

# **FRATERNAL COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF LOCALISATION AND DECOLONISATION**

## **Rethinking Humanitarian and Development Assistance in Africa**

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March 2024



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Executive summary .....	7
1.Introduction .....	18
1.1. Research methodology .....	18
2.Conceptualising and defining localisation .....	22
2.1. Localisation in the context of Caritas's work.....	22
3. Defining decolonisation .....	27
4. Key findings .....	30
4.1. Factors facilitating local leadership and localisation of aid and long-term development within caritas africa .....	30
4.1.1. Local advocacy and mobilisation .....	30
4.1.2. Existing social connections, networks, and local leadership .....	30
4.1.3. Progressive international actors .....	30
4.1.4. Progressive donor policies .....	31
4.1.5. Pooled funds .....	31
4.1.6. Humanitarian access .....	32
4.2. Factors hindering local leadership and localisation of aid in africa .....	32
4.2.1. Structural barriers .....	32
4.2.2. Power dynamics .....	34
4.2.3. Capacity issues .....	35
4.2.4. Communication issues .....	36
4.2.5. Perceptions of risk .....	37
4.2.5. Contextual challenges .....	37
5. Recommendations .....	39
5.1. Possible practical steps to localisation and fraternal cooperation .....	39
5.2. Possible role of national caritas .....	41
5.3. Possible role of bishops .....	43
References .....	50



*Attention to subsidiarity can help guide the appropriate distribution of power and decision-making. Larger institutions or authorities can provide overall support, when necessary, while locally individuals and communities have the freedom to make decisions that affect their lives.*

**Pope Francis, at the 2023 World of Work Summit  
hosted by the UN International Labour Organization**

# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study on localisation and decolonisation of aid and development amongst Caritas Africa member organisations. The study aimed to explore the experiences of local actors and leaders in the context of aid and development assistance, and to identify the challenges, opportunities, and possible recommendations for promoting more equitable and sustainable development practices. The report is based on a desktop review, group consultations with the six Caritas Africa zonal representatives, and key informant interviews with representatives of international and civil society organisations within the Caritas family.

Caritas Africa, as a humanitarian and development organisation rooted in Catholic values, emphasises the importance of empowering local communities to address their challenges. Localisation of aid involves the shifting of power, decision-making and implementation to local actors, including governments, NGOs, and local communities, with the aim of enhancing effectiveness and sustainability. Decolonisation of aid entails a shift in power dynamics from external actors to local communities and organisations, while promoting equitable partnerships, re-examining funding models, and acknowledging and addressing historical injustices.

The study concluded that the concepts of decolonisation and localisation of aid and development are not new to Caritas Africa. These concepts resonate with the principle of subsidiarity engrained within the Catholic social teachings. Catechism defines subsidiarity as the principle that “a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good”. This also aligns seamlessly with Caritas Africa's objective: a commitment to community-driven and sustainable solutions.





# 1. Factors facilitating the localisation of aid In Africa



The study found that there are several factors that facilitate the localisation of aid in Africa, including:

**Local advocacy and mobilisation:**

Both community and national actors are effective in promoting the localisation agenda through networking, mobilisation, and advocating for their own priorities by ensuring that the necessary policies are in place. Local leaders and organisations and progressive international organisations play a crucial role in driving sustainable development initiatives within African communities. They also help in fostering partnerships and collaborations between international aid organisations and local entities.

**Existing social connections, networks, and local leadership:**

Country-level funding arrangements that incorporate national NGO leadership or co-leadership can be an effective means to enable a prompt humanitarian response. Existing social connections and networks play a crucial role in facilitating local leadership, localisation, and decolonisation of aid and development in Africa. Local leaders and communities are better equipped to understand the unique needs and contexts of their regions and can tailor aid efforts to address these needs effectively. Thus, aid and development efforts can be more targeted, efficient, and culturally appropriate. In this regard, giving more decision-making power and building the capacity of Caritas at the regional, national, and diocesan level is critical. There is a particular need to strengthen capacity of Caritas at the national and diocesan le-

vel as these are the levels with capacity gaps that may hinder localisation.

**Role of international actors:** Some international humanitarian organisations have shifted from direct implementation and invested in local partner capacity over the long-term, a move that promotes local leadership, local governance, and sustainability. International actors can play a progressive role in enabling localisation of humanitarian aid and leadership by supporting and empowering local non-governmental organisations to build their institutional capacities, ranging from human resources, finance, equipment, and ICT. However, these international actors must do more to reduce power imbalances between donors and the recipients of funding

**Donor policies:** Donor policies need to promote equitable partnerships that take ethical and geopolitical factors into consideration through prioritising the participation of local communities in decision-making processes and ensuring that their needs and perspectives are taken into account. This may mean investing in building the capacity of local organisations and institutions and enabling them to take on more leadership roles in aid delivery and decision-making. These initiatives and policies can also help to address the unequal relationship that often exists between donors and local NGOs and communities.

