![AFNS - Aid Fund for Northern Syria logo]

Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS)

Localisation Strategy

Date: 6th December 2023

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Introduction

Background

This Localisation Strategy was developed by the Share Trust together with the Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS) core team and the AFNS Localisation Working Group. It draws upon consultations in August 2023 with key stakeholders, including affected communities, local actors, international actors, regional experts, and donors.

The Strategy is part of the overall strategic framework of AFNS and is aligned with its existing strategies on Communication; Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI); and Accountability to Affected Population and Community Engagement (AAPCE). This will ensure that accountability, gender equality and inclusion are adequately considered in the Localisation Strategy, which is founded on community and local engagement, and will ensure that the new strategy is clearly communicated.

Purpose

Localisation of humanitarian assistance, as envisioned by the Grand Bargain[1], addresses the need for local and national actors to take a central role in delivering locally led responses. There is a growing evidence base demonstrating the critical role of local actors in delivering programming that is more effective, cost-efficient, flexible, and responsive to local priorities.

Critically, contextualised solutions are needed to transform the humanitarian system, considering local complexities, and challenging the over-simplified narrative and definitions of localisation. This localisation strategy is underpinned by an in-depth exploration of "localisation" in the context of northern Syria - considering the diversity of "local" actors and conceptualising "local" entities (organisations and institutions).

This Localisation Strategy provides a roadmap on how the AFNS can commit to, promote, and realise localisation and support locally led humanitarian assistance whilst working across the triple nexus.[2] It builds on learning and good practice and consultation with diverse stakeholders to identify critical enablers of change for driving progress and shifting power, funding, and processes to deliver a locally led, community centred AFNS.

Context

Twelve years since the Syrian conflict began, the humanitarian situation remains critical, compounded by new crises. In February 2023, a devastating earthquake hit northern Syria, killing over 4,500 people, destroying essential infrastructure, and intensifying the existing humanitarian crisis, rooted in years of military offensives, the COVID-19 pandemic, and global economic challenges. Today, approximately 4.55 million civilians reside in northwest Syria alone, including 2.87 million internally displaced people. Of these, in 2022, an estimated 4.05 million people (including 1 million women and 2 million children) were in need and reliant on monthly UN support received in cross-border assistance from Türkiye (OCHA, 2023).

Humanitarian efforts in the region are fragmented due to complex governance structures and access restrictions. The UN Security Council was unable to reach a consensus on cross-border access in July 2023, allowing the resolution to lapse. However, in August 2023, the Government of Syria (GoS) took the initiative to open the border crossing for six months. The future of cross-border operations remains uncertain after this period. This, coupled with the reluctance of UN agencies to enter Syria without government permission, is placing significant strain on operations in northern Syria; and undermining progress towards scaling support and long-term programming. It is this fast-changing and challenging context that is opening a gap for the AFNS to fill.

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[1] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/content/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc

[2] The triple nexus is the term used to capture the interlinkages between the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors. It specifically refers to attempts in these fields to work together to meet peoples' needs, mitigate risks and vulnerabilities, and move toward sustainable peace more effectively.

Pooled funds such as the AFNS have emerged as an important mechanism to channel funding directly to local actors. While their primary aim is to address critical humanitarian needs, localisation is a secondary, yet significant, objective. Pooled funds have the potential to reshape the humanitarian financing landscape, directing funds to frontline responders and enabling decision-making closer to humanitarian needs. They also provide an opportunity to link humanitarian assistance with early recovery and build resilience in the longer term. The AFNS was established in November 2022, in part to enable an interim solution until the UN has more clarity on what activities it can continue if the mandate from the UN cross-border resolution expires. As a result, the AFNS is complementary to the UN-OCHA Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) in ensuring a coordinated and harmonised approach for transparent, inclusive, effective, efficient, and accountable humanitarian response in northern Syria.

Yet local actors in Syria – and especially smaller, grassroots organisations, women's and youth organisations - face numerous barriers to accessing funds. For example, smaller entities often do not qualify to receive pooled funds nor have the systems in place to manage the complex application processes and high transaction costs. Similarly, the absence of multi-year funding, flexibility to cover overheads, equal partnerships, and investment in coalitions of local actors as local intermediaries further poses a challenge to localisation. As a result, there is a clear disparity in funding available to local actors when compared with INGOs. In 2019, it was estimated that Syrian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) delivered an estimated 75 percent of assistance, despite receiving only 0.2 to 0.9 percent of direct funding.[3]

To ensure the successful implementation this Localisation Strategy in northern Syria it is imperative to clarify the definition of the diverse range of "local actors" within the specific northern Syrian context. Only then can truly contextualised solutions be developed and applied. Further, it will be important to shift not only more funding to local actors, but also ensure better quality flexible funding. A locally led AFNS will also need to shift leadership and power through changes to decision making, governance, systems, and processes, enabled by building trust, partnerships, and capacity.

