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Section A: Policy and Planning

Module 3: Working with partners and the localisation agenda

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Introduction to the series

The pandemic continues to impact not only the security risks that NGOs may face but also the way risk treatment measures are developed, implemented, and communicated to staff. As we get used to new ways of working with COVID-19, and the focus is, rightly, on the pandemic and its impacts, we must ensure that we do not lose sight of ongoing and emerging security situations and issues.

Introduction to the module

The COVID-19 pandemic has - by necessity - partially advanced the localisation agenda by creating a unique opportunity for local civil society to lead on aid programming in places where international aid organisations evacuated international employees and/or locked down national staff. In this void, many local aid organisations [1] stepped up to meet new and existing humanitarian needs.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how critical local organisations are to the effective delivery of aid, this is not a new revelation. In many contexts before the pandemic, international aid organisations relied on local actors to reach those most affected, especially in high-risk contexts such as Syria and Yemen.

But while many international organisations rely on local partners to access hard-to-reach populations, research by GISF and others has shown that this transfer in responsibility for implementing programming has not been accompanied by honest conversations about the transfer of security risks, nor by adequate support to local actors to manage these risks. Recent findings highlight that even as local organisations took on more programming responsibilities during COVID-19, many

partnerships maintained pre-existing power imbalances. The greater reliance on local actors during the pandemic has also not always been accompanied by adequate support and resource sharing to manage the heightened security risks faced by local organisation staff. This is particularly problematic given that global security incident data trends show that security incidents disproportionately affect local aid workers.

International aid organisations have an ethical responsibility to support local partners in mitigating the heightened risks faced by their staff, especially as the responsibilities they have for carrying out programmes - and consequently their exposure to risks - increase with the pandemic.

Partners organisations should jointly develop and promote equitable partnerships that proactively shift power to local aid actors. This shift needs to be accompanied by open and honest conversations about security risk transfer, how partners can support each other to securely carry out their work and adequate resources for both partners to take on the risks they face.

COVID-19 has forced many international organisations and donors to trust local actors in ways they never have before. This trust must outlast the pandemic.

As the world slowly reopens, reverting to a top-down relationship will not only negatively impact the trust established between partners, but may cause local aid workers to see localisation as simply a justification used by international organisations to transfer risk in times of crisis and not a real commitment to transfer power.

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[1] This module uses the term 'local' to describe both national and local actors, i.e., those native to the area in which programmes take place and those who are programming in different parts of their home country. While no distinction is made in this module in the interests of brevity, it is important to be aware of the distinction in practice.

The guidance shared in this module is relevant for partnerships during the pandemic but also for partner organisations International aid organisations have an ethical responsibility to support local partners in mitigating the heightened risks faced by their staff, especially as the responsibilities they have for carrying out programmes - and consequently their exposure to risks - increase with the pandemic.

Acknowledgements

Suggested citation

GISF (2021) Keeping up with COVID-19: essential guidance for security risk managers, Module A.3. Working with partners and the localisation agenda. Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF). First Edition, December 2021.

🔍 Further Information

Moutard (2020) Covid-19 and localisation: an opportunity for equitable risk-sharing. Humanitarian Practice Network/ODI

📖 Useful sources

GISF (2020) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: from the local partner's perspective

Humanitarian Outcomes (2021) Aid Worker Security Report 2021

Stoddard, Czwarno and Hamsik (2019) NGOs & Risk: Managing Uncertainty in Local-International Partnerships. Humanitarian Outcomes and InterAction

Disclaimer

Why are partnership arrangements and the localisation agenda important to consider during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Complex Operating Environment

To meet the needs of affected populations during the pandemic, many local actors have taken on greater responsiblities, which often come with greater risks.

The reduction of international aid organisations' presence due to COVID-19 restrictions has made local organisations and local staff the main humnaitarian assistance providers in many contexts, including, for example, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This greater programmatic footprint has come with the challenges of operating in a complex humanitarian context with constantly changing government guidelines and restrictions, a surge in humanitarian needs (because of the pandemic but also due to related challenges, such as the closure of existing programmes), and the complex interplay between the pandemic and existing crises, included armed conflict.

Partner organisations have had to develop new relationships and creative ways of working to meet the needs of affected populations despite this complex operational environment.

The pandemic has forced organisations to be flexible in their programmatic expectations and operations. Organisations that have most successfully navigated this changing environment have been those that have placed operational decision-making power with those closest to the projects, often local organisation staff, and negotiated flexible budgets and work plans with their partners and donors.

📖 Useful sources

Ullah, Khan and Wijewickrama (2021) Covid-19: implications for localisation. A case study of Afghanistan and Pakistan. ODI

Barbelet, Bryant and Spencer (2021) Local humanitarian action during Covid-19: findings from a diary study. HPG/ODI

🔍 Further Information

DA Global (2021) Is Aid Really Changing: what the Covid-19 response tells us about localisation, decolonisation and the humanitarian system. British Red Cross

Humanitarian Outcomes: Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO)

Insecurity and security risk management support

The 2021 Aid Worker Security Report indicates that 95% of aid workers who were affected by security incidents in 2020 were nationals of the country in which the incident took place [2]. Despite the heightened risk faced by local actors, many organisations fail to jointly discuss, identify, and manage security risks with their partners, whether these risks are from the local security context or whether they emerge due to the partnership itself.

Research carried out by GISF and others has shown that local partners continue to face gaps in:
- discussions and analyses of risk transfer and risk attitudes with international partners,
- long term and flexible security-related resources (funding, equipment, and personnel),
- adequate margins in contracts to build security capacity (driven in part by a competitive market that forces organisations to cut corners and take on more risk),
- opportunities for capacity strengthening in security risk management that build on existing local knowledge and practice, and
- access to relevant security-related information and resources.

[2[This refers to national victims, regardless of the type of organisation they work for.

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Risks can be categorised into different areas:

- Security
- Safety
- Fiduciary
- Legal/Compliance
- Operational
- Reputational
- Information
- Ethical

Discussions around risk in partnership arrangements are usually focused on fiduciary and legal/compliance risks, often directed by donor expectations and compliance requirements.

While this module focuses on security risks, these risk areas are interrelated in practice. For example, operational and reputational risks can affect staff security and vice-versa. How risk is understood, and which risks are important to both partners, need to be a part of early conversations between partners.

🔍 Further Information

GMI: Anatomy of Power reflection exercise

Aid Worker Security Database

📖 Useful sources

GISF (2020) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: from the local partner's perspective

Good practice for security risk management: SRM, the localisation agenda and partnership arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic

Establish an equitable security risk management partnership

To establish an equitable partnership, organisations should openly discuss risk transfer, adopt partnership principles, engage in good communication that builds trust, and jointly explore the risk attitudes of each partner.

Understand and address security risk transfer

By entering into a partnership, international and local organisations automatically transfer risk to each other, both intentionally and unintentionally.

Risk transfer is the formation or transformation of risks (increasing or decreasing) for one actor, caused by the presence or actions of another.

For example, by partnering with an international non-governmental organisation (NGO), a local organisation may place itself at risk of being negatively perceived by various stakeholders that hold negative perceptions of international aid organisations.

Some contexts have seen heightened negative perceptions of foreign aid organisations where international staff have been accused of being carriers of COVID-19, with implications for the perceptions of local partners who are openly coordinating with these international aid actors. Some contexts have also seen populations reject the existence of COVID-19 altogether, and, therefore, local partners working on COVID-19 related programming for an international partner have faced the risk of backlash from local populations.

Partners should, therefore, unpack the multiple forms in which risk has been created, transferred, or transformed within the partnership and jointly identify ways to mitigate any identified risks.

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Adopt partnership principles

Organisations should adopt principles that promote an equitable partnership and ensure that their staff adhere to these, including those of complementarity, equity, transparency and trust, a result-oriented approach, responsibility, and mutual benefit. Partners should regularly reflect on and proactively take action to support the application of principles that support equitable partnerships.

Due to the pandemic, local organisations are facing many challenges when trying to carry out activities, such as unexpected illness among staff, restrictions on travel, contextual insecurity due to tensions between powerholders, etc. An international partner that fails to be programmatically and financially flexible to allow local partners to cope with the changing context and risk environment is not respecting the principles of trust and of a result-oriented approach. Contracts between partners should not only include adequate overheads to allow for security risk management measures, but also flexible conditions and force majeure clauses in the event of major events or shifts in security conditions.

During the pandemic, some international actors have expected local partners to carry out COVID-19 programming. However, for some local partners and communities, COVID-19 has not been identified as a priority need. An international partner that pushes for COVID-19 response programming, despite this not being a local priority, is driving its own agenda and thereby not meeting the principle of mutual benefit. A failure to discuss community and local partner needs and incorporate these into programme plans can, in fact, negatively impact the perception and acceptance of both partners and adversely affect their security. Conversely, by jointly planning and agreeing on programming before the commencement of activities the partners are meeting the principle of equity.

COVID-19 has placed a lot of strain on the well-being, mental health, and capacity of individuals. Therefore, partner organisations should ensure that there is support to all staff to improve well-being and mental health. This support can be in the form of counselling, but also flexible working hours and expectations.

In many partnerships, a straightforward solution is to reduce the bureaucratic burden placed on local partner staff – a result-oriented approach. Many local partner organisations experience heavy expectations from international counterparts in completing paperwork, often without a clear benefit to the local partner's work. International partners should show flexibility in expectations, be open to negotiating deliverables, and ensure activities are prioritised that meet humanitarian needs and also tangibly benefit both partners.

Communicate and Build Trust

Organisations must listen to the concerns of their partners and develop a communication system that facilitates open discussion of risks. Both partners should feel empowered to seek information from each other to improve mutual understanding.

The pandemic has seen the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 and related issues. In these circumstances, communicating regularly, being honest, and proactively aiming to build trust is more important than ever within a partnership.

Both partners should feel that they can seek reliable information from each other, based on their areas of expertise, and, especially, in times of uncertainty.

For local organisations, it can be helpful to receive regular updates from international partners on medical information regarding the pandemic given the additional resources many international organisations have to collect this type of information. International organisations, on the other hand, can benefit from regular updates from local organisations on national rules and restrictions imposed by governments because of the pandemic.

To support better communication during the pandemic, partners should ask themselves, for example:

- Is my organisation regularly sharing relevant information about the pandemic with its partners? (Especially if regular updates are already being shared with their own staff.)

- By using remote communication methods due to COVID-19 movement restrictions, is everyone in my organisation communicating with everyone they should? If not, what are the challenges and how can the partners jointly address them? For example, international partners can support local organisations with IT equipment to improve staff access to communication tools when this access is limited.
- Are my staff members showing understanding and solidarity in their communications with partner organisation staff who are struggling with the added pressures resulting from the pandemic, e.g., the loss of loved ones and additional homecare responsibilities?

Partners should regularly evaluate their communication methods to ensure the approach adopted is appropriate for the context and individuals involved. Partners should also ensure that they follow through on promises made. Very little is as damaging to trust as initiating conversations and then not following through with adequate support. Remember that security risk management within partnerships takes commitment, time, and resources.

🔍 Further Information

Tool 1: Good communication in partnerships in GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

GISF (2020) Keeping up with COVID-19: essential guidance for security risk managers, Module A.2. Information Management

📖 Useful sources

GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

Explore Security Risk Attitudes

Many local partners have managed to continue programming despite COVID-19 restrictions and challenges. In this ever-changing environment, a high degree of flexibility is needed. While some international organisations and donors have been flexible when working with local organisations during the pandemic, this has not always been the case. Some international partners have placed pressure on local organisations to deliver without sufficient programmatic or financial flexibility. This has forced local organisations to take on additional health, safety, and security risks in order to continue receiving funding.

Due to a historical lack of funding for core running costs, many local partners rely on projects to continue operating and often face the risk of closure at the loss of one funding stream. The decision to accept risk, therefore, is not always made on equal terms by both partners.

Partners need to have open and honest conversations about their risk attitude, what they each consider to be an acceptable level of risk and feel empowered to say no when the risk is too high without it costing the livelihoods of their staff.

Partners can support this by ensuring that conversations about risk appetite take place at the beginning of a partnership, and ideally as part of a larger meeting where the partner jointly plan the programme/project and related activities. These plans then need to be accompanied by programmatic and financial flexibility to allow partners to adjust projects and activities, when needed, to meet the risk acceptance thresholds of both partners.

Every organisation will see risk differently and approach this risk in its own way. Therefore, any joint approach to security risk management must be tailored to the partnership, the context, and the organisations involved. Discussing risk attitudes is an essential foundation for future conversations between partners.

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🔍 **Further information**

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GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

Tool 2: Risk attitude in partnerships in GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

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Approach security risk management together

To equitably share responsibility for security, partners should support each other in managing security risks, by agreeing on and implementing a joint security risk management (SRM) aprroach, identifying and addressing SRM gaps, and engaging in joint advocacy. These steps are discussed further below.

Agree and implement a joint SRM approach

Organisations should hold conversations as soon as possible and regularly thereafter on how both partners want to approach the different elements of the security risk management framework, including, for example, travel arrangements, crisis management, access to security resources, and security collaboration and networks.

This means jointly discussing and answering key questions such as:
- How will an incident be managed, such as a staff member contracting COVID-19 and requiring emergency care while movement restrictions are in place?
- Do both partners have access to the right security information and resources, e.g., around COVID-19 and related issues?
- Where do COVID-19 health, safety and security risks sit within each partner organisation and are these different units speaking to each other regularly?
- Cyber threats have been on the rise due to the pandemic with aid organisations also affected by attacks such as ransomware. Is this a risk that either partner faces, and if yes, what support do the partners need to manage this risk?

- Are the partners supporting each other in sourcing safety equipment, e.g., personal protective equipment (PPE), to improve staff safety?

Following these discussions, partners can identify actions to take forward to address concerns or fill gaps. For example, by establishing a mechanism for regularly sharing knowledge and resources on COVID-19 or jointly carrying out a risk assessment that incorporates COVID-19 health, safety, and security risks.

COVID-19 has caused significant disruption to operations, as well as the professional and personal lives of both partner organisations' staff. Efforts to discuss security risk management should, therefore, be flexible.

Consider:

✓ How best to hold conversations (via online video conferencing or through e-mail),

✓ When these should take place (set flexible timelines), and

✓ Who should be invited (online calls can sometimes allow a wider geographical spread of attendees).

One international aid organisation organised clinics with its partner organisations to foster discussion around the risks each organisation faces. During these clinics, experts were brought in to share information, for instance, doctors were invited to talk about COVID-19 health-related risks.

Organisations have found that sharing relevant questionnaires with their partners in advance of any meeting and allowing them time to internally discuss their concerns and prepare questions can help make conversations between partners more fruitful.

In times of uncertainty, creative and flexible solutions that are identified together are often the most effective.

A joint approach to security risk management begins with initial conversations that aim to understand how each partner manages security and how each partner can support the other in filling jointly identified gaps in resources, knowledge, and/or capacity. The

end result should be a partnership that promotes the 'sharing of risk' rather than the 'transfer of risk'.

The GISF Partnerships and Security Risk Management joint action guide describes in greater detail the steps that partners can follow when carrying out a joint SRM review. More specifically, Tool 3 includes a questionnaire for partners to discuss security risks and how to manage them within the partnership. Consider adding COVID-19 relevant questions to each section of the questionnaire before going through these together.

🔍 Further information

Tool 4: Joint SRM review action plan template in GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

📖 Useful sources

EISF (2017) Security Risk Management: a basic guide for smaller NGOs

GISF (2020) Security to go: a risk management toolkit for humanitarian aid agencies (4th Edition)

Tool 3: Joint SRM review questionnaire and worksheet template in GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

Jointly identify and address security risks

Sharing risk means jointly exploring the risks each partner is exposed to, the impact these could have on both partners, and thereafter, jointly identifying and implementing actions to manage these risks. Ideally, all exchanges between partners should be adapted to match the ways of working, including the culture, of both organisations.

The pandemic has demonstrated how quickly contexts can change, and therefore joint risk assessments between partners

should be carried out regularly. Partners should ensure that COVID-19 related security risks are included in these assessments. However, assessments should go beyond exploring how to reduce the risk of staff contracting COVID-19 and consider how the pandemic has changed the operating environment and, consequently, the threats organisations face. Partners should jointly identify how they can support each other in mitigating identified risks.

With regards to COVID-19, partners may consider, for example:
- How to implement mitigation measures when there are travel and movement restrictions.
- How misinformation and disinformation about the pandemic can affect the perception and acceptance of both partners.
- How the suspension or closure of programmes affect acceptance and security.
- How some governments' reliance on the police and/or military to support the national COVID-19 response affects each partners' security.
- How vaccine hesitancy among staff can affect the health, safety and security of other employees and communities, and measures that can be taken to address the concerns of hesitant staff.
- Assessing the risks and benefits of establishing relationships with new actors, such as businesses producing PPE.
- Carrying out a conflict sensitivity assessment to understand changing contextual dynamics in conflict areas and to unpack how each partner organisation can impact these through their presence and what implications there are for the partnership and the security of staff.

🔍 Further information

Tool 5: Joint security risk assessment and management plan template in GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

Save the Children (2021) Conflict Sensitivity Guider: A practical roadmap to mainstream conflict sensitivity into programming

Tool 6: Security risk management in partnerships budget template in GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

📖 **Useful sources**

EISF (2013) The Cost of Security Risk Management for NGOs

GISF (2020) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: from the local partner's perspective

Fund security risk management

Most conversations between partners are project-specific and, therefore, partnership budgets often do not meet the long-term needs of local partners especially. This is a particular risk during COVID-19 where many new partnerships have been quickly entered into. Conversations, funding, and capacity strengthening efforts that consider each partner organisation as a whole, rather than just a project or operational area, are more beneficial to both partners in the long run.

The pandemic has offered new opportunities for adjusting existing budgets. For some organisations, COVID-19 has resulted in savings from unspent travel and accommodation budget lines. In these instances, organisations should consider reallocating the unspent funds to meet staff safety and security needs, where it is possible to do so.

> International organisations and donors must ensure that conversations around security risk management with local actors are accompanied by financial support to implement agreed actions

A long-term strategy should also be put in place within any partnership to ensure that both partners receive adequate overhead costs and dedicated funding for security risk management, such as staff, psycho-social services, equipment, insurance schemes, and security risk management training.

Sharing risks means that the partnership includes flexible funding that not only meets the complex operational realities of the pandemic, but also the strategic and long-term needs of both partners.

Strengthen security risk management capacity

Capacity strengthening efforts should aim to build the capacity of both partners.

International organisations, for example, should ensure that any capacity strengthening support provided to local organisations is structured and delivered in such a way as to ensure that local organisations can operate independently of their international partners in the near future.

Local organisations, in turn, should aim to strengthen their international partners' capacity in the areas they face gaps in, for example, in understanding local contextual dynamics, the structure of local institutions, local government regulations and programmes, etc.

> While strengthening local organisations' capacity in proposal development and financial risk management is often cited as a priority need, especially given donor compliance expectations, capacity strengthening should be seen as a two-way process that both partners benefit from. Both partners have skills, knowledge, and experience to share. Discussions around strengthening capacity within the partnership should consider all forms of knowledge sharing, including on security risk management.

Capacity strengthening efforts should always be developed in consultation with all relevant staff (in both partner organisations), to ensure these are appropriate, contextually relevant and meet the voiced needs of staff. To ensure this, organisations should hold a joint discussion early on in the partnership on the capacity needs of each partner and how best to address these.

Due to COVID-19, many capacity strengthening activities were halted or moved online. While moving trainings, workshops and even conferences online has allowed many more individuals to access these resources, individuals with poor internet and IT equipment access have been further marginalised.

Partner organisations should be creative in the way in which resources, expertise and knowledge are shared, particularly in the face of movement and travel restrictions (e.g., through online libraries, online recorded trainings, remote training sessions, training for trainers, investing in internet access or IT equipment, etc.). As travel opens up following the pandemic, partner organisations should consider making some of the temporary online resources permanently available, especially if the feedback suggests these were beneficial and improved access to a larger number of local actors. Partners should ensure that the right trainers – which may be local – are selected for in-person trainings, once these can be carried out safely in each context.

Capacity strengthening efforts should also not be limited to the provision of training. Mentorship schemes and direct technical support from specialists are often cited as more effective capacity strengthening efforts than one-off training sessions.

In some contexts, security is a priority for local organisation staff, while in others, there may be other risks and more pressing support needs. Partner organisations should aim to meet the voiced needs of implementing staff. Security support, in many instances, may need to be part of a broader support package jointly agreed with and provided.

Useful sources

Eldebo and Slaybaugh (2020) Adapting security training during COVID-19: World Vision's journey with Rapid Access Security Training

GISF (2021) Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations

Jointly advocate for change

COVID-19 has put in stark relief the important role and strengths of local actors within the aid system. Effective humanitarian action needs local leadership. Obstacles to this shift in power, however, remain and will require continued advocacy with powerholders.

This may mean local organisations have to advocate for change within their international partner organisations. Partner organisations may also decide to jointly advocate for change in attitudes and approaches by other actors, including, for example, donors.

Partners should discuss the challenges that are outside of their control and develop a joint advocacy strategy to influence those in power and effect change. During COVID-19, partners can, for example, support each other by jointly advocating for greater donor flexibility to deliver aid in complex and ever-changing operating environments. Partners can also advocate for a rethink in donor compliance expectations beyond the pandemic to allow funding to reach a wider variety of local organisations, including more informal groups that may have weaker grant management capacities but that have greater expertise and demonstrated higher impact in particular areas, such as women-led groups working on gender-based violence [3].

Advocacy can also be internal within an organisation. The management of partnerships and communication with partner organisations will often sit with programme managers who may not be conscious of the security challenges or needs of the partner organisation. Security focal points can use the pandemic and its widespread impact on staff health, safety and security to shine a spotlight on the challenges faced by partner organisations in these areas.

Useful sources

Whiting (2016) NGO Fora Advocacy Guide: Delivering Joint Advocacy. ICVA

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[3] See the Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations for a list of humanitarian organisations, including local ones.

Inclusivity considerations for partners

When discussing and exploring risk mitigation measures, partners should remember that risks can be different for each individual. Aid workers have different risk profiles which relate to their personal characteristics, both visible and hidden, such as their gender, nationality, ethnicity, etc. These characteristics interact with each other, with the context, as well as with the staff member's role and organisation, and even their partner organisation.

Throughout the partnership, the diverse risks faced by staff must be considered, including the threats that may come from within the organisation or the partnership itself. The personal profiles of staff in one organisation can be very different to another – as can their exposure to threats. For example, local organisation staff belonging to certain ethnic groups may be particularly exposed to internal threats, which are not always visible to, or understood by, international partner staff.

To adopt an inclusive approach to security risk management within partnerships, partners should ask themselves and each other key questions, including:

- Does the security risk management approach of both organisations consider how the intersection of staff members' identity, location and work can affect their vulnerability to threats?
- Does the partnership affect the risks faced by certain staff members more than others due to their profiles?
- How should sensitive identity topics, such as internal and external threats based on sexual orientation, race, or gender, be discussed by the partners? What are the comfort levels (accounting for cultural sensitivities)?
- How can partners support each other to step out of their comfort levels to ensure effective security risk management for all staff?

It is important for organisations not to blindly rely on their partners' security risk assessments and mitigation measures but instead consider the particular risks their staff face due to their personal profiles and implement inclusive risk treatment measures.

Useful sources

EISF (2018) Managing the Security of Aid Workers with Diverse Profiles

GISF (2021) Keeping up with COVID-19: essential guidance for security risk managers, Module B11. Inclusivity and security risk management

Conclusion

The pandemic provided the aid system with an opportunity to truly advance the localisation agenda. Unfortunately, the greater reliance on local partners brought about by COVID-19 has not generally resulted in more equitable partnerships nor a true shift in power towards local actors.

While there have been instances where decision-making power was given to local actors and flexible budgets and work plans introduced, some organisations are seeing a return to former top-down ways of working as the impacts of the pandemic subside in some contexts.

The pandemic has provided both challenges and opportunities to partnerships within the aid sector. Aid organisations have developed innovative new ways of communicating, working, and sharing training and other resources during the pandemic. Local staff have successfully taken on more leadership positions within aid programming. In general, the capacities of local and international organisations to manage uncertainty in partnerships have been strengthened. Notions of what can be achieved with flexible work plans and budgets have been broadened. These advancements must be built upon in the future and not be dismantled as the effects of the pandemic stabilise.

Security focal points in partner organisations can support these efforts by ensuring their organisations develop and maintain equitable partnerships from a security risk management perspective. To adopt an equitable and joint approach to security risk management, partners should:

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1. Establish the foundations of an equitable security risk management partnership by:

(a) Understanding and addressing risk transfer
(b) Adopting partnership principles
(c) Communicating and building trust
(d) Exploring risk attitudes

2. Carry out a joint review of each partner's understanding of security risk management and procedures, and agree on a joint approach

3. Jointly identify and address security risk management needs, gaps and challenges by:

(a) Assessing security risks together
(b) Meeting resource and funding needs
(c) Strengthening capacity while building on existing knowledge and practice
(d) Engaging in joint advocacy to effect wider change within the aid sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed local organisations at the forefront of humanitarian programming. Now, more than ever, the international community should ensure that this shift in responsibility is accompanied by a true shift in power, with partnership arrangements that promote the sharing of risk rather than the transferring of risk.