for Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, convened to address humanitarian crises in Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon. Based on recommendations from local civil society organisations, NORCAP was selected to support grassroots initiatives in these countries.¹

The programme pairs two specialists in each country: a localisation specialist and a gender specialist. Together, they work to strengthen local organisations' capacities and influence in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts. This is achieved through three main approaches: building civil society capabilities, promoting systemic change, and increasing local organisations' visibility. Key focus areas include organisational development, gender-responsive programming (with particular attention to enabling women-led organisations), and increasing local participation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. NORCAP collaborates with Resident Coordinators' Offices, UN Women, and OCHA, supporting over 60 local organisations across the four countries, with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) and ECHO.

¹ NORCAP defines localisation as the **process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the capacity of and leadership by national and local actors** (state and non-state) in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding, in order to better address the needs of crisis-affected populations and to prepare local and national actors for ongoing and future responses.



HOMOCOSMICOS/ADOBE STOCK

Executive Summary

The document showcases a series of approaches taken by NORCAP specialists to localising humanitarian response across the Lake Chad Basin region. These stories demonstrate how targeted support to local organisations, particularly women-led groups, is transforming humanitarian action from the ground up. From Nigeria, where the BAYNetWoC network secured representation in high-level coordination bodies, to Chad, where a comprehensive localisation strategy is reshaping humanitarian coordination, each story illustrates how localisation is not one thing, but changes with context.

The stories highlight three key themes: the critical role of women's leadership in a more localised humanitarian response, as seen in Niger's successful integration of women-led organisations in decision-making processes; the importance of systematic capacity strengthening, exemplified by Cameroon's approach to supporting local organisations in accessing international funding; and the power of collective action, demonstrated by local civil society's growing influence at the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum. Each story provides concrete examples of how local organisations, when supported and given opportunities, can effectively lead the humanitarian response in their communities.

These stories demonstrate that localisation is not just a concept, but is actionable and has impact – not just for the local organisations benefitting from greater recognition, but also for the communities they serve. Whether through women leading reintegration processes for former combatants in Cameroon, or local organisations accessing direct international funding through innovative mechanisms like the UN Peacebuilding Fund, the stories demonstrate how shifting power to local actors enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian response in complex crisis settings.

Overall Recommendations

- **Establish and expand structured mentorship** programmes that pair experienced and emerging organisations to build sustainable capacity in governance, financial management, and programme execution.
- **Create dedicated funding mechanisms** at national and regional levels, including pooled funds and simplified grant processes, to ensure local organisations, especially those led by women and marginalised groups, have direct and sustained access to resources.
- **Formalise local representation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms** by establishing quotas and creating permanent advisory roles for local civil society organisations in key decision-making bodies like Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) and pooled funds advisory boards.
- **Develop formal partnerships between local organisations and domestic funding sources**, including government bodies and private sector actors, to reduce reliance on international grants and ensure long-term sustainability.
- **Strengthen the advocacy and communications capacity** among local organisations through tailored training programmes, enabling them to effectively influence policy decisions and articulate community needs at all levels of humanitarian response.



Summary of Success Stories

1. Building a United Voice: Women-Led Organisations in Northeast Nigeria – focusing on the development and support given to the BayNetWoc.

RESULTS: Region's first civil society strategic plan and improved governance structures.

Specific Recommendations:

- Expand capacity strengthening through the BayNetWoc's mentorship model
- Increase the representation of women-led organisations in decision-making platforms
- Foster domestic resource mobilisation and local partnerships

2. Fostering the Agency of Women in Humanitarian Response in Niger – looking at the support and work for the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group.

RESULTS: Increased access to funding representation of women-led organisations on governance bodies.

Specific Recommendations:

- Enhance coordination among women-led organisations
- Increase direct funding for women-led initiatives
- Support long-term advocacy efforts for gender inclusion

3. Strengthening Local Humanitarian Leadership in Cameroon – a deeper dive into capacity strengthening for local organisations.

RESULTS: Improved organizational governance, increased local representation on HCT, local organisations leading response efforts.

Specific Recommendations:

- Institutionalise capacity-strengthening programmes for long-term impact
- Strengthen mentorship networks among local organisations
- Promote equitable representation in decision-making platforms

4. A Seat at the Table: Transforming Humanitarian Leadership in Nigeria – integration of local organisations into the core humanitarian coordination structure – especially the Humanitarian Country Team.

RESULTS: Increased representation on the HCT; more funding to national actors.

Specific Recommendations:

- Strengthen mentorship and capacity-strengthening programmes for humanitarian country team representatives
- Increase dedicated funding for women-led and marginalised groups
- Institutionalise local representation in coordination mechanisms



5. Developing a Localisation Strategy for Chad – developing a road map to local humanitarian leadership.

RESULTS: Increased seats on the HCT for local organisations; access, for the first time, to international funding.

Specific Recommendations:

- Expand capacity-strengthening initiatives for local organisations
- Enhance representation of local actors in decision-making platforms
- Develop a national pooled fund for local organisations

6. Promoting Women's Leadership in Peacebuilding Processes in Cameroon – inspirational work with women-led organisations leading peacebuilding efforts.

RESULTS: Increased organisational capacity and contribution to peacebuilding.

Specific Recommendations:

- Expand capacity-strengthening programmes for women-led organisations
- Establish sustainable funding mechanisms for women-led disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration initiatives
- Strengthen gender advocacy within disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration frameworks

7. Raising the Voice of Civil Society at the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum – a regional story, drawing together the work of NORCAP within a regional inter-governmental forum.

RESULTS: Enabled participation and ensured voices of the population were heard.

Specific Recommendations:

- Regularise the role of CSOs in forum the planning, participation & implementation of regional strategy
- Provide sustainable funding mechanisms for local organisations
- Enhance capacity strengthening and advocacy training for CSOs

8. Breaking Barriers and Enabling Local Organisations to Access International Funding – accessing funding by bringing together the different strands of NORCAP's work to ensure local organisations can access direct funding.

RESULTS: Increased capacity, funding, representation, voice, and agency, creating a ripple effect.

Specific Recommendations:

- Strengthen local organisations' governance and financial management systems
- Build regional networks to share resources and enhance advocacy impact
- Enable diverse organisations to participate in humanitarian funding decision-making



Key Results from NORCAP's Lake Chad Localisation Programme



Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum 2023 & 2025

- Supported over 100 CSO participants to attend and participate in CSO pre-forum events.
- Enabled 80 CSO representatives to join the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum.
- Ensured 50% of the forum's sessions included civil society panellists.
- Hosted a CSO panel discussion and supported development of CSO declarations highlighting their critical role and contribution in delivering the regional strategy.

Nigeria

- Civil society representation on the Nigeria HCT increased from **1 seat to 4 seats** by January 2025.
- The Nigerian Humanitarian Fund created a **US\$2.3 million** funding envelope for disability inclusion initiatives in 2024.
- The Nigeria Humanitarian Fund increased its allocation to local organisations from **36% in 2022 to 58% (a total of US\$7.5 million) in 2024.**
- **9 Women-led organisations from Nigeria** participated in the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum in 2023.

Niger

- **6 women-led organisations** in Niger now hold seats in national forums addressing gender-based violence and food security.
- Secured **2 dedicated seats** for women-led local actors on the HCT in Niger.
- **2 women-led CSOs** in Niger secured **US\$100,000** each through the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.
- The Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group in Niger **recognised globally.**

Cameroon

- **60 local organisations in Cameroon** using NORCAP's self-assessment tool.
- **3 additional local NGOs** were given seats on the Humanitarian Country Team in Cameroon.
- **Localisation events in 2023 and 2024** raised awareness, visibility, and collaboration of local actors.

Chad

- Chad's localisation strategy aims for **25% of humanitarian funds** to go directly to local actors.
- Women-led organisations now account for **30% of participants** in coordination mechanisms in Chad.
- **7 women-led organisations in Chad** completed NORCAP's organisational assessment.
- **Unification of 9 local NGO platforms in Chad** into the National Coordination of Chadian NGOs (CONAT), a breakthrough for localisation.

Building a United Voice: Women-Led Organisations in Northeast Nigeria

When women are not given [access] to decision-making processes, it is our responsibility as women-led organisations to advocate and make demands

SARAH JACKSON, Executive Director
Against All Odds Foundation

RESULTS: Region's first civil society strategic plan and improved governance structures.

Developing a Localisation Strategy for Chad

Women-led organisations bring unique perspectives. Ensuring their full participation is not just a moral imperative; it's a strategic advantage

FIRMIN MBALA, NORCAP Localisation Specialist, Chad

RESULTS: Increased seats on the HCT for local organisations; access, for the first time, to international funding.

Fostering the Agency of Women in Humanitarian Response in Niger

Women have a lot of power. They are not only victims of conflict, they have local solutions; we must listen to [them]

ABDOU IDI HAOUA, Executive Director
Jeunesse Africaine et Actions de Développement

RESULTS: Increased access to funding representation of women-led organisations on governance bodies.

Promoting Women's Leadership in Peacebuilding Processes in Cameroon

Before NORCAP's support, we had no internally-developed policy documents. We are now equipped to contribute meaningfully to DDR processes

FANNE YAYA, Coordinator, ADECOPA-CAM

RESULTS: Increased organisational capacity and contribution to peacebuilding.

Strengthening Local Humanitarian Leadership in Cameroon

NORCAP's support made us a champion organisation

MARTHE WANDOU, Founder ALDEPA

RESULTS: Improved organizational governance, increased local representation on HCT, local organisations leading response efforts.

Raising the Voice of Civil Society at the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum

One of the most important turning points for civil society engagement in the Lake Chad Basin region was their participation in the Governors' Forum. It ensured that the voices of the population were heard

ABUBAKAR ABDULLAHI SULEIMAN,
Executive Director, CENSCOPE

RESULTS: Enabled participation and ensured voices of the population were heard.

A Seat at the Table: Transforming Humanitarian Leadership in Nigeria

Local actors have unparalleled knowledge of the communities they serve

CHRISTOPHER AGUTU, NORCAP
Localisation Specialist, Nigeria

RESULTS: Increased representation on the HCT; more funding to national actors.

Breaking Barriers and Enabling Local Organisations to Access International Funding

Local organisations are the first responders. They are there before the international community arrives

MANRE CHIRTAU, NORCAP Localisation Specialist, Chad

RESULTS: Increased capacity, funding, representation, voice, and agency, creating a ripple effect.



BEATE SIMARUD/NRC

Building a United Voice: Women-Led Organisations in Northeast Nigeria

In northeast Nigeria's BAY states – Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe – humanitarian crises resulting from conflict, climate change, and food insecurity have impacted over 8.4 million people. Women and girls bear a disproportionate share of the burden: 59 percent of those in need are female. Amid these challenges, the Borno Adamawa Yobe Network of Women-Led Civil Society Organisations (BAYNetWoC) has emerged as a powerful force for change, transforming how humanitarian assistance is delivered and coordinated in the region.

Unifying Women's Voices

When NORCAP localisation specialist Salamatu Kemokai, who was assigned to UN Women, arrived in the region, she found that although state-level networks of women-led organisations had been established, these organisations – critical to response efforts – lacked a unified voice in humanitarian coordination efforts.

While the local organisations were being coordinated at state-level, “the framework of humanitarian operations was across all three northeastern states,” said Salamatu. “Unless we aligned the women-led organisations with the humanitarian framework, then it would be much harder to give them a voice in any decision-making.” The result were consultations that led, in 2022, to the formation of the BAYNetWoC.

The network is indicative of NORCAP's approach to strengthening localisation – regional coordination mechanisms led by local and national actors – but it has cultural significance too. As Sarah Jackson, Treasurer of the BAYNetWoC and Executive Director of member organisation Against All Odds Foundation, explains: “In this part of the country, because of culture and tradition, women are not [typically] allowed to be part of the decision-making process – even for decisions that have to do with their own peace and security. When women are not given the opportunity to add their voices to any decision-making process, it is our responsibility as women-led organisations to advocate and make demands.”

“When women are not given the opportunity to add their voices to any decision-making process, it is our responsibility as women-led organisations to advocate and make demands.”

SARAH JACKSON, Executive Director, Against All Odds Foundation

Breaking New Ground

The network was quick to have an impact, securing two dedicated seats for women-led local actors on the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), the highest coordination body in the country.² Through sustained advocacy, civil society representation on the HCT expanded from one seat at the start of NORCAP’s localisation programme to four at the time of writing (January 2025), opening doors for organisations representing other marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities. The network also managed to secure representation on the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund Advisory Board – critical to ensuring project proposals reflect community priorities and fund local organisations.³

And this enhanced representation has already yielded concrete results. In 2024, the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund created special funding envelopes for women-led organisations, including US\$2.3 million for disability inclusion initiatives. Most significantly, local organisations were directly funded by 58 percent of the total US\$13 million funding portfolio – a milestone achievement and one that demonstrates the growing recognition of local actors’ critical role in humanitarian response.⁴

Cultural Understanding Driving Impact

The BAYNetWoC’s effectiveness stems partly from its members’ deep understanding of local contexts. “There are some cultural barriers in the north that do not allow men to enter specific places,” Jackson notes. “But if it is a woman, she can enter freely, provide services, and speak with the women in that particular household. Because of these cultural barriers, it is very important that women come together, look at our context, and bring better approaches.”

The network demonstrated its operational capabilities during the September 2024 floods in Borno State, coordinating nutrition support for 22,000 crisis-affected people. This response showcased both their capacity as first responders, particularly in reaching vulnerable populations, but also the network’s ability to coordinate its members and bring coherence to response activities.

Building Sustainable Capacity

NORCAP specialists have played a critical role in strengthening the BAYNetWoC’s institutional capacity. The network developed the region’s first civil society strategic plan and established a comprehensive constitution governing its 138 member organisations. Their innovative mentorship programme pairs established organisations with those that are emerging, creating sustainable knowledge transfer within the network.

“Through the BAYNetWoC platform, we’ve accessed capacity building in leadership, early warning response, GBV [gender-based violence] response, and organisational development,” Jackson explains. “The network has also facilitated international engagement: in 2023, nine members participated in the Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum in Chad” – participation that was funded by NORCAP – “where women could voice their communities’ challenges.”⁵

Looking to the Future

The network is expanding its focus to include domestic resource mobilisation and strengthened partnerships with state governments. “We see the possibility of women having the opportunity to access more funding to impact their communities,” Jackson says. “We have a four-year strategic plan until 2026, and we hope to secure funding to implement the interventions we’ve outlined.”

The network exemplifies the transformative potential of coordinated local action in humanitarian response. As NORCAP’s Senior Gender and Capacity-Building Specialist in Nigeria – assigned to UN Women – Agnes Koome notes, “When women are empowered, they can provide leadership and effectively coordinate an emergency response.” Through their determination and collective action, women-led organisations in the BAY states are not just responding to crises – they are reshaping the future of humanitarian response in northeast Nigeria, setting a powerful example for similar initiatives globally.

² Humanitarian Country Team members are typically comprised of the national government and international actors.

³ The Nigerian Humanitarian Fund Advisory Board reviews funding proposals submitted to the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund – often the largest funding body in any response. Typically comprised of international actors, giving seats to local organisations ensures local voices are heard during critical funding decisions.

⁴ This is an increase from 54 percent of funds going directly to local organisations in 2023, and 36 percent in 2022.