Definition and categorisation

Global definitions fail to capture the complexity of conceptualising "local" in northern Syria and the range and variety of local actors responding to the current crisis. Unlike most countries, a significant majority of local actors had to flee northern Syria to escape the conflict and have not been able to return. As a result, whereas many countries would define "local" based on a range of criteria including location (based in the community they are serving), in northern Syria, nationally founded organisations are frequently headquartered internationally, out of necessity. Part of the consultation undertaken for this framework included asking local and other humanitarian actors to define "local" for northern Syria.

The AFNS defines "local" to encompass a wide range of actors including individuals, grassroots associations, community-based organisations (CBOs), representative organisations (e.g., women's organisations, youth associations), non-governmental organisations (that are indigenous or locally founded), faith-based organisations, technical bodies/local directorates, academia, the private sector, the media, and local government structures[4] (not affiliated with the regime or insurgent groups but based in northern Syria).

While the Fund engages with all of these actors in the implementation of its Localisation Strategy, it primarily collaborates with three categories of partners to implement relief and recovery activities. These are:

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[3] Building Markets *"Enabling A Localised Response in Syria: An Assessment of Syrian Led Organisations"*, 2019.

[4] While the AFNs recognises that local quasi-governmental, administrative structures and technical directorates are key local actors delivering services in parts of northwest Syria, political and financial realities currently prevent AFNS from supporting them.

Category	Category name	Description	Key Criteria
1	Anchor Organisations	Pivotal, leading institutions **eligible for direct AFNS funding** that manage larger grants and oversee multi-year projects. Their operations are conducted in conjunction with a diverse array of civil society actors, prioritising smaller, grassroots, community-based organisations (Category 3), but also partnering with Category 2 entities (see below), especially for the implementation of specialised services (for example, Health) and several area-based approaches (ABAs)	Lower importance of localisation status (can include INGOs); organisation must be fully committed to support localisation efforts; preference to work directly with Cat 3 organisations if and where possible; able to provide or oversee capacity strengthening support *("future AFNS approach")*
2	Implementing Partners and Sub-Implementers	This group consists mainly of local, Syrian-led NGOs **eligible for direct AFNS funding** (*intermediate* target of AFNS localisation efforts). They are offering specialised support. Their implementation is either direct, in association with other INGOs, or indirectly through smaller grassroots entities. They can also be sub-implementers of (Category 1) Anchor Organisations	Preference for strong localisation status; demonstrated ability to mobilise and support Cat 3 organisations; preferably also works directly as direct implementer; able to provide or oversee capacity strengthening support *("current AFNS approach")*
3	Smaller, grassroot organisations	These are the *primary focus* of our Localisation Strategy and are prioritised for their alignment with our localisation objectives. They include an array of smaller, Community-based Organisations (CBOs), Women-led Organisations (WLOs), Youth Associations, etc. These partners have formal or informal structures and **do not have to meet eligibility criteria for direct AFNS funding**, as they will be funded through Category 1 and 2 partners	Mandatory 100% local ownership; operating directly in the proximity of affected populations; demonstrated *willingness to grow and learn*; strong capacities to implement ABAs; minority representation, women-led *("future AFNS priority")*

Each category plays a distinct role, with **Category 3 Partners being the main emphasis in our efforts to localise** relief and recovery activities in northern Syria.
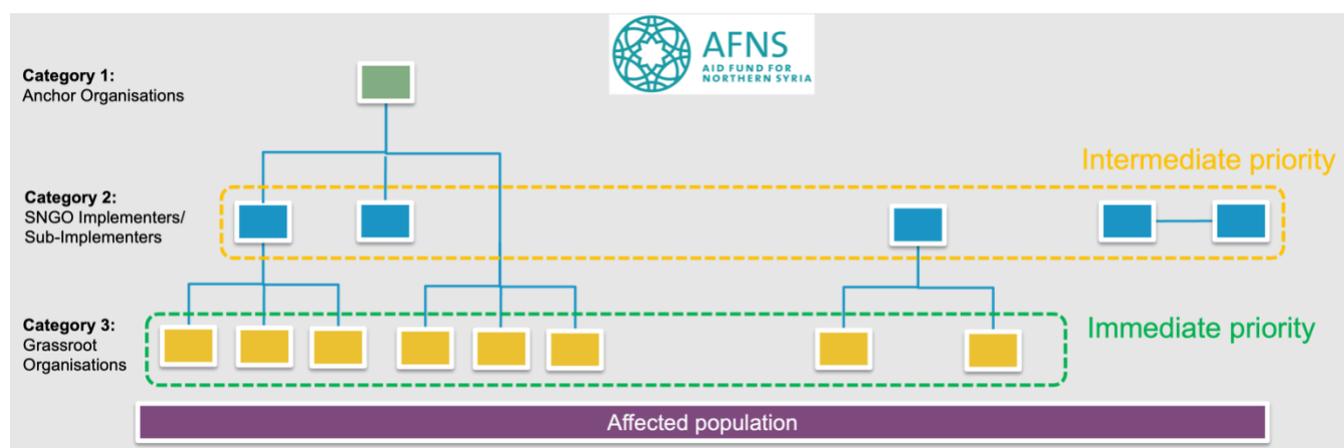
Capacity Strengthening Service Providers (CSSPs): AFNS implements the Localisation Strategy in cooperation and coordination with a **broad, diverse network of partners**, focusing on targeted capacity-building support for local actors. This encompasses offering technical assistance to map the local partner landscape, joint development of digital tools and educational programmes (face-to-face and online) as well as certification processes. Further, AFNS facilitates peer support, organises networking opportunities, and provides direct capacity enhancement initiatives. Examples:

- Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA)[5]
- Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL)[6]
- Red R UK[7]
- INGOs (funded through other programming, or via AFNS) who are interested to collaborate with local partners (funded by AFNS)

- Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GiZ)
- Academia, research entities, and think tanks
- Private sector specialised in a specific capacity building area
- Alliances, diaspora organisations

Rationale

Purpose

This strategy aims to shift power and funding to local actors in order that assistance in northern Syria is locally-led, people-centred, community driven, flexible, sustainable, collaborative, and inclusive.

Objectives

There are five strategic objectives (pillars) of the AFNS Localisation Strategy:

1. To secure equitable **partnerships** and strengthen **collaboration** between local actors;
2. To support knowledge **and capacity sharing** between actors;
3. To increase **flow of funding** to local actors;
4. To enhance the **quality of funding** for local actors; and
5. To secure locally led **decision making and leadership**.

Theory of Change

IF
- There are **equitable partnerships and strengthened collaboration** between local actors and INGOs/donors;
- There is **strengthened knowledge and capacity sharing** between actors;
- There is an **increased flow of funding** to local actors;
- The quality **of funding for local actors** is enhanced;
- Decision **making and governance** is locally led;

THEN there will be **shifts in power and funding** to local actors;

THEN assistance in northern Syria will be **locally led, community centred, demand driven, flexible, sustainable, coordinated, and inclusive;**
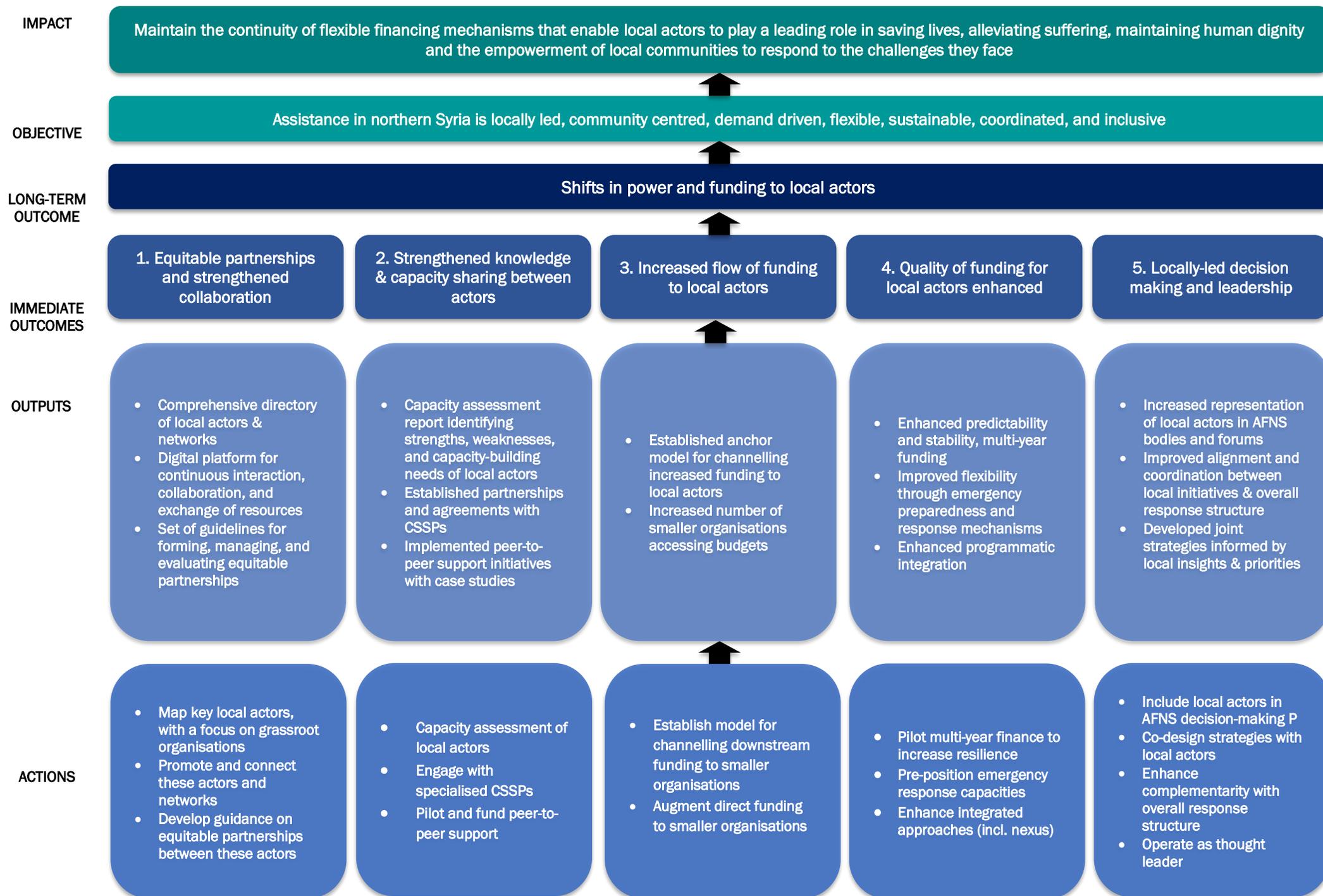
RESULTING in the most affected and marginalised people in northern Syria having a **powerful and sustainable mechanism for autonomous, community-led humanitarian response and resilience building.**