**Pooled funds:** Pooling of funds at the country level is an effective way to send money to local actors. It allows local organisations to have more control and decision-making po-



wer over the use of funds. Pooled funds enable localisation and decolonisation of aid and development.

**Humanitarian access:** Humanitarian access challenges in Africa have led to a shift towards empowering local leadership, promoting localisation, and decolonising aid efforts. These challenges have forced international humanitarian organisations to work more closely with local communities and organisations, allowing for the development of local leadership in addressing crises. Local actors are better placed in accessing and providing aid to affected communities. They can tailor aid to the specific needs and contexts of the affected populations, leading to a more effective and sustainable response.



*Africa, Ethiopia*



▼ A tanker truck from Caritas partner organisation PACIDA brings 12,000 litres of drinking water to the desert-like region of Marsabit.



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## 2. Factors hindering the localisation of aid in Africa



The study found that there are seven broad challenges that hinder localisation of aid and development in Africa:

**Structural barriers:** The humanitarian aid system continues to favour the status quo that is predominantly paternalistic, racist and neocolonialist. The system perpetuates the dominant top-down approach to aid and development delivery where donor countries and international organisations set the agenda and determine the priorities. This approach does not leave any room for local partners to make their own independent decisions. It can lead to a disregard for local knowledge systems and practices, thereby hindering the integration of indigenous solutions into development initiatives. Many structures in the international humanitarian system also have features that exclude local actors.

**Power dynamics:** Some international actors consider localisation as a threat to the power and privileges they enjoy under the status quo. They believe that localisation may lead to loss of their jobs or their access to funding. Entrenched interests of international actors make it difficult to realise the agenda of decolonising and localising humanitarian aid and development work in Africa.

**Limited funding:** Local actors continue to experience a lack of access to funding and to international coordination and partnership mechanisms. The limited quantity and quality of funding directed at local actors is both an outcome of and barrier to localisation because the local actors cannot attract and retain quality staff, who migrate to better-funded international organisations. The aid industry is often characterised by a “brain drain” effect, where local leaders and experts are lured away to work for international organisations or donor countries, leading to a loss of local talent and expertise. Without sustained financial support, local organisations struggle to attract qualified professionals. This impedes these organisations’ ability to deliver aid and development effectively. In addition, the expectations and requirements that are provided around aid

flows are based on a Western perspective, on the expectations of certain governments structures, and on the prevailing financial management systems, which sometimes make it difficult or challenging for small organisations to meet the requirements.

**Capacity issues:** The term “capacity” is often defined by international actors from the global North, thereby mirroring the global North’s standards, with emphasis on administrative and financial management abilities and reporting “upwards”. This undermines capacity features associated with local actors, such as local knowledge, language, culture, and the ability to gain access to complex environments. In addition, there is ineffective capacity building of local actors as the capacity building elements are often designed and delivered by international ac-



tors who are not privy to the needs and contexts of local actors, and who many not even have the capacity to deliver. The impact of limited funding for capacity building for localisation efforts is profound. Local organisations are unable to develop the expertise and resources required to tailor programmes and interventions to the unique cultural, social, and economic contexts within their communities. As a result, the effectiveness and sustainability of localised initiatives are compromised, hindering the overall progress of localisation efforts in Africa.

**Communication issues:** There is often lack of clear communication between and among members and international partners. Without effective communication, local leaders may not be aware of the resources and support available to them and may not be able to access the training and capacity-building opportunities that they need to effectively lead their communities. Secondly, lack of communication can lead to a lack of ownership and buy-in from local leaders and communities, which can undermine the effectiveness of aid efforts. Finally, without a strong communication strategy, it can be difficult to ensure that localisation and decolonisation efforts are well-coordinated and aligned with the needs and priorities of the local community.

**Perceptions of risk:** The perception that local actors have a limited ability to manage funds properly and uphold humanitarian principles has led to the widespread belief that providing direct and large amounts of funding to local actors is inherently high-risk. Therefore, there is a tendency among donors



to scrutinise local actors more intensely. The same level of scrutiny is not directed at international organisations.

**Contextual challenges:** While national governments play an important role in the localisation of humanitarian aid, repressive, corrupt, or weak national governments can be an obstacle to localisation processes. Corrupt governments can politicise aid, while repressive ones may simply enforce restrictive policies that make it difficult for humanitarian actors to operate. Weak governments may not have the required technical capacity to promote humanitarian work. Poor governance and instability in some African countries hinder efforts to localise aid and development. This leads to a lack of accountability and trust in local institutions, making it difficult for aid organisations to work directly with local communities and governments to address their specific needs.