⁵ The Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum is the most important political and platform, one that is pivotal in uniting regional stakeholders and visionaries to confront the intersecting challenges of humanitarian development and peace crises in the region.

Recommendations

Expand Capacity Strengthening Through BAYNetWoC's

Mentorship Model BAYNetWoC's innovative mentorship programme, pairing well-established organisations with emerging ones, has proven effective in building long-term capacity. Expanding this model to include more structured, multi-year mentorship plans could further strengthen less-experienced organisations.

Increase Representation of Women-Led Organisations

in Decision-Making Platforms BAYNetWoC's success in securing dedicated seats for women-led organisations on the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund Advisory Board is a milestone. Future efforts should focus on scaling this representation, ensuring that women-led organisations hold leadership roles in clusters and working groups. Training programmes specifically for women leaders within BAYNetWoC could equip them to influence humanitarian response decision more effectively.

Foster Domestic Resource Mobilisation and Local

Partnerships Sustainable funding is essential for BAYNetWoC's long-term impact. Building on the network's engagement with state governments, efforts should prioritise formalising partnerships with domestic funding sources, including private sector actors and philanthropic initiatives. Communication and advocacy campaigns highlighting BAYNetWoC's achievements could also attract more local donors and ensure diversified funding streams that reduce reliance on international grants.

BEATE SIMARUD/NRC



SAMUEL JEGERDE/NRC

Fostering the Agency of Women in the Humanitarian Response in Niger

Ranked 189 out of 191 on the Human Development Index, Niger is facing a perfect storm of humanitarian challenges driven by political instability, the climate crisis, and armed conflict. Women and girls bear the brunt of these crises, with systemic gender inequality exacerbating their vulnerabilities. Yet, amid these challenges, women-led civil society organisations have emerged as powerful agents of change.

The Need for Inclusion

When NORCAP first started supporting local actors in Niger in 2017, the barriers to women's participation in humanitarian decision-making were formidable. Early marriage rates stood at over 75 percent, with deeply entrenched cultural norms limiting women's roles to the domestic sphere. "It's not easy for women here, due to the culture and the religion of this country," explains Janvier Ntalindwa, NORCAP localisation specialist assigned to OCHA Niger. "Women were often present at key discussions, but they were seated at the back, their voices unheard.

Against this backdrop, NORCAP recognised that fostering meaningful change required a dual approach: strengthening technical capacity while navigating cultural sensitivities. Trust was the foundation. "You need to listen with two ears," Janvier adds, "and be transparent in everything you do."

“Today, we are securing funding and contributing to national-level discussions.”

AISHA MOUNKAILA, President of the women-led CSO network in the southeast Nigerien region of Diffa

Building Capacity and Trust

NORCAP's multi-faceted strategy for localisation began with a focus on nine women-led civil society organisations (CSOs). The initiative involved intensive coaching on project design, proposal writing, leadership development, and integration into humanitarian coordination mechanisms. This was coupled with training on resource mobilisation and the creation of governance structures tailored to meet the standards of international donors.

“We don’t just train; we build systems,” said Jean Paul Dargal, NORCAP Senior Gender and Capacity Building Specialist working with UN Women in Niger. The cornerstone of this process was establishing networks for women-led CSOs in the country, allowing them to coordinate their efforts and amplify their collective voice.

Aisha Mounkaila, President of the women-led CSO network in the southeast Nigerien region of Diffa, recalled how transformative the process was: “We started with just the basics of what a project proposal should look like. Today, we are securing funding and contributing to national-level discussions.”

Securing Representation and Resources

The impact of these efforts has been profound. For the first time, women-led CSOs in Niger are actively shaping humanitarian response. Six of these organisations now hold seats in key national fora that address gender-based violence and food security, and women’s perspectives are increasingly reflected in national humanitarian strategies.

Funding access has also improved dramatically. Two women-led CSOs secured grants of \$100,000 each through the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, enabling them to implement initiatives addressing gender-specific needs in conflict-affected areas in Niger. This success in attracting funding underscores the importance of capacity strengthening: both organisations had previously been excluded from donor funding due to a lack of formal structures and documentation.

Women as Mediators in Times of Crisis

Women-led CSOs have also proven indispensable in crisis mediation. During a particularly volatile period, in 2020, of Boko Haram incursions, it was women-led organisations that stepped in where others could not. “The women knew the combatants – they were their sons, their husbands, their cousins,” explains Jean Paul. “They went to the frontlines and said, ‘Stop fighting.’” Their interventions were instrumental in de-escalating tensions and facilitating dialogue with crisis-affected communities.

Systemic Changes in Niger

A cornerstone of the sustainability of NORCAP specialists’ work in the country is the formation of a Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group. Under NORCAP expert guidance, the group is recognised as a model of inclusivity and effectiveness, regularly bringing together diverse stakeholders to address critical, gender-related issues. “Our GiHA working group was one of the best in terms of good practices, in terms of the periodicity of our meetings, and in terms of achievements,” notes Jean Paul, who had the honour of showcasing the working group’s success among the international community in Geneva.

Its impact extends beyond national borders, with the Nigerien GiHA Working Group establishing connections with similar working groups at the regional offices in Dakar and global headquarters in Geneva. This has created opportunities for knowledge sharing and has positioned Niger as a model for other countries. Through sustained advocacy, three regional women’s coordination groups have been established across Niger, expanding the group’s influence across the country.

Challenges Ahead

Despite significant progress, substantial challenges remain. The current military government’s priorities do not always align with gender equality objectives, given that the Nigerien Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection was dissolved on August 9, 2023, following the July coup d’état. Competition between CSOs can sometimes hinder collaboration, and security restrictions limit access to remote areas where support is needed most.

However, through persistent advocacy, women’s representation in governance bodies has increased, including in national commissions and ministerial appointments. “Through advocacy, we were able to increase the number of women – which now stands at 20 percent – taking part in governing bodies,” Jean Paul notes, highlighting how, even in challenging circumstances, progress continues.



MIKA ISSA/NORCAP

A Model for Inclusion

The foundation laid through the work of NORCAP specialists in the country provides a solid basis for continued progress. The experience in Niger demonstrates that localisation is not just the transferring of responsibilities to local actors, but requires the strengthening of enduring capacities and fostering genuine inclusion. As Abdou Idi Haoua, the Executive Director of the women-led organisation, Jeunesse Africaine et Actions de Développement, noted: “Women have a lot of power. They are not only victims of conflict, they have local solutions, they are close to local authorities, and we must listen to their proposals for ending the crisis.”

The experience of NORCAP in Niger offers valuable lessons for similar efforts globally, particularly in regions where cultural and institutional barriers have traditionally limited women’s participation in humanitarian action. Critical to the success in Niger has been maintaining a long-term perspective while remaining sensitive to local contexts and building genuine partnerships with local organisations.

Looking ahead, NORCAP plans to expand its support to more women-led organisations, further institutionalising their roles within Niger’s humanitarian response. As Niger continues to navigate multiple crises, the increased capacity and representation of women-led organisations stands as a crucial achievement in ensuring a more effective humanitarian response – and is a blueprint for how to ensure no voice is left behind.

Recommendations

Enhance Coordination Among Women-Led Organisations

Building on the success of the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group, efforts should focus on further strengthening coordination among women-led organisations at the national and subnational levels. Expanding the group’s scope and fostering partnerships between established and emerging organisations can amplify their collective impact. This includes creating opportunities for regular knowledge-sharing sessions to sustain and institutionalise best practices.

Increase Direct Funding for Women-Led Initiatives

While some women-led organisations have successfully secured international funding, more can be done to ensure equitable access to financial resources. Donors should be encouraged to create dedicated funding streams specifically for women-led CSOs in Niger, with simplified application processes and capacity-building components to prepare smaller organisations for managing grants.

Support Long-Term Advocacy Efforts for Gender Inclusion

With the dissolution of the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment, there is an urgent need to ensure that gender considerations remain central to humanitarian and development strategies. NORCAP and its partners should continue to advocate for women’s representation in governance bodies, leveraging the success of past efforts.



INGRID PRESTETUN/NRC

Strengthening Local Humanitarian Leadership in Cameroon

In Cameroon, which faces a complex blend of humanitarian crises, an innovative approach to strengthening local organisational capacity is reshaping how aid is delivered. With 3.4 million people in need of assistance due to conflicts in the Far North, Northwest, and Southwest regions, coupled with climate-related disasters and disease outbreaks, the necessity of robust local responses has never been more urgent. Yet, for years, local organisations struggled to secure international funding, hampered by a humanitarian system oriented to funding large international actors, and a lack of institutional capacity and formal structures among local Cameroonian organisations. NORCAP's localisation programme has been pivotal in transforming this landscape.

Breaking Down Barriers to a More Local Response

Cameroon's humanitarian needs are diverse and vast. Nearly a million people are internally displaced, and almost half a million refugees from neighbouring countries seek safety within its borders. In addition to armed conflicts, climate-related challenges such as floods and droughts exacerbate the situation, as do persistent cholera outbreaks. Despite this, Cameroon has received limited international humanitarian attention, leaving local actors to bear the brunt of the response.

When they began supporting localisation efforts in Cameroon in 2023, NORCAP specialists encountered a fragmented and under-resourced local response landscape. As NORCAP localisation specialist assigned to the Office of the Resident Coordinator, Bintou Sylla recalls: "Most local organisations did not understand their important role in the humanitarian landscape, alongside authorities and international actors." Many had strong operational capabilities but struggled with financial management, protection policies, and formal governance structures. This created a vicious cycle: local organisations could not access funding due to insufficient capacity, and they lacked the resources to build that capacity.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP IN CAMEROON



“Most local organisations did not understand their important role in the humanitarian landscape, alongside authorities and international actors.”

BINTOU SYLLA, NORCAP Localisation Specialist, Cameroon

A Systematic Approach

Recognising the need for sustainable, systemic change, NORCAP launched a comprehensive organisational strengthening programme. This began with a detailed assessment of 60 local actors using NORCAP's organisational capacity self-assessment tool. The tool uses prompts and guidance to assess various aspects of organisational readiness, including governance, financial management, programme execution, and protection frameworks.

The results provided a roadmap for tailored capacity-strengthening initiatives. “It wasn't just about identifying gaps, but providing the tools and mentorship needed to address them,” Bintou explains. Organisations received support to develop governance documents, such as administrative and financial procedure manuals, anti-fraud policies, and accountability tools. Training in financial management systems and donor compliance requirements ensured these organisations could manage funding transparently and efficiently.

Strengthening Capacity for Self-Reliance

The process also focused on creating robust systems for accountability and protection. Feedback mechanisms and clear protocols for handling sensitive cases were established, ensuring organisations could maintain high standards of accountability to affected populations.

“The training changed everything,” said Tchana Gildas Delmas, Vice-President of local organisation, Action Pour le Respect des Droits de l'Homme et la Dignité Humaine (ARDHU). “We developed critical governance documents and accountability systems that are now the backbone of our operations.”

Being Funded Directly

For many of these organisations, the transformation was not merely structural but also financial. ARDHU, one of the programme's standout successes, secured funding from international donors, including UNICEF, enabling it to expand its operations significantly. Moving from a single-room office to a four-room facility with meeting and training spaces, ARDHU became a model of growth and impact.

Action Locale pour un Développement Participatif et Autogéré (ALDEPA), another participant, leveraged its strengthened capacity to act as a mentor to other organisations. “NORCAP's support made us a champion organisation,” says Marthe Wandou, ALDEPA's founder. “We are now helping others build their capacity” – multiplying the impact of the capacity support.

These advancements have had a tangible impact on the ground. During the October 2024 floods in the Far North Region, strengthened local organisations demonstrated their enhanced ability to respond swiftly and effectively, filling critical gaps left by international actors.

Driving Systemic Change

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when international organisations faced access constraints, local actors stepped up, providing critical assistance thanks to their enhanced access and community knowledge. This demonstrated the inherent value of local leadership through improved response times and more nuanced interventions. These strengths are being further amplified through NORCAP's programme, creating ripple effects that extend beyond individual organisations.

“NORCAP's localisation expertise is changing the dynamic,” localisation specialist Bintou Sylla reflects. “Local organisations are now leading response efforts in their communities, proving that they are not just participants but leaders in humanitarian action.”



Overcoming Challenges

While the programme has achieved significant successes, challenges remain. Competition among local organisations sometimes hinders collaboration, and cultural norms can limit the inclusion of women-led groups in decision-making spaces. Additionally, sustained funding for organisational development remains a pressing need, even as local NGO networks are strengthened and their participation in humanitarian coordination is expanded.

Despite these hurdles, NORCAP's approach has demonstrated the transformative power of targeted support. The addition of three more local NGOs to the Humanitarian Country Team – ALDEPA, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Foundation (LUKMEF-Cameroon), and Help Children – as a direct result of NORCAP advocacy and support marks significant progress in local leadership. This has been complemented by strengthened local NGO networks, which has included capacity assessments and development plans. Through localisation days that raise awareness and visibility of local actors, and by fostering collaboration among local responders, the approach ensures that progress is both maintained and amplified.

A Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, NORCAP's work in Cameroon is set to expand, with a focus on creating mentorship networks and platforms for knowledge sharing among local organisations. The ultimate goal is to build a sustainable ecosystem of local humanitarian actors capable of assuming leadership roles in coordination mechanisms and beyond. "The success in Cameroon shows what's possible when local organisations are given the tools and support they need," Bintou concludes. "It's not just about responding to crises – it's about transforming how we approach humanitarian action together."

Recommendations

Institutionalise Capacity-Strengthening Programmes for

Long-Term Impact Building on the success of local capacity-strengthening initiatives, future efforts should focus on institutionalising these programmes within local governance frameworks. By creating a standardised and scalable capacity-strengthening model, local organisations can be supported more systematically, ensuring sustainable improvements in governance, financial management, and programme execution.

Strengthen Mentorship Networks Among Local

Organisations The mentorship model, exemplified by organisations like ALDEPA, has proven effective in multiplying the impact of capacity support. Expanding these mentorship networks to include more women-led and emerging organisations could foster a culture of collaboration and mutual learning.

Promote Equitable Representation in Decision-Making

Platforms Despite progress, cultural norms and systemic barriers still limit the participation of women-led organisations in key decision-making spaces. Advocacy efforts should prioritise increasing the representation of women-led groups in local and national coordination mechanisms, such as clusters and working groups.



BEATE SIMARUD/NRC

A Seat at the Table: Transforming Humanitarian Leadership in Nigeria

In the evolving landscape of humanitarian response, the inclusion of local organisations in decision-making processes represents a critical shift in local actor inclusion in the architecture of response coordination, and increased response effectiveness. This transformation is especially evident in Nigeria, where NORCAP's localisation initiatives have enabled local actors to assume significant roles in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)⁶ – the highest-level coordination forum for humanitarian response – and increased representation on the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund Advisory Board.⁷

A History of Exclusion

When Christopher Agutu, NORCAP localisation specialist assigned to OCHA Nigeria, arrived in the country, he encountered a glaring gap. “The HCT was largely composed of donors, UN agency heads, and international organisations,” Christopher explains. “Local organisations, despite their crucial role in implementation, were absent.” At that time, there was only one local representative on the HCT – a position secured just months earlier as a result of commitments to localisation made during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.

This exclusion wasn't just symbolic. It reflected systemic barriers that prevented local organisations from influencing decisions about funding, strategy, and programme implementation. Many local groups were confined to implementing roles, with little say in broader humanitarian policies.

⁶ Humanitarian Country Team members are typically comprised of the national government and international actors.

⁷ The Nigerian Humanitarian Fund Advisory Board reviews funding proposals submitted to the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund – often the largest funding body in any response. Typically comprised of international actors, giving seats to local organisations ensures local voices are heard during critical funding decisions.

Advocating for More Inclusive Representation

Recognising the need for diverse voices, NORCAP's localisation approach in Nigeria sought to create a framework for more inclusive representation. This involved seeking to include organisations led by women, youth, and persons with disabilities, as well as those representing the country's geographically diverse regions, in the most influential humanitarian coordination mechanisms in the country.

In December 2023, a carefully designed election process brought four new local representatives to the HCT – two women and two men – each reflecting different sectors and regions. “This was a milestone,” Christopher recalls. “For the first time, we had representation that mirrored the diversity of Nigeria's humanitarian landscape.”

From Presence to Participation

However, securing seats at the table was just the beginning. Christopher recognised that meaningful participation required equipping these representatives with the skills and confidence to navigate the complexities of humanitarian coordination: Participation without a voice is meaningless.”

Through intensive coaching and mentorship, NORCAP supported the new HCT members in building their capacity to articulate community needs, advocate for funding, and influence policy decisions. Training sessions focused on strategic communications and negotiation and provided a technical understanding of the humanitarian system.

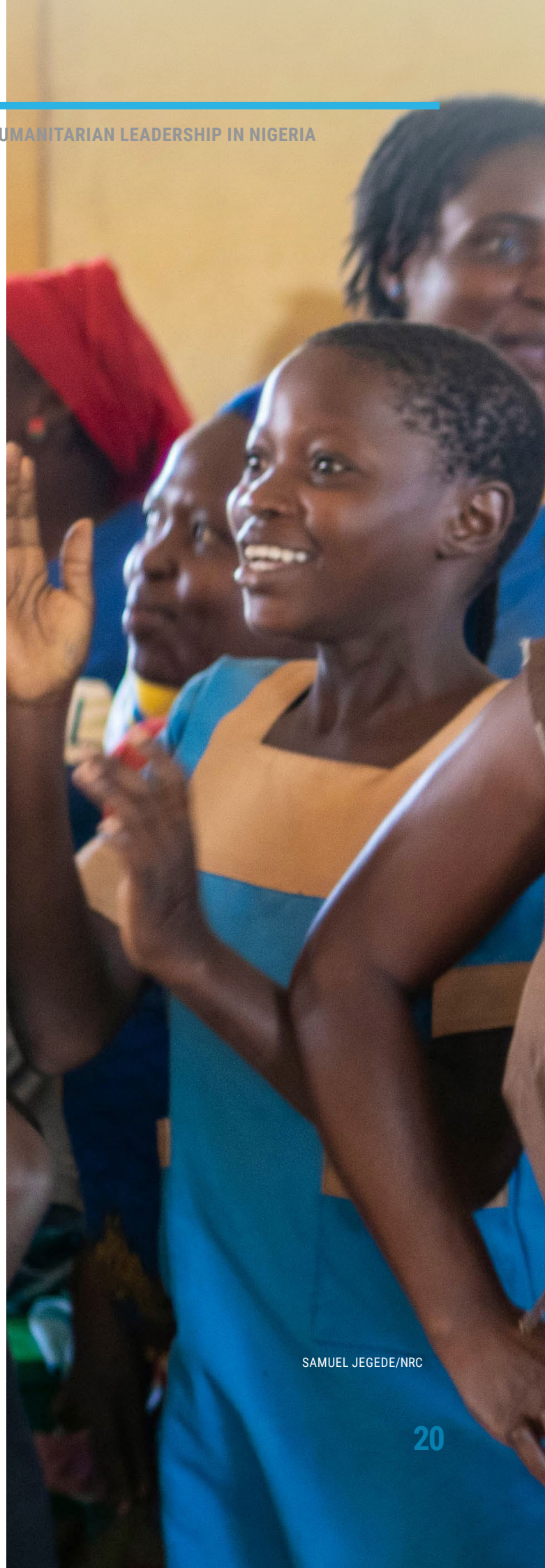
Tangible Impacts on Humanitarian Outcomes

The increased representation of local organisations on the HCT has led to tangible outcomes. One of the most notable achievements was in funding allocations. The Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF) directed 58 percent of its latest portfolio⁸ – approximately US\$7.5 million – to local organisations. This included dedicated funding envelopes for women-led organisations and disability inclusion initiatives.

This shift in funding priorities reflects a deeper understanding of the unique capabilities of local organisations. “Local actors have unparalleled knowledge of the communities they serve,” Christopher explains. “They understand the languages, cultures, and security dynamics in ways that international organisations often cannot.”

This knowledge proved critical during a cholera outbreak in Borno State in October 2024 when local organisations mobilised quickly to deliver life-saving interventions, often reaching areas inaccessible to international agencies.

8 This is an increase from 54 percent of funds going directly to local organisations in 2023, and 36 percent in 2022.





POCO_BW/ADOBE STOCK

“For the first time, we had representation that mirrored the diversity of Nigeria’s humanitarian landscape”

CHRISTOPHER AGUTU, NORCAP Localisation Specialist, Nigeria

Challenges and Lessons Learned

While progress has been made, challenges persist. Local organisations continue to face hurdles in accessing sustainable funding and navigating the bureaucratic complexities of international donor systems. Additionally, entrenched power dynamics within humanitarian coordination structures can limit the influence of local voices. Christopher notes that addressing these challenges requires ongoing advocacy and capacity strengthening. “We’ve made strides, but the journey isn’t over.”

Scaling Success

Building on these successes, NORCAP’s focus in Nigeria is now on institutionalising these changes. Plans include establishing mentorship programmes to support emerging local leaders and creating a national localisation strategy to guide future efforts. The ultimate goal is to ensure that local organisations are not only part of the humanitarian system but are recognised as its leaders.

Recommendations

Strengthen Mentorship and Capacity-Strengthening

Programmes for HCT Representatives The inclusion of local representatives on Nigeria’s Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) has been a milestone, but ensuring their meaningful participation requires continuous capacity strengthening. Establishing structured mentorship programmes, where experienced representatives mentor new members, can enhance their ability to articulate community needs and influence policy decisions.

Increase Dedicated Funding for Women-Led and

Marginalised Groups While the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF) has made strides by allocating 58 percent of its portfolio to local organisations, efforts must ensure equitable access for women-led and disability-focused groups. Expanding dedicated funding envelopes for these organisations and simplifying grant application processes can enable more local actors to participate.

Institutionalise Local Representation in Coordination

Mechanisms To ensure the sustainability of current achievements, local representation in the HCT and other coordination platforms must be institutionalised through formal policies. Advocacy should focus on embedding quotas for local actors, particularly from underrepresented regions and groups, within the governance frameworks of coordination mechanisms.



ALISON BOTTOMLEY/NRC

Developing a Localisation Strategy for Chad

In Chad, where humanitarian challenges are vast and complex, local actors have long played a critical role in responding to crises. Yet, for years, their contributions were constrained by systemic barriers – limited access to decision-making platforms, funding restrictions, and capacity gaps. This is changing thanks, in part, to the concerted efforts of NORCAP localisation specialists and the collaborative development of Chad's localisation strategy.

Why Localisation Matters

Chad sits at the epicentre of multiple crises. From the conflict in neighbouring Sudan to climate change shrinking Lake Chad by 90 per cent since 1960, the pressures on Chad's population are immense. Local NGOs are the first responders in Chad's crises, not least because they are often already embedded in crisis-affected communities. Yet, their ability to lead and shape humanitarian responses has been historically limited.

Localisation, defined by NORCAP as the process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the capacity of and leadership by national and local actors, aims to shift the balance of humanitarian response toward local actors, empowering them with resources, decision-making authority, and leadership opportunities. Chad's localization strategy seeks to make this vision a reality, ensuring that humanitarian action becomes, "as local as possible [and] as international as necessary."⁹

⁹ As stated by the World Humanitarian Summit's Grand Bargain in 2016: <https://www.unocha.org/localization>



POCO.BW/ADOBE STOCK

The Development of Chad's Localisation Strategy

The process of crafting Chad's localisation strategy began in earnest in early 2024, following recommendations at the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group retreat in late 2023. An ad hoc working group, led by NORCAP's Firmin Mbala, Localisation and Organisation Development Advisor at OCHA, was tasked with developing the strategy. This group brought together local organisations, international NGOs and UN agencies to ensure broad ownership and alignment with global localisation goals.

"The aim was not just to create a document but to build a roadmap that reflected the realities of Chad's humanitarian context," Firmin explains. The strategy focuses on four pillars: partnerships, coordination, funding, and capacity strengthening. Each pillar addresses specific barriers faced by local actors and provides actionable steps to overcome them.

Representation and Participation

A significant milestone in Chad's localisation journey was the unification of nine existing and often overlapping local NGO platforms into the National Coordination of Chadian NGOs (CONAT). This coalition became a critical player in advancing the localisation agenda, now holding three seats on Chad's Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), the country's highest coordination body, giving local actors a voice in humanitarian decision-making.

While securing these seats was a breakthrough, Firmin emphasises that representation alone is not enough. "Local representatives need the tools, knowledge, and confidence to participate meaningfully," he says. To address this, NORCAP organised training sessions for CONAT members focusing on humanitarian principles, advocacy, and the technical aspects of coordination mechanisms.

Direct Support for Local Actors

One of the most transformative aspects of the localisation strategy is its emphasis on increasing direct funding for local organisations. The goal is to allocate 25 percent of humanitarian funds directly to local actors, in line with Grand Bargain targets. However, as Firmin notes, many local organisations currently lack the capacity to manage large grants effectively. "Capacity strengthening is crucial. Without it, increased funding could lead to inefficiencies or even harm."

To bridge this gap, the localisation strategy is accompanied by a NORCAP-specialist-led capacity-strengthening programme. Tools have been introduced to help organisations identify areas for growth and develop tailored improvement plans. And these efforts are already bearing fruit: one women-led organisation, following training and mentorship, secured its first international grant to implement a project supporting survivors of gender-based violence.

Gender-Inclusive Localisation

Another key focus of the strategy is increasing the participation of women-led organisations. Currently, women-led groups account for 30 per cent of participants in coordination mechanisms – a significant improvement but still short of parity. The strategy includes specific measures to support these organisations, such as mentorship programmes and dedicated funding envelopes.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The localisation process in Chad has not been without challenges. Cultural norms and entrenched power dynamics continue to hinder the inclusion of local actors, particularly women. Additionally, the lack of a national pooled fund limits direct funding opportunities for local organisations.

Despite these hurdles, the strategy has fostered significant progress. The establishment of CONAT as a unified platform, the activation of the localisation working group, and the adoption of a clear roadmap for localisation are all testaments to the collective commitment of humanitarian actors in Chad. Firmin is optimistic about the future. “Localisation is a long-term process, but the foundation we’ve built in Chad is strong. With sustained investment and collaboration, we can create a humanitarian system that is not only more efficient but also more just.”

Recommendations

Expand Capacity-Strengthening Initiatives for Local

Organisations Building on work already done, localisation efforts in Chad should prioritise multi-year capacity-strengthening programmes. These initiatives should focus on helping organisations develop robust governance structures, financial management systems, and technical expertise.

Enhance Representation of Local Actors in Decision-

Making Platforms The inclusion of CONAT members in Chad’s Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) represents a significant achievement, but further efforts are needed to increase local representation across coordination mechanisms. Advocacy should focus on expanding quotas for local actors, particularly women-led organisations, and ensuring that local representatives receive continued training and support to participate meaningfully in discussions and decision-making.

Develop a National Pooled Fund for Local Organisations

One of the main barriers to funding local organisations in Chad is the lack of a national funding mechanism. Establishing a pooled fund dedicated to local actors can streamline access to financial resources and reduce reliance on international intermediaries.



ALISON BOTTOMLEY/NRC

“Women-led organisations bring unique perspectives that enrich humanitarian responses,” says Firmin. “Ensuring their full participation is not just a moral imperative; it’s a strategic advantage.”

FIRMIN MBALA, NORCAP Localisation Specialist, Chad



Promoting Women's Leadership in Peacebuilding Processes in Cameroon

The ongoing effects of the Boko Haram insurgency in Cameroon have left thousands of individuals displaced, communities fractured, and former combatants in need of reintegration. Women, often caught in the crosshairs of such conflicts, face unique challenges, from trauma and displacement to stigmatisation. Recognising the pivotal role women can play in rebuilding their communities, NORCAP has supported UN Women's efforts to amplify the voices and leadership of women-led organisations in Cameroon's disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes.¹⁰ These efforts are fostering not only the reintegration of ex-combatants but also the restoration of communities profoundly affected by conflict.

The DDR Challenge in Cameroon

Cameroon hosts three DDR centres, which currently house nearly 3,000 fighters formerly associated with Boko Haram. The inclusion of local actors – particularly women-led organisations – in the operations of these centres is increasingly being recognised as essential to these efforts. These organisations bring vital perspectives to DDR processes, addressing the distinct needs of women and girls impacted by conflict whilst fostering community healing and resilience.

However, these organisations face significant barriers, including limited access to resources, capacity constraints, and cultural norms that often marginalise women in leadership roles. To address these challenges, NORCAP has implemented a programme to strengthen women-led organisations and ensure their meaningful participation in both DDR programmes and wider humanitarian response initiatives.

¹⁰ Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) is a process through which members of armed forces and groups are supported to lay down their weapons and transition to civilian life.

"[NORCAP's] assessment shed light on [our] weaknesses and led to comprehensive improvements in our organisation's capabilities."

FANNE YAYA, Coordinator, ADECOPA-CAM

Building Capacity for Leadership

NORCAP's engagement with women-led organisations began with an organisational capacity assessment to identify gaps and develop targeted support. One organisation, the Association for Development and Community Participation in Cameroon (ADECOPA-CAM), exemplifies the impact of this approach. Located in Maroua, ADECOPA-CAM initially lacked the foundational policies and governance frameworks required to manage projects that required significant funds.

"Before NORCAP's support, we had no internally-developed policy documents," recalls Fanne Yaya, ADECOPA-CAM's coordinator. "Their assessment shed light on these weaknesses and led to comprehensive improvements in our organisation's capabilities." Through NORCAP's capacity-building programme, ADECOPA-CAM developed essential policies, including a code of conduct and a gender policy, and gained expertise in governance, financial management, and advocacy.

This strengthened foundation has enabled ADECOPA-CAM to take on a leadership role in reintegration efforts, focusing on the unique needs of women and girls. As Yaya notes, "We are now equipped to contribute meaningfully to DDR processes, ensuring that women's voices are heard and their needs addressed."

Integrating Gender Perspectives

One of the hallmarks of NORCAP's approach is its emphasis on gender-responsive programming. Women-led organisations are uniquely positioned to address the gendered dimensions of DDR, from supporting female ex-combatants and allies to ex-combatants to providing psychosocial support for women and girls impacted by conflict. NORCAP has facilitated training sessions on mainstreaming gender in humanitarian response and strengthening advocacy, better equipping organisations to advocate for the inclusion of gender-specific considerations in DDR planning and implementation.

Daouda Serifou, NORCAP gender and localisation specialist working with UN Women in Cameroon, highlights the importance of this work: "The participation of women-led organisations in DDR processes is not just about equality – it's about effectiveness. Their contributions ensure that DDR initiatives are holistic and responsive to the needs of all community members."

Rebuilding Lives and Communities

The impact of NORCAP's support is already visible in the communities served by women-led organisations. In the Far North Region, women-led groups have developed initiatives to address the stigma faced by female ex-combatants and survivors of sexual violence. These programmes include vocational training, counselling, and community dialogues aimed at fostering reconciliation.

Through these efforts, ex-combatants, particularly women, are finding pathways to reintegration that not only restore their dignity but also contribute to community development. "Reintegration is not just about the individual – it's about the community," says Daouda. "When women-led organisations take the lead, they bring a level of empathy and understanding that is crucial for rebuilding trust."

Overcoming Challenges

While progress has been significant, challenges remain. Cultural norms and patriarchal structures continue to limit the influence of women-led organisations in some areas. Additionally, the lack of sustainable funding poses a barrier to scaling successful initiatives.

To address these challenges, NORCAP has advocated for increased investment in women-led organisations and the establishment of long-term partnerships. By building networks and facilitating mentorship opportunities, NORCAP is fostering collaboration among organisations, enabling them to pool resources and amplify their impact.

A Vision for the Future

As Cameroon moves towards the next phase of its DDR programme in 2025, the role of women-led organisations will be more critical than ever. NORCAP's work has laid the groundwork for their sustained participation, but continued support and investment are essential to ensure lasting success.

Looking ahead, NORCAP plans to expand its capacity-strengthening efforts, with a focus on developing leadership pipelines for women in local communities. These efforts aim to capitalise on progress already made, while creating a model for gender-inclusive DDR processes that can be replicated in other conflict-affected regions.

Recommendations

Expand Capacity-Strengthening Programmes for

Women-Led Organisations Building on the success of NORCAP's capacity-strengthening initiatives with organisations such as ADECOPA-CAM, future efforts should focus on multi-year programmes tailored to address specific challenges in governance, advocacy, and financial management. These programmes should also include targeted training in conflict resolution and psychosocial support, ensuring women-led organisations can effectively engage in all aspects of DDR planning and implementation.

Establish Sustainable Funding Mechanisms for Women-

Led DDR Initiatives A lack of long-term funding remains a significant barrier for women-led organisations. Creating dedicated funding streams for gender-responsive DDR initiatives can ensure that these organisations have the resources needed to sustain and expand their impact.

Strengthen Gender Advocacy within DDR Frameworks

The integration of gender-specific considerations into DDR processes is essential for holistic and effective outcomes. Future efforts should include the establishment of gender-focused advisory committees within DDR frameworks to provide ongoing input from women-led organisations.

RENATE WEFERSADOBE STOCK



MANRE CHIRTAU/NORCAP

Raising the Voice of Civil Society at the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum

The Lake Chad Basin region, spanning Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, is among the most fragile on earth. Lake Chad, the region's primary water source, is diminishing. Climate change is ushering in a perfect storm of decreased rainfall and increased extreme heat, escalating the lake's evaporation. Severe water scarcity, declining fish stocks, reduced agricultural productivity, and increased competition for limited water resources are fuelling conflict, resulting in mass displacement.

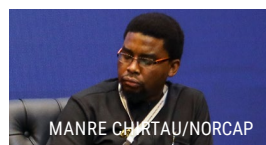
The Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum, established in 2016 by governors from areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, serves as the preeminent platform for dialogue and collaboration between regional leaders, donors, international organisations, and civil society groups. The forum aims to address the complex challenges of stabilisation, recovery, and resilience in the region and promote peacebuilding through coordinated cross-border efforts. It is the cornerstone of efforts to tackle the area's multifaceted crises.

The Essential Role of Local Organisations

Though the critical contribution of local organisations to humanitarian responses has long been recognised in the region, their involvement in regional coordination mechanisms has not always been a priority. Prior to 2023, participation in the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum had largely been limited to governors, donors, and UN agencies. Panels containing representatives from local organisations were both marginal and rare.

Yet local organisations are central to the region's humanitarian responses. Governance structures often struggle to reach remote borderland communities. As one stakeholder explained: "In the areas we're talking about... governance does not reach people here. Some people in these areas don't know what country they're part of."

Local organisations possess deep community connections, and their understanding of local dynamics enables them to operate effectively in areas largely inaccessible to international humanitarian actors. In the borderland regions, where national identities blur and tribal affiliations take precedence, local organisations serve as crucial bridges between communities and broader governance structures. Their ability to work holistically, transcending traditional humanitarian-development divides, has proven especially valuable in addressing the complex, interconnected challenges facing the region.



“One of the most important turning points for civil society engagement in the Lake Chad Basin region was the participation in the Governors’ Forum. It ensured that the voices of the population were heard. It provides credibility, confidence, and accountability within the process.”

ABUBAKAR ABDULLAHI SULEIMAN, Executive Director, CENSCOPE

Transforming Participation at the Forum

Advocacy efforts spearheaded by NORCAP’s localisation specialists at the fourth Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum marked a turning point and ushered in a significant shift towards more inclusive participation. In N’Djamena, Chad, in July 2023, and with support of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and NORCAP, more than 40 CSO representatives from across the region were mobilised to join the forum. Their participation, rather than being merely symbolic, was substantive: civil society representatives served as panellists on more than half of the forum’s sessions, and, for the first time, the CSO declaration was presented at the opening ceremony, ensuring ground-level perspectives were heard across high-level discussions.

For Abubakar Abdullahi Suleiman, Executive Director of the Centre for Social Cohesion, Peace and Empowerment (CENSCOPE), this inclusion was a watershed moment: “One of the most important turning points for civil society engagement in the Lake Chad Basin region was the participation in the Governors’ Forum. It ensured that the voices of the population were heard. It provides credibility, confidence, and accountability within the process.”

Impact on Discussions and Outcomes

The success of CSO integration at the forum has created momentum for further change. At the fifth forum, delivered in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, in January 2025, local organisations have secured not just participation but influence in shaping the agenda. A dedicated session on CSO partnerships, in which their role in implementing the revised Regional Strategy for Stabilisation, Recovery, and Resilience was formalised, represented a significant evolution in how local expertise is valued at the regional level – and is a direct result of NORCAP localisation specialists in the region galvanising local actors and fostering engagement with key decision-makers, including the Lake Chad Basin Commission Executive Secretary, Ambassador Mamman Nuhu.

A Model for Regional Governance

Transforming the Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum into an inclusive platform that meaningfully engages local actors has created an important model for regional governance in fragile contexts. It demonstrates that effective localisation demands a fundamental shift in how regional bodies view and value local expertise. Rather than merely attending as observers, local organisations offer unique perspectives that directly inform regional strategy and decision-making.

NORCAP’s strategic placement of localisation specialists within key humanitarian agencies has been crucial in facilitating this transformation. Able to utilise agency capacity and resources, while being unconstrained by bureaucratic processes and internal politics, support for local actors has been rapidly galvanised. This represents more than just improved representation – it signals a fundamental shift in how regional challenges are understood and addressed. By bringing local knowledge and expertise to the forefront of regional decision-making, the forum is better equipped to develop effective, sustainable solutions to the complex challenges facing the Lake Chad Basin region.

Looking Forward

As the region prepares to implement the actions and recommendations of the fifth forum, the challenge now lies in ensuring progress thus far translates into improved outcomes for crisis-affected communities. This includes securing sustainable funding for local organisations and maintaining their meaningful participation in regional governance structures. The success of these efforts will be crucial to determining whether the Lake Chad Basin can effectively address its interconnected challenges going forward.



Recommendations

Regularise the Role of CSOs in Forum Planning, Participation and Implementation of the Regional Strategy

Future Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forums should integrate the participation of local organisations in forum structures. This could include creating a permanent CSO advisory council or establishing quotas for local representation in agenda-setting processes. Such measures would ensure that local actors continue to have meaningful influence over regional strategies and policies.

Provide Sustainable Funding Mechanisms for Local Organisations

To maintain and enhance the participation of local organisations, it is essential to establish dedicated funding streams that support both their engagement in the forum, and the implementation of resulting actions and recommendations. This could involve creating a regional localisation fund managed in collaboration with the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

Enhance Capacity Strengthening and Advocacy Training for CSOs

While the inclusion of local organisations in the forum is a significant milestone, local organisations will continue to require strengthened capacities to meaningfully participate in the regional response. Tailored training programmes should focus on advocacy, strategic communication, and technical understanding of regional governance frameworks. These initiatives will empower CSOs to articulate community needs more effectively and engage with high-level stakeholders on equal footing.



Breaking Barriers and Enabling Local Organisations to Access International Funding

Across the Lake Chad Basin region, local civil society organisations (CSOs) are indispensable in responding to humanitarian crises. Deeply embedded within their communities, these organisations understand local dynamics and needs in ways international actors cannot. Yet, historically, they have struggled to access direct international funding, often serving as subgrantees to larger international organisations. Through the efforts of NORCAP localisation specialists and others working to increase the funding of local actors in the region, this is gradually changing. With targeted capacity-strengthening initiatives and advocacy, local organisations are securing direct funding and transforming humanitarian response.

The Peacebuilding Fund

In September 2022, a groundbreaking development reshaped the funding landscape. The UN Peacebuilding Fund, managed by UNDP, launched a two-year, US\$3.5 million regional fund to directly support local CSOs across Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. Nearly half the budget – US\$1.825 million – was earmarked for direct CSO interventions, with an additional US\$250,000 allocated for local capacity strengthening.

“This was a significant shift,” explains Manre Chirtau, NORCAP localisation specialist with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in Chad, whose work with the fund was instrumental in ensuring its focus was local. “Local organisations are the first responders. They are there before the international community arrives, responding to crises without concern for whether they’re categorised as humanitarian or development actors.”

The Peacebuilding Fund sought to break traditional funding barriers, moving away from favouring a small pool of pre-selected organisations. “We wanted this to be open,” Manre emphasises. “We encouraged organisations to apply and collaborate, recognising that their collective strength surpasses their individual capacities.”

“Local organisations are the first responders. They are there before the international community arrives, responding to crises without concern for whether they’re categorised as humanitarian or development actors.”

MANRE CHIRTAU, NORCAP Localisation Specialist, Chad

Strengthening Local Capacities

While direct funding is a milestone, accessing and managing these funds requires robust organisational structures. Across the four countries, NORCAP specialists introduced tailored capacity-strengthening programmes to equip local organisations with the skills needed to meet donor requirements.

In Chad, Tiphaine Bolombo, NORCAP Senior Gender and Youth Advisor with OCHA, utilised NORCAP’s organisational capacity assessment tool to help seven women-led organisations address gaps in governance, financial management, and accountability systems. The uptake has been immediate. Of the twenty women-led organisations undertaking the assessment, seven have completed the assessment at the time of writing, including the Chadian local NGO Nirvana: “The discovery of this tool is a real opportunity for us, because it gives us the ability to better discover ourselves. It has enabled us to understand our strengths and weaknesses, and to work accordingly.”

In Niger, NORCAP’s Jean Paul Dargal, Senior Gender and Capacity Building Specialist at UN Women, enabled women-led organisations to secure significant grants. Two organisations successfully obtained US\$100,000 each through the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, demonstrating the transformative potential of tailored capacity strengthening. “We’re not just strengthening organizational capacity,” Jean Paul notes. “We’re empowering them to lead.”

Local Representation and Influence in Nigeria

Beyond funding, NORCAP’s work has ensured that local organisations gain representation in key decision-making forums. In Nigeria, for example, Christopher Agutu, NORCAP specialist and Localisation Advisor at OCHA, advocated for the inclusion of women-led and disability-focused organisations in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). “Representation is only meaningful if it comes with a voice,” Christopher explains. “Through training and mentoring, we ensured that these organisations could advocate effectively for their communities.”

This advocacy has yielded tangible outcomes. Increasing from 36 percent in 2022, the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund allocated 58 per cent of its US\$13 million portfolio in 2024 to local organisations, including dedicated envelopes for women-led

initiatives. These funds have enabled local actors to implement critical projects, from supporting survivors of gender-based violence to delivering life-saving interventions during health crises.

Supporting Women-Led Organisations in Cameroon

Across Cameroon’s humanitarian landscape, women-led organisations play an increasingly vital role, though their capacity varies significantly. While major cities host well-established civil society organisations, smaller community-based groups often struggle with fundamental challenges, as Daouda Serifou, NORCAP specialist and Senior Gender and Capacity Building Specialist at UN Women, explains: “When you look at smaller community-based groups, they face several weaknesses – lack of documentation, experience and managerial capacities.”

The Women, Peace and Security Fund has emerged as a crucial initiative to strengthen these organisations, particularly significant as Cameroon prepares to reintegrate 3,000 former Boko Haram fighters in 2025. As Fanne Yaya, coordinator of Action pour le Développement et la Cohabitation Pacifique au Cameroun (ADECOPA-CAM) in Maroua, notes: “Before NORCAP’s support, we had no internally-developed policy documents. Their assessment shed light on these weaknesses,” leading to comprehensive improvements in her organisation’s capabilities.

Collaboration in Action

The Peacebuilding Fund’s innovative model emphasises collaboration, encouraging CSOs to pool their resources and expertise. In Cameroon, NORCAP supported organisations in forming networks that amplified their collective impact. One organisation, Action Locale pour un Développement Participatif et Autogéré (ALDEPA), emerged as a mentor, helping smaller groups navigate donor requirements and build capacity. “It’s about creating a ripple effect,” says Marthe Wandou, ALDEPA’s founder. “When we strengthen one organisation, we strengthen the entire system.”

Early Impacts and Lessons Learned

The increase in direct funding to local organisations is already showing results. In Chad, women-led organisations mobilised to provide emergency assistance during October 2024 floods, using their newly acquired skills to manage funds effectively and coordinate responses. In Niger, funding from the Women's Humanitarian Fund has enabled local organisations to implement sustainable projects, including community-driven peacebuilding initiatives.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Regulatory environments in some countries complicate access to international funding, and competition among local organisations can hinder collaboration. Additionally, many organisations still struggle with long-term sustainability, relying on short-term grants that limit their growth. But by breaking down barriers and equipping local organisations to succeed, these initiatives are not only addressing immediate crises but also laying the groundwork for a more equitable and effective humanitarian system.

Recommendations

Strengthen Governance and Financial Systems

Encourage local CSOs to continuously enhance their internal governance and financial management systems. Tailored capacity-strengthening programmes can help ensure local organisations meet donor requirements and efficiently manage funds for long-term sustainability.

Promote Collaborative Networks Facilitate the creation and expansion of regional networks among CSOs to pool resources, share expertise, and collectively advocate for funding opportunities. This approach not only enhances individual capacities but also strengthens the entire ecosystem, creating a ripple effect of empowerment and sustainability.

Enhance Representation and Advocacy Advocate for the inclusion of local organisations, especially women-led and disability-focused groups, in decision-making platforms such as Humanitarian Country Teams. Provide ongoing mentoring and training to ensure these organisations have the skills to effectively represent their communities and influence policy at the highest level.



RICCARDO NIELS MAYER/ADOBE STOCK



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



**PART OF NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL**



**Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs**

The Lake Chad Localisation Programme is funded by the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (NMFA) and the European Union (ECHO). Views and opinions expressed herein are, however, those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect those of NMFA or ECHO. Neither NMFA, ECHO, nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.