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[5] https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/

[6] https://centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/

[7] https://www.redr.org.uk/

Figure 1: Localisation of the AFNS – Theory of Change

IMPACT	Maintain the continuity of flexible financing mechanisms that enable local actors to play a leading role in saving lives, alleviating suffering, maintaining human dignity and the empowerment of local communities to respond to the challenges they face			
OBJECTIVE	Assistance in northern Syria is locally led, community centred, demand driven, flexible, sustainable, coordinated, and inclusive			
LONG-TERM OUTCOME	Shifts in power and funding to local actors			

IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES	1. Equitable partnerships and strengthened collaboration	2. Strengthened knowledge & capacity sharing between actors	3. Increased flow of funding to local actors	4. Quality of funding for local actors enhanced	5. Locally-led decision making and leadership
OUTPUTS	• Comprehensive directory of local actors & networks • Digital platform for continuous interaction, collaboration, and exchange of resources • Set of guidelines for forming, managing, and evaluating equitable partnerships	• Capacity assessment report identifying strengths, weaknesses, and capacity-building needs of local actors • Established partnerships and agreements with CSSPs • Implemented peer-to-peer support initiatives with case studies	• Established anchor model for channelling increased funding to local actors • Increased number of smaller organisations accessing budgets	• Enhanced predictability and stability, multi-year funding • Improved flexibility through emergency preparedness and response mechanisms • Enhanced programmatic integration	• Increased representation of local actors in AFNS bodies and forums • Improved alignment and coordination between local initiatives & overall response structure • Developed joint strategies informed by local insights & priorities
ACTIONS	• Map key local actors, with a focus on grassroot organisations • Promote and connect these actors and networks • Develop guidance on equitable partnerships between these actors	• Capacity assessment of local actors • Engage with specialised CSSPs • Pilot and fund peer-to-peer support	• Establish model for channelling downstream funding to smaller organisations • Augment direct funding to smaller organisations	• Pilot multi-year finance to increase resilience • Pre-position emergency response capacities • Enhance integrated approaches (incl. nexus)	• Include local actors in AFNS decision-making P • Co-design strategies with local actors • Enhance complementarity with overall response structure • Operate as thought leader

Approach

Outcome 1: Equitable partnerships and strengthened collaboration

The outcome strategy is designed to systematically identify, connect, and empower local actors and networks, with the aim of fostering more equitable and effective partnerships in humanitarian efforts.

Map local actors - The first priority focuses on creating a comprehensive and categorised directory of local actors, including larger and smaller NGOs, grassroots organisations, and other community-based entities. The aim is not just to identify these actors, but to understand their areas of expertise, geographic reach, the networks they are part of, and their ambitions and willingness to learn and grow. This process also involves an on-the-ground understanding of the political dynamics that these actors navigate. This is a foundational step, crucial for any subsequent action, as it provides a landscape analysis of local capabilities and structures in northern Syria.

Promote and connect these actors and networks - After identifying and understanding the local actors, the next priority is to facilitate their interaction and collaboration. This is achieved through the creation of a digital platform or forum and, based on need and requests, the organisation of regular networking events. The platform (hosted at the AFNS website) serves as a perpetual resource and communication channel, enabling both CSSPs and local actors to share information, opportunities, and best practices. The networking events will provide a more immediate and personal forum for idea exchange and partnership formation.

Develop guidance on equitable partnerships - The third priority aims to formalise the principles and practices that should govern these partnerships. This involves mobilising CSSPs and other organisations that can provide training and resources for equitable partnerships, through the digital platform and other means. It can further involve the formation of/support to (preferably, this will happen under a revitalised NWS NGO Forum) a "Community of Practice", able to support partners in different development areas and to co-create guidelines on what equitable partnerships should look like. These guidelines are then disseminated through training workshops with selected partners to ensure they are understood and adopted across the board.

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
1.1: Map local actors, including NGOs, with a focus on grassroot organisations, e.g., Community-based organisations (CBOs), WLOs, youth organisations, and local networks	1.1.1: Identify and mobilise qualified capacity strengthening service providers (CSSPs) and capacity strengthening opportunities that are available and interested (such as HLA, etc.). 1.1.2: Define categories and methodology (scorecard approach) and conduct a comprehensive survey to identify and document local actors, their areas of expertise, and the networks they are part of (2-3 levels/tiers), develop a good understanding of the political dynamics on the ground at a local level (through a specialised and capable service provider) 1.1.3: Organise workshops to physically map and validate the identified local actors and networks, and to foster initial relationships *1.1.4: (TBD – e.g., when to activate and how to promote) Facilitate dialogue & broker partnerships between the private sector and other local actors to create local market-driven solutions & enhance impact, where appropriate given the political and/or security concerns of working with the private sector*	Directory of local actors and networks, categorised by area of expertise, geographic coverage, and organisational capacity Directory of CSSPs
1.2: Promote and connect these actors and networks	1.2.1: Define audience and map existing platforms/initiatives, explore opportunities to link and integrate 1.2.2: Develop and launch a digital platform with resources for local actors and where all local actors and networks can share information, opportunities, and start collaborations 1.2.3: Coordinate with stakeholders and organise regular networking events or forums to foster interaction, exchange of ideas, and collaboration among the local actors and networks *(significant coordination required, preferably with the support of a CSSP)*	Platform or forum established for continuous interaction, collaboration, and exchange of resources among the mapped actors and networks

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
1.3: Develop guidance on equitable partnerships between these actors	1.3.1: Support a working group ("Community of Practice" - CoP) at NWS NGO Forum level; comprising representatives from diverse local actors, networks, and CSSPs 1.3.2: Contribute to co-creating guidelines on equitable partnerships (set standards, expectations and then hold partners to account for delivery) 1.3.3: Conduct training workshops on the developed guidelines to ensure understanding and adoption of equitable partnership principles among local actors and networks	Set of guidelines and best practices for forming, managing, and evaluating equitable partnerships among diverse local actors and networks

Outcome 2: Strengthened knowledge & capacity sharing between actors

After the local actors have been identified, mapped, and connected, the next outcome strategy is structured to amplify the knowledge base and operational capacity of local actors in humanitarian efforts. It aims to facilitate a robust interplay of expertise, resources, and actionable insights among diverse stakeholders, thereby nurturing an ecosystem of empowered, well-informed actors.

Capacity assessment of local actors - This priority will be implemented through one or more selected CSSPs, based on a methodology approved by AFNS. It serves as a foundational step aimed at understanding the capabilities of local organisations. A multi-faceted capacity assessment tool is devised to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of these entities. These assessments are carried out in phases and are informed by AFNS's ongoing efforts in this area. Subsequent feedback sessions will allow for an in-depth discussion of the results, aiding in the identification of targeted areas for capacity development.

Capacity strengthening of local actors - Here, the focus shifts to capacity strengthening through external collaboration. AFNS will utilise its resources, alongside other resources, to facilitate the engagement of specialised CSSPs, including larger organisations such as INGOs that, while not funded by AFNS, are interested in supporting AFNS-funded Local Partners. These partnerships will be in harmony with the needs identified by local actors and are designed to be mutually beneficial. The approach aims to strike a balance; it is not intended to replicate the existing structures within CBOs or to change their intrinsic nature. The goal is to prepare them for future challenges, ensuring they have the necessary resilience to continue serving their communities with efficiency. This process is about strengthening and enhancing, not altering their identity.

Resources required for capacity strengthening, including potential AFNS support, are delineated, and efforts for fundraising and advocacy are initiated. Coordination with capacity strengthening service providers ensures the delivery of targeted training and organisational capacity strengthening to prioritised local actors.

Pilot and fund peer-to-peer support - The third priority introduces a peer-to-peer support approach. This is a more horizontal form of capacity strengthening, where actors learn from each other's experiences and expertise. The approach is designed to be inclusive, reflecting GESI/AAPCE best practices. A Community of Practice could be established to facilitate these peer-to-peer knowledge transfer initiatives. Funding can be secured through AFNS allocations to ensure that the approach is sustainable and effectively implemented.

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
2.1: Capacity assessment of local actors	2.1.1: Develop a capacity assessment tool to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and support/training needs of local actors, specific to their respective categories (building on current AFNS CA approach) 2.1.2: Administer capacity assessments (2-3 phases) by integrating/expand AFNS's ongoing CA efforts 2.1.3: Organise feedback sessions with prioritised entities to discuss the findings and identify priority areas for capacity development	Capacity assessment report identifying strengths, weaknesses, and prioritised capacity-building needs of key local actors
2.2: Engage with specialised Capacity Strengthening Service Providers	2.2.1: Mobilise AFNS resources & expand partnerships with selected CSSPs that align with the identified capacity development needs 2.2.2: Identify resource requirements for capacity strengthening efforts (incl. AFNS support options); support fundraising and advocacy efforts	# established partnerships and agreements/MoUs between AFNS and

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
(CSSPs)	2.2.3: Coordinate with CSSPs and local actors to co-create and deliver targeted training, organisational capacity strengthening interventions to prioritised local actors (hybrid/online, in Syria, and in Türkiye)	specialised CSSPs to deliver targeted capacity strengthening interventions
2.3: Pilot and fund peer-to-peer support	2.3.1: Develop a structured peer-to-peer support programme, identifying mentors and mentees based on skill sets and learning needs 2.3.2: Reflect GESI/AAPCE best practices through these programmes, based on the CA outputs, establish community of practice to facilitate knowledge transfer initiatives 2.3.3: Secure funding to facilitate the peer-to-peer support programme, covering costs such as training materials, meeting spaces, and technology platforms for virtual engagement (later during strategy implementation)	Implemented peer-to-peer support initiatives, with documented case studies showcasing the impact and lessons learned from the pilot

Outcome 3: Increased flow of funding to local actors

After the local actors have been prioritised and their capacity has been strengthened, this outcome strategy seeks to increase the financial resources available to local actors, thereby enhancing their operational and programmatic capacities. (*Please note: As detailed in subsequent sections, a phased approach will be applied to the implementation of these outcomes. This indicates that the initiatives may not follow a sequential order. Certain initiatives, such as the accelerated funding to prioritised arrangements with some local actors, can be executed more rapidly, whereas others may require additional capacity strengthening support, particularly in harder to reach areas).*

Establish "Anchor Organisation Model" - The priority aims to create a bespoke funding model to work through Anchor Organisations. This model will integrate learning and priorities concerning key policies, procedures, and systems such as aid diversion, safeguarding, and due diligence. Additionally, this model aims to design **incentives** for Anchor Organisations to work with smaller grassroot organisations (Category 3), and an accessible application process enabling these organisations to secure funding through these Anchor Organisations. (*Optionally, a mentorship approach could be introduced to pair these organisations with more experienced entities more adept in budget management and financial sustainability - a consideration for potential future implementation).*

Augment direct funding to smaller local actors - The ultimate priority is to allocate funding to smaller organisations, adhering to set benchmarks for distribution. (*Please note: although the creation of a dedicated funding stream within the AFNS for direct support, independent of an Anchor Organisation, is contemplated for future consideration, it has been currently assigned a lower priority owing to constraints in resources, signalling an opportunity for future growth.)*

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
3.1: Establish model for channelling downstream funding to smaller organisations	3.1.1: Establish a funding model to provide financial support to Anchor Organisations engaged in downstream funding for qualified and selected local actors *(Note: it needs to be mandatory for Anchor Organisations to share operational/administrative costs with Local Partners; as well as mandatory budgets for capacity strengthening)*; incorporate new approach in revised governance documents 3.1.2: Incorporate relevant learnings & priorities, incl. policies, procedures and systems into the subgrant arrangements utilised by the AFNS Anchor Organisations (incl. prevention of aid diversion, safeguarding, PSEA, money transfer modalities, audit requirements, etc.) *3.1.3: (Optional) Establish a mentorship approach linking smaller organisations with more experienced entities to guide them in budget management and financial sustainability*	# established and strengthened anchor organisations or coalitions effectively channelling increased levels of funding to smaller organisations Revised governance frameworks endorsed by SB

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
3.2: Augment direct funding to smaller organisations (Cat. 3)	3.2.1: Set allocation benchmarks (phased approach), based on scorecard results 3.2.2: Explore possibilities to create a dedicated AFNS funding stream to directly support smaller local actors *(Note: this is deprioritised for '24 and '25). Potentially, an "incubator approach" could be integrated at a later stage. This will take dedicated resources, which is currently beyond AFNS capabilities.)*	% of funds directly allocated to smaller local actors *(see scorecard approach),* enabling enhanced operational and programmatic capacities

Outcome 4: Quality of funding for local actors enhanced

This outcome aims to enhance the quality of financial support provided to local actors through targeted initiatives that focus on predictability and flexibility of funding, and integrated programming. The approach is designed to support the long-term resilience and adaptability of these actors, enabling them to better meet the evolving needs of affected communities. (Please *note: Equitable access to operational and administrative costs from Consortium Leads or Anchor Organisations has been established as a <u>precondition under Outcome 3</u>. The three principal aspects of quality funding to be addressed here are predictability, flexibility, and integration, in accordance with recommendations of the Grand Bargain).*

Predictability and stability – pilot multi-year finance to increase resilience - This priority seeks to improve the predictability and stability of funding by piloting multi-year financial commitments. Key activities include securing an extension of AFNS contracts (with break clauses if required) and launching a pilot programme for multi-year funding, focusing on resilience-building initiatives. The impact of this multi-year approach will be rigorously evaluated.

Flexibility – allow re-allocation of funds as needs evolve - The aim here is to build a more flexible funding architecture that can adapt to changing circumstances. Building on emergency preparedness approaches established already under AFNS's RA2 allocation, this includes enhancing a flexible funding policy, implementing a more responsive grant reporting process, and conducting impact analyses to ensure that reallocations are effective and do not cause harm *(Note: reallocations, by default, can disadvantage initially targeted beneficiary groups).*

Integration – enhance integrated approaches - This priority focuses on encouraging a more integrated approach to humanitarian funding. Activities include enhancing integrated programming across sectors, incorporating the Nexus approach into funding allocations, and establishing feedback mechanisms for the continuous improvement of integrated initiatives.

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
4.1 Predictability and stability: Pilot multi-year finance to increase resilience	4.1.1: Secure extension of AFNS (1), include break clauses in contracts in early '24 4.1.2: Design and launch a pilot programme offering multi-year funding to a select group of local actors, with a focus on resilience-building initiatives *(subject to AFNS 2)* 4.1.3: Evaluate the impact of multi-year financing on the resilience and sustainability of local actors; build long-term relationships and enhance their capacity for fundraising, moving past transient project-based engagements to create sustained collaborations	# of local actors implementing multi-year projects
4.2 Flexibility: Allow re-allocation of funds as needs evolve or new priorities emerge	4.2.1: Continue improving a flexible/seed funding policy that allows for the flexible use of funds based on evolving needs or emerging priorities 4.2.2: Implement a responsive grant reporting and modification process to facilitate timely re-allocation of funds as per changing circumstances on the ground (incl. seed funding (pre-positioned unrestricted) and local approval committees, aka START Fund approach) 4.2.3: Incorporate impact analysis of re-allocations in upcoming allocation designs *(ensure continuity and do-no-harm approaches)*	Developed mechanism for real-time assessment and flexible use of funds to address emerging needs or priorities

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
4.3 Integration: Enhance integrated approaches	4.3.1 Enhance integrated programming across sectors, including area-based approaches where feasible/possible 4.3.2 Integrate humanitarian assistance, recovery/resilience building, and peacebuilding (Nexus) in allocation designs 4.3.3. Establish Feedback Mechanisms for Continuous Improvement of Integrated Approaches	% of funding allocations that incorporate all three Nexus pillars % of funding allocations that promote integrated programming across sectors

Outcome 5: Locally led decision making and leadership

This outcome is predicated on the principle that local actors are best positioned to understand the intricacies of their communities and should therefore play a central role in decision-making processes. The strategy seeks to embed locally led decision-making and leadership within the broader humanitarian response framework, ensuring that local insights inform strategies, that local capacities are built and utilised, and that local actors are integrated into broader response coordination. *(Please note: the outcomes detailed within this strategy are to be achieved concurrently with other outcomes, and not in a sequential manner. Efforts will be directed towards realising the outputs of this strategy in parallel, wherever feasible.)*

Include local actors in AFNS decision-making processes and allocation strategies - This priority aims to directly involve local actors in AFNS's strategic processes. Activities include participatory community engagement sessions and consultations where local insights are actively solicited. (*Please note: This is already happening, to some extent, but will be intensified and systematically expanded under this strategy.*) Feedback mechanisms will also be enhanced to keep the local actors engaged in the ongoing refinement of strategies.

Co-design interventions with local actors to foster locally led initiatives and ownership - The focus here is on co-creating interventions with local actors to ensure that the projects are not only contextually relevant but also owned by the community. Workshops could be organised for co-designing interventions, and a scoring system can be introduced to prioritise projects that have been co-designed with local communities.

Enhance complementarity with overall response structure for greater local inclusion and coordination - This priority seeks to support the integration of local actors into the broader humanitarian response architecture. A review could be conducted to identify gaps and opportunities for local inclusion, followed by the development of action plans to address these gaps. This is an opportunity for AFNS to position itself as a **thought leader in promoting localisation**, advocating for a more localised response based on evidence and analysis. Additionally, efforts will be made to contribute to the development **of resilient local coordination structures** for humanitarian support, which can sustain beyond AFNS's involvement and serve as reliable institutional anchor points for future humanitarian aid.

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
5.1 Include local actors in AFNS decision-making processes and allocation strategies	5.1.1: Participatory community engagement and consultations where local actors actively contribute to AFNS's decision-making processes and allocation strategies 5.1.2: Enhance feedback mechanisms to continuously engage local actors in the refinement and implementation of co-designed strategies 5.1.3 Ensure relevant "consortia/coalitions" of local actors and communities are considered for SB membership/observer status	Community engagement sessions supporting locally led decision making # of relevant local actors represented directly/indirectly in AFNS SB & forums
5.2 Co-design interventions with local actors to foster locally led initiatives and ownership	5.2.1: Organise workshops with AFNS partners to co-design interventions 5.2.2: Provide higher scores in projects co-designed with local actors, especially those informed by "community committees" 5.3.3: Promote best practices by sharing knowledge with the wider humanitarian community.	# of projects informed by local insights and priorities, fostering greater local ownership and sustainability

Priority Action	Activities	Indicators
5.3 Enhance complementarity with overall response structure for greater local inclusion and coordination	5.3.1: Conduct a review of the existing response structure to identify gaps and opportunities for greater local inclusion and coordination *(in line with the ambition of AFNS to become a thought leader)* 5.3.2: Develop and implement action plans to address the identified gaps, with a focus on promoting complementarity between local initiatives and the overall response structure *(deprioritised until the end of the strategy implementation, see also timeline below)* 5.3.3: Advocate for more localisation in the northern Syria response. influence the humanitarian sector when it comes to learning and AFNS localisation ambitions; seek to **operate as a thought leader**, influencing other strategic decision makers to follow our analysis and evidence base 5.3.4 Explore options to support the establishment of resilient local coordination structures	Report with recommendations to improve alignment & coordination between local initiatives and the overall response structure

Implementation

Rollout and timeline

This phased approach is designed to align closely with the logic and sequencing of actions within each outcome. Each phase complements specific outcomes, enabling a streamlined and effective implementation of the strategy.

Phase 1: Strategy dissemination and initial engagement (Q1-Q2 '24)

- Activities: Disseminate the AFNS Localisation Strategy to local actors and other stakeholders. Conduct initial meetings to introduce the strategy and confirm the timeline for each phase. Develop an operational plan (top priority). Establish clear criteria for defining anchor organisations to ensure that partnerships with grassroot entities are based on transparent and well-understood standards.
  Aligned With: All Outcomes.

Phase 2: Comprehensive mapping and capacity assessments (Q2-Q4 '24 - repeat in '25)

- Activities: Start implementing Outcome 1 and Outcome 2 strategies, focusing on procuring the services of key CSSPs, responsible for mapping local actors and assessing their capacities. Establish local coordination mechanisms. Aligned with: Outcome 1, Outcome 2.

Phase 3: Funding and financial management capacity strengthening (Q3 '24 – Q4 '26)

- Activities: Roll out Outcome 3 and Outcome 4 strategies, concentrating on building anchor organisation model, supporting smaller organisations, and piloting multi-year finance and flexible funding models. Aligned with: Outcome 3, Outcome 4.

Phase 4: Inclusive decision-making and local leadership (Q1 '25 – Q4 '26)

- Activities: Implement Outcome 5 strategy with a focus on involving local actors in decision-making processes, co-designing interventions, and fostering locally led initiatives. Aligned with: Outcome 5.

Phase 5: Integration and annual review (Q1 '25)

- Activities: Annual reviews of progress. Revisit all key guidance, processes, and procedures with a localisation lens. Review and monitor the implementation of the strategy from a MEAL perspective. Share updates on changes and new opportunities. Aligned with: All Outcomes.

Phase 6: Strategy review and future planning (Q3 '26 – Q4 '26)

- Activities: Evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the strategy. Plan the next phases, including any necessary adjustments to the current outcomes or the addition of new outcomes. Aligned with: All Outcomes.

Key roles and responsibilities

Stakeholder	Role
Steering Board	- Review AFNS governance with a "localisation lens" - Provide strategic guidance - Advocacy
Fund Management Agent (FMA) leadership	- Translate this strategy into an operational plan (top priority) - Overall leadership - Review and adjust staffing and practices to adhere to the Localisation Strategy
Strategy and Innovation Unit	Develop an "Equitable Partnerships" policy aligned with Outcome 1
Partnerships and Delivery Unit	- Review and revise internal processes that might hinder localisation - Support the implementation of the Localisation Strategy
MEAL Unit	Review and monitor the implementation of the strategy
Localisation Working Group	Guide the development and ongoing refinement of the Localisation Strategy
Localisation Sub-Group	- Monitoring the implementation of the strategy - Coordinate with the AFNS MEAL team for monitoring and evaluation
Strategic Technical Review Committee (STRC)	Review the application and funding allocation processes with a "localisation" lens, aligned with Outcome 3
Women's Advisory Group	- Support gender-responsive and inclusive implementation of the Localisation Strategy, particularly aligned with GESI/AAPCE best practices - Clarify the different roles and responsibilities of the WAG, GESI, and GWG
New advisory groups	PWD, Youth, etc. – support strategy
Implementing partners	- Provide feedback on registration and application process review - Actively participate in co-designing interventions aligned with Outcome 5
Capacity Strengthening Service Providers (CSSPs)	- Provide technical support to AFNS (systematic collaboration in implementing key elements of the strategy, such as mapping, digital solutions, capacity strengthening, etc.) - Co-create and deliver targeted training and capacity- strengthening interventions, particularly aligned with Outcome 2
Coordination Fora (NWS NGO Forum, SNL, SNA, SIRF)	- Knowledge exchange - Facilitate stakeholder engagement and coordinate multi-sectoral activities. - Support the establishment of local coordination mechanisms aligned with Outcome 2 ("Community of Practice")
Donors	Support funding allocation strategies aligned with all Outcomes
Local directorates	Coordinate and cooperate with local experts

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

Progress localising the AFNS needs to be measured and documented if it is to contribute to system-wide change, learning, and accountability. This will require locally led data collection and analysis alongside periodic review of the strategy progress and responsibilities. Our approach to Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) for the Localisation Strategy is designed to capture progress, success, challenges, and lessons implementing the strategy from an "all stakeholder perspective" with a focus on local and community stakeholders. It will be led by the AFNS MEAL team, supported by local stakeholders, who will help refine key performance indicators to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in capturing localisation of the AFNS. This work will be aligned with the overall AFNS Accountability Framework.

Indicative Key Performance indicators will be identified that could be used to measure progress implementing measures for each of the five Localisation Strategy objectives and pillars.