▲ Cameroon: Numerous women and children who have been displaced by the terrorist militia Boko Haram live in the north of the country near Zamay. They receive support from Caritas' partner organisation ALDEPA.





### 3. Practical steps to ensure localisation

The following practical steps can be taken ensure location:

#### a. National and diocesan level

**Power-sharing and decision-making:** National Caritas should prioritise power-sharing and decision-making with local communities. This means involving them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of aid and development projects. Local communities should have a say in determining their own needs and the strategies to address them. This falls in line with the Church's doctrine of subsidiarity, which according to Catholic traditions as expounded by Pope Pius XI, refers to a "situation which ensures that power, decisions, and responsibility are carried out to the lowest level at which they can be properly exercised".

**Strengthening local capacities:** There should be efforts to invest in building the capacity of local organisations and individuals. This includes providing training, resources, and technical support to empower local actors to take charge of their own development initiatives.

**Partnerships, collaboration, and coordination:** Caritas Africa should actively encourage partnerships and collaborations between national and diocesan Caritas, local organisations, community leaders, and grassroots initiatives. This fosters a more inclusive and participatory approach, where local knowledge, expertise, and networks are valued and integrated into the decision-making process.

#### b. Regional and national Caritas organisations

**Resource allocation at regional and national level:** Regional and national Caritas should prioritise resource allocation that supports local initiatives. This means directing funding, materials, and technical assistance towards locally-identified priorities and projects, as well as linking local partners with donors and building their capacity in resource mobilisation.

**Advocacy and policy influence:** Caritas Africa should engage in advocacy efforts to promote policies and practices that support decolonisation and localisation of aid. This includes advocating for changes in funding mechanisms, policies, and practices that empower local communities and prioritise their agency in decision-making processes.

#### c. Funding Partners

Cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding: Funding partners should prioritise adapting interventions to fit the specific social, economic, and environmental contexts of the communities being served.





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## 4. Possible role of Bishops

To fully decolonise and localise aid and long-term development in the African region, Catholic bishops have a pivotal role to play by taking the following strategic steps:

**Setting the tone or taking the lead:** Bishops can establish policies that guide partner organisations in advocating for local approaches, thus creating a conducive environment for co-operation between partners and stakeholders. They have the power to invite the partner to the country and spell out the local development priorities.

**Fostering partnerships with local communities:** Bishops could address power imbalances between international actors and local responders by fostering equitable partnerships and challenging dominant narratives that undermine local knowledge and leadership, as entailed in the principal of subsidiarity.

**Supporting local capacity building:** Bishops could advocate for dedicating resources to strengthen local entities and individuals' capacity, especially during their interactions with donors and government agencies.

**Advocating for policy changes:** As influential spiritual leaders deeply embedded within local communities, Catholic bishops possess the moral authority to amplify the voices of the marginalised and vulnerable. They can use their platforms to engage with policymakers, urging them to prioritise locally led initiatives and ensuring that aid and development efforts are sensitive to the unique cultural and socio-economic contexts of the regions they serve.

**Collaborating with other stakeholders:** Bishops could promote collaborative action between national and international charitable organisations, in line with the principles outlined in Article 12 of the Motu Proprio, which emphasises that diocesan bishops should actively promote collaboration of institutions under their care.

**Encouraging sustainable development:** Bishops play a multifaceted role in steering the church's charitable endeavours towards impactful and sustainable outcomes. This may mean monitoring the aspirations of fraternal cooperation to ensure they align with the church's vision, as espoused in the teachings of Benedict XVI in 2012, which encourages church leaders to ensure the faithful execution of the church's mission, including promoting and supervising charitable activities implemented by Caritas.



# 1. Introduction

In the recent past, Caritas organisations have engaged in reflections on local leadership, fraternal cooperation, and decolonisation of aid. This stems from calls to shift power and resources from the global North to the global South, and to recognise the agency of local partners and

Caritas Africa region brings together 46 national Caritas organisations in 46 African countries, including adjacent islands in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. All these organisations, including the Regional Executive Secretariat, rely on partner support and funding to realise their mission to serve communities in need and to promote social justice.

However, service delivery takes place in the context of a Western view to development, exemplified by unequal North-South power dynamics, resources remaining in the hands of a few, limited funding for local actors, and knowledge from Africa being perceived as being inferior to knowledge from the West. In some cases, local organisations are perceived as lacking capacity. Moreover, most local organisations' engagement with international actors is shaped by an unequal donor-recipient relationship.

Notably, some progress has been made to change these dynamics, including allocating

some partner programme budgets to capacity sharing, facilitating direct linkages to the back donor, ensuring access to multi-year funding, increasing representation of the global South in international fora, and providing funding for core costs.

Caritas Africa, during its General Assembly in Rome in May 2023, approved a 7-year strategic framework that will run from 2024-2030. To build resilient communities in Africa, Caritas Africa intends to implement all activities through the lens of localisation and fraternal cooperation. Additionally, as part of its advocacy agenda, Caritas Africa calls for *“advocacy towards an enabling environment and support for local leadership, voice and influence in humanitarian and development sectors.”*

This report presents the findings of a qualitative research study on the realities of fraternal cooperation, local leadership, and decolonisation of aid. The study aimed to explore the experiences of local actors and leaders in the context of aid provision and to identify the challenges, opportunities, and possible recommendations for promoting more equitable and sustainable development practices.

## 1.1. Research methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology. The research was guided by a participatory approach that sought





to engage local stakeholders in the design, implementation, and dissemination of the study. The approach entailed an in-depth desktop review of literature and document analysis on localisation and decolonisation of humanitarian aid and long-term development work in Africa. This was followed by consultations organised along the Caritas zones in Africa taking into account language considerations.

The following six (6) Caritas zones were consulted:

- i. Association des Conférences Episcopales de Afrique Centrale (ACEAC),
- ii. Association of Episcopal Conferences of the Central African Region (ACERAC)
- iii. The Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA),
- iv. Episcopal Conferences of the Indian Ocean Islands and Madagascar (CEDOI – M),
- v. Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa Regional/Episcopal Conference of West Africa (RECOA CERAWO) and
- vi. Africa (RECOA CERAWO) and
- vii. The Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA).

The zonal consultations were conducted in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) format over Zoom. In addition to this, participants were drawn from these zones making a total of six FGDs consisting of a total 39 participants, as indicated in the table below.

Zone	Number of Participants
ACEAC	4
ACERAC	4
AMECEA	11
CEDOI-M	6
RECOWA CERAWO	8
IMBISA	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>

The sample profile of participants consisted of the following: Caritas Africa member organisations from each zone, local council of churches, local civil society organisations working in the selected zones, and religious/church leaders. In addition, 9 in-depth interviews were conducted with participants from international agencies and civil society organisations working with Caritas.

Consultation and facilitation guides in English, French and Portuguese were developed and used to collect data. Consultations were done using tailored online tools to cater for different social settings. Purposive sampling technique was adopted, as it helped to ensure that individuals with rich and diverse experiences related to the research topic were included in the study. Analysis of data was done using a simple content thematic analysis drawn from the broad parameters that emerged from the study findings.



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## 2. Conceptualising and defining localisation

Understanding the historical context of humanitarian aid and development work in Africa is crucial for understanding the shift towards localisation and decolonisation<sup>1</sup>. Traditional models of aid often operate under a top-down approach, with international organisations taking the lead in designing and implementing relief programmes. Scholars argue that the historical roots of humanitarian aid and development in Africa are tied to colonial and imperialistic practices, where the global North played a dominant role in shaping aid agendas. The localisation of aid and development in Africa has gained prominence in recent years, with a paradigm shift towards empowering local actors to take a more central role in humanitarian and development efforts, as well as to change the lingering attitudes and practices of colonialism in development work in Africa.

Localisation of aid refers to the process of shifting power, decision-making, and implementation of humanitarian and development assistance to local actors, including governments, NGOs, and local communities, with the aim of enhancing effectiveness and sustainability. There is a general consensus that a greater inclusion of local actors in humanitarian aid is an effective way to address

unequal power relations within the humanitarian sector. Localisation goes beyond mere decentralisation; it emphasises the transfer of decision-making power, resources, and responsibility to local entities. Local actors possess contextual knowledge, cultural understanding, and community trust, which are essential for effective aid delivery. Localisation entails recognising and respecting local knowledge, capacities, and leadership. In addition, the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence serve as the foundation for advocating for the localisation of aid.

There are several drivers pushing for the localisation of aid. Most of these drivers are a critique of the international humanitarian system, which is viewed as too centralised and Eurocentric. The system is viewed as too bureaucratic, with a top-down approach that overlooks local knowledge.

However, there is still no consensus on what localisation means in both theory and practice. Some scholars consider “localisation” to be a broad term referring to “all approaches to working with local actors”. The World Humanitarian Summit



Secretariat defines it as “making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as possible”. The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operation views localisation as being about empowering local actors in affected countries to take the lead in delivering humanitarian aid, as well as building the capacity and resources of local organisations to respond to humanitarian needs, thereby promoting long-term sustainability. Nonetheless, there have been increasing calls in recent years to develop context-specific definitions of localisation.

The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit is mostly remembered for advocating for the localisation of humanitarian aid. The Summit emphasised the need for the humanitarian sector to uphold universally applicable humanitarian principles and to ensure that local and national actors are “...reinforced wherever possible, backed by

*stronger regional cooperation and supported global institutions”.*

The Grand Bargain, a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to getting more resources into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action commitment to localisation, was established in May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. It calls for direct funding to local humanitarian organisations, investing in the institutional capacity of local humanitarian actors, forming more equitable partnerships, and ensuring that coordination platforms are inclusive of local humanitarian actors.

Most of the participants during the consultations for this study argued for localisation on the basis that it gives voice and power to local organisations since they have a better appreciation of the needs and contexts of their communities. A respondent with an international organisation stated the following:

*It would be giving local institutions a voice, allowing them to have a seat at the table, and actively participate in those platforms that are traditionally led by international actors and donors because they know the needs and the actual situation on the ground. They provide more input when decisions are made, whether through regional or local coordination platforms.*

During the consultations it became clear that respondents associated localisation

<sup>1</sup> The terms decolonisation and localisation are closely related and interlinked as shown by their definitions provided in this report. The terms have the same goals and objectives and thus are used interchangeably in this report.





Marceline, midwife at Caritas Kouango, providing medical education to the assembled village of Ngadza.

©Philipp Spalek

with effective aid delivery. A respondent in a zonal consultation said:

*We have to go back to sitting with the people to understand their needs. Fraternal cooperation and localisation require sitting with beneficiaries, spending time with them, and asking questions and engaging*

### 2.1. Localisation in the context of Caritas's work

The concept of localising aid and development programmes is not new to Caritas Africa. It aligns seamlessly with Caritas Africa's objectives, reflecting a commitment to community-driven, sustainable so-

lutions. Caritas Africa, as a humanitarian and development organisation rooted in Catholic values, emphasises the importance of empowering local communities to address their unique challenges. Localisation entails shifting decision-making and implementation responsibilities to the grassroots level, fostering a sense of ownership and agency among the affected populations. This approach resonates with Caritas Africa's mission to promote human dignity, social justice, and solidarity. By prioritising the involvement of local actors, Caritas Africa ensures that interventions are contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the specific needs of the communities they serve. This alignment underscores Ca-

ritas Africa's dedication to fostering genuine partnerships, fostering local capacity-building, and ultimately contributing to sustainable development across the continent. Collaboration between Caritas Africa and secular humanitarian organisations can amplify the impact of localisation efforts, as this would combine religious values with evidence-based practices. Dioceses, with their established community networks and infrastructure, serve as natural hubs for coordinating and implementing humanitarian and development initiatives, thereby ensuring a more targeted and efficient response. The intersection of localisation of humanitarian aid, international development, and fraternal cooperation, particularly as championed by Caritas Africa, presents a promising framework for more inclusive, responsive, and ethical humanitarian and development practices in Africa.

Participants in this study noted that while localisation might be new for those doing humanitarian and development work, it is not necessarily new for Caritas. Its work is founded on social teachings of the Catholic Church and there is nothing substantially different from the concept of subsidiarity. Catechism defines subsidiarity as the principle that "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good."

From the consultations it was quite apparent that respondents saw localisation as giving decision-making power and building the capacity of Caritas at the regional, national, and diocesan levels. A key informant described localisation as:

*Something that is locally- or partner-led at all different levels. For example, if working in Africa, we are looking at a situation where Caritas Africa becomes the signature of the design and implementation of programmes and projects at the African regional level. Similarly, at the national level, we envision national development partners taking the lead. In this case, the Caritas national office would be in charge of designing and driving national development processes. At the community level, we anticipate the diocesan Caritas taking charge of development processes at that level.*

It is evident from this respondent that the various levels of Caritas from the African region, cascading to the national and finally diocesan level, would represent localisation. A zonal group consultation echoed similar observations and asserted that:

*It would be ensuring that regional and national Caritas organisations can take charge of themselves and carry out humanitarian actions in these localities without depending on external aid. It would be for member organisations to be autonomous and to have the means and skills to respond and do the necessary work.*

A key informant with an international organisation concurs with the above notion and opined:

*It would be recognising, reinforcing, sustaining, and supporting the leadership role of each national Caritas in the collective humanitarian response. Thus, promoting a collective*

*commitment to strengthen local capacities at the diocesan level.*

Another respondent emphasised the need for a logical flow of communication and information channels for effective localisation. It was observed that:

*The system should have a logical flow of communication and information channels, that is from the zones, we move to the national offices. The national offices could provide services to the diocesan offices. In this system, we could capacitate each office at its level. If not, we face a problem where charity at the diocesan level is stronger than at the national level, and donors prefer to go directly to the dioceses. This weakens the network in one way or another.*

It was agreed that having a logical flow of communication and information channels helps in avoiding discordant behaviour between the Caritas national office and the diocesan office, as cited in the example of Caritas Marwa in Cameroon. It was felt that the diocesan office in Marwa has become more developed than the national level and many donors now prefer to go there directly without the knowledge of the national office. This means that communication and information channels at the national level are weakened as the national office no longer has full control over what is happening in its networks. However, it is important to note that while there is a need to have logical information flow, having a developed local diocesan office should not be viewed as negative but the ideal setup if true localisation is to occur.

Following this logic, for localisation to happen, there is a need to strengthen capacity at the national and diocesan levels as these are the levels with capacity gaps that may hinder localisation.

## 3. Defining Decolonisation

The term “decolonisation of humanitarian aid” has become topical in international development circles. The Center for Humanitarian Leadership defines it as:

*a call from many humanitarian actors for a fundamental shift in power and resources, grown out of concerns that the current international aid system is part of a colonial construct that operates on Western terms and from Western points of view, perpetuating power imbalances between the global North and global South.*

Decolonisation of aid is very provocative and sensitive issue. In essence, decolonisation of aid is a term used to describe a movement within the field of international development and humanitarian assistance that is reevaluating and restructuring the ways in which aid and assistance are provided to countries and communities in need, with a focus on addressing historical imbalances and power dynamics rooted in colonial histories.

The Peace Direct report, Time to Decolonise Aid, which outlines the findings from a global study on the colonial legacy of the aid system, notes that while “according to its original usage, ‘decolonisation’ refers to the process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it ‘independent’, practitioners point out that the term has a secondary meaning, referring also to the process of deconstructing

colonial ideologies regarding the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches”.

A key informant in this study defined decolonisation of aid as “a shift, in terms of the power dynamics between international and local actors and also resources, which are currently in place. It is also about mutual accountability and promoting true and equal partnership”.

Western perspectives and approaches rooted in colonialism can hinder humanitarian and long-term development initiatives and localisation efforts in Africa due to their potential to overlook the local context, needs, and capabilities. When Western organisations or governments support humanitarian and development efforts in Africa, they do so with a mindset shaped by their own cultural, political, and economic experiences and interests, which may inadvertently undermine the effectiveness of aid and development programmes. This can occur through various means, including imposing solutions that do not align with the local realities, disregarding the input of local communities and organisations, and perpetuating dependency rather than fostering self-sufficiency.

It is argued that the goal of decolonising aid is to adopt a more just and effective approach



in providing assistance, where the agency and dignity of the recipients are paramount. A participant in a group consultation defined decolonisation of aid as follows:

*I think the main idea for decolonisation is making sure that local partner institutions who are closest to the issues, to the challenges are able to access funding and respond to the needs on the ground since they would understand better the context and have closer relationships with the populations affected and vulnerable persons, and therefore, be able to make better decisions or provide better inputs as to how to support these different communities that are impacted.*

Decolonisation of aid involves the shifting in power dynamics from external actors to local communities and organisations while encouraging equitable partnerships, reexamining

funding models, and acknowledging and addressing historical injustices. It also advocates for cultural sensitivity in finding solutions rather than imposing solutions based solely on external perspectives.

Decolonisation, from the perspective of the Catholic Church, involves acknowledging and rectifying historical injustices, promoting self-determination for indigenous communities, and advocating for the restoration of their rights and dignity.



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# 4. Key Findings

## 4.1. Factors facilitating local leadership and localisation of aid and long-term development within Caritas Africa

### 4.1.1. Local advocacy and mobilisation

Both local and international humanitarian actors help in the process of localisation of aid. Local and national actors are effective in promoting the localisation agenda through networking, mobilisation and advocating for their own priorities. One participant highlighted the importance of:

*...continuous advocacy or training, ranging from women empowerment, and climate change emergency preparedness to local actors, and ensuring that the necessary policies in place are key for humanitarian and development localisation.*

### 4.1.2. Existing social connections, networks, and local leadership

Country-level funding arrangements that incorporate national NGO leadership or co-leadership can be an effective means to enable a prompt humanitarian response. Existing social connections and networks play a crucial role in facilitating local leadership, localisation, and decolonisation of aid in Africa. Local and national actors also capitalise on existing social connections and networks in their response to disasters. Local leaders and commu-

nities are better equipped to understand the unique needs and contexts of their regions and can tailor aid efforts to address these needs effectively. By leveraging existing social connections and networks, aid efforts can be more targeted, efficient, and culturally appropriate. According to study participants, this approach also empowers local communities and promotes their ownership of development processes, leading to more sustainable outcomes. Study respondents also highlighted that they are working with various stakeholders, including local leadership and social groups, to address humanitarian interventions. It was observed that these interventions were key in promoting awareness and collective action among community members.

### 4.1.3. Progressive international actors

Some international actors, such as the Red Cross and United Nations agencies, have shifted from direct implementation to investing in local partner capacity over the long-term, a move that promotes local leadership, local governance, and sustainability. While this may be a result of international commitments and donor policies, it is the pro-activeness of such actors that makes the localisation agenda possible. Caritas was commended for its unique approach in this regard, as one respondent highlighted:

*...that we have local resources from the national Caritas members' organisation and Caritas at the diocesan level. It is unique to the Caritas Confederation to help maintain this presence at every grassroots level and to be part of the community.*

One participant noted:

*A factor that enables localisation of humanitarian aid and leadership is international organisations supporting local non-governmental organizations, not only giving them grants but supporting them to have power and institutional capacities, ranging from human resources, finance, equipment, and ICT.*

### 4.1.4. Progressive donor policies

Progressive international donor policies are those that promote equitable partnerships and that take ethical and geopolitical factors into consideration. Progressive policies can prioritise the participation of local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring that their needs and perspectives are taken into account. For example, the study participants highlighted that UNHCR is making efforts and is currently working on a localisation framework. One participant also highlighted that:

*there were other assisting frameworks like core humanitarian standards that commit organisations to work with local development organisations. Core humanitarian standards have guidelines, and indicators. Additionally, there was a non-governmental organisation consultation to gather input and feedback from both international and local NGOs on what this potential localisation framework could look like. It was also reported that IOM had announced that they were working on a localisation framework.*

These initiatives and policies can help to address the power imbalance that often exists between international aid organisations and local communities. In addition, progressive policies can invest in building the capacity of local organisations and institutions, enabling them to take on more leadership roles in aid delivery and decision-making. This can help to reduce dependence on external aid and promote sustainable development.

### 4.1.5. Pooled funds

Country-based pooled funds are effective ways of sending money to local actors. As some participants noted, the development of pooled funds in Africa helps to facilitate local leadership, localisation, and decolonisation of aid by allowing local organisations to have more control and decision-making power over the use of funds. According to one participant:

*Pooled funds bring together resources from multiple donors, which can then be allocated to local organisations based on their needs and priorities. This approach empowers local leaders to address issues specific to their communities, promotes the localisation of aid efforts, and reduces dependency on external actors.*

By decentralising decision-making and funding allocation, pooled funds support the decolonisation of aid in Africa, enabling a more sustainable and community-driven approach to development. In addition, the development of pooled funds enables the process of localisation as it helps international donor agencies to overcome some of their challenges in getting funds to local actors.



#### 4.1.6. Humanitarian access

Humanitarian access challenges in Africa have led to a shift towards empowering local leadership, promoting localisation, and decolonising aid efforts. Study participants highlighted that these challenges have forced international humanitarian organisations to work more closely with local communities and organisations, allowing for the development of local leadership in addressing crises. Some of these contexts include armed conflicts, natural disasters, climate change, pandemics such as Ebola and COVID-19, and even lack of physical access due to cyclones, among other disasters. Studies in Somalia and South Sudan have shown that humanitarian response has no option but to rely on local actors because international actors cannot access the population or do not live where the affected communities are located. In addition, as another participant noted:

*...during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, local community leaders played a crucial role in educating and mobilising their communities to prevent the spread of the disease.*

By engaging with local actors, aid efforts become more tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the affected populations, leading to a more effective and sustainable response. Furthermore, this shift contributes to the decolonisation of aid by reducing dependency on external assistance and empowering local entities to take ownership of relief and development initiatives. Additionally, these challenges can prompt international aid organisations to recognise the importance of em-

powering and partnering with local actors, thereby promoting the localisation of aid efforts.

#### 4.2. Factors hindering local leadership and localisation of aid in Africa

Despite the recognition of the importance of empowering local actors in improving the relevance, efficiency, and the positive impact of humanitarian aid, operationalising the localisation agenda has its own challenges. Many structures in the international humanitarian system still have features that exclude local actors. Local actors continue to experience a lack of access to funding, coordination, and partnership mechanisms. Furthermore, there are also unequal power relations within the humanitarian aid system that tend to favour the status quo, which can be racist and neo-colonialist. These barriers are interconnected as they reinforce each other. As such, it becomes mandatory not to address these barriers in isolation.

##### 4.2.1. Structural barriers

Structural barriers hinder local leadership, localisation, and decolonisation of aid in Africa in several ways. The dominant paradigm of aid delivery is top-down, with donor countries and international organisations setting the agenda and determining the priorities for aid distribution. This can marginalise local leaders and communities, who may have a better understanding of the specific needs and context of their communities.

##### i. Limited quantity and quality of funding

Respondents observed that limited quantity and quality of funding directed at local actors is both an outcome of and barrier to localisation because the local actors cannot attract and retain quality staff. As such, the aid industry is often characterised by a “brain drain” effect, where local leaders and experts are lured away to work for international organisations or donor countries, leading to a loss of local talent and expertise. In some cases, local actors fail to access funding because the international donors have limited capacity to administer small grants that benefit local actors.

Moreover, international donors have continued to uphold unequal subcontracting partnership models. While the existing funding modalities within the Caritas confederation, particularly the emergency appeal system, comprise a fast and efficient tool for Caritas members to access funding, operational members often face challenges in covering their administrative costs.

A participant highlighted this point by saying:

*In the context of the Seychelles, the problem with leadership is that we are all working in partnership with Caritas, and there are practically no full-time workers. A hindering factor is that we are a little low in terms of funding, making it a bit difficult to pay a full-time worker. It is a bit difficult because you have to do your job full-time along with Caritas work.*

Another participant from South Sudan raised the same sentiments, saying:

*We are not able to get the funding that we need to respond to emergencies and maybe to do other projects in different areas. There is really not enough support for the national Caritas to be able to do its work and to operate well.*

Without sustained financial support, local organisations struggle to attract and retain qualified professionals, which undermines the long-term resilience and self-reliance of affected communities. Therefore, addressing the financial challenges is paramount to building a more sustainable and impactful humanitarian response at the local level.

##### ii. Top-down approach

Structural barriers give way to a top-down approach that does not leave any room for local partners to make their own independent decisions. As one participant noted:

*This has gone on to create an inferiority complex where some local people and leadership think that if it comes from the outside, it is good, and some people no longer imagine that we can live without help.*

The impact of an inferiority complex on localisation efforts as a result of these structural barriers is significant. It can lead to a disregard for local knowledge systems and practices, hindering the integration of indigenous solutions into development initiatives. Furthermore, the lack of confidence in local capacities may deter investment in local organisations and humanitarian initiatives, perpe-



growth but also undermines the sustainability of development and humanitarian efforts in Africa.

Moreover, due to structural challenges, local actors cannot access coordination systems and international decision-making bodies. This poses a barrier to the localisation of humanitarian and development aid as most decisions are taken by Western international actors who have greater access to the coordination system. One respondent noted that:

*...the expectations and requirements that are provided around aid flow is based on a Western perspective. It is based on the expectations of certain governments structures, financial management systems, things being in place and sometimes it makes the requirements difficult or challenging for small organisations to reach.*

#### 4.2.2. Power dynamics

Entrenched interests of international actors make it difficult to realise the agenda of decolonising humanitarian aid. As some participants observed, this results in some international partners executing the local projects themselves. For example, participants in a group noted that in some regions:

National Caritas organisations are competing with local diocesan Caritas. We need to emphasise the need for greater mutual accountability and respect for the Caritas local leadership and ensure that they do not compete for resources with the national Caritas.

However, another participant noted that sometimes funders tend to take the structure of Caritas at the national and diocesan level as complex and expensive, which in some ins-

tances presents challenges in how funds are disbursed and at various levels. The participant remarked that:

One of the funding partners I once travelled around with told me that we don't work with the national office. We work with the local offices. This is a big problem now. To them, they are saying that this is the localisation providing support to the local institutions. So, I was saying, but the national office is also a local institution. So, this is the problem that is there. The challenge the partners put forward is that the national office is an expensive stratum. They say that getting money to go to the national office of the diocese will cost a lot of money in terms of administration.

In line with this point, the research shows that some international actors consider localisation as a factor that may negatively affect their power and privilege within the humanitarian and international development system. "Self-preservation" of international actors poses a hindrance to localisation. International actors have also undermined local capacity, for example, by nationalising international non-governmental organisations such that they can source funds nationally while the international actors still retain the privilege of receiving foreign funds.



#### 4.2.3. Capacity issues

According to the African Union Strategic Framework for Capacity Development in Africa 2019, capacity building is a process of enabling individuals, groups, organisations, institutions, and societies to sustainably define, articulate, engage, and actualise their vision or developmental goals, building on their own resources and learning in the context of a pan-African para-

digm. One participant highlighted that:

*In the context of the localisation of humanitarian and long-term development aid, capacity building refers to the process of enhancing the abilities, skills, and resources of local actors at various levels to effectively respond to emergencies and provide sustainable solutions to community needs.*

Another respondent remarked that:

*At the diocesan level, capacity building involves strengthening the organisational and operational capacities of local Caritas branches, enabling them to take a more active role in disaster response, recovery, and long-term development initiatives. This includes training local staff and volunteers, establishing robust communication systems, and fostering collaboration with other partners.*



However, in most cases, the term “capacity” is defined by international actors from the global North. Thus, capacity ends up mirroring the global North’s standards, which emphasise administrative and financial management abilities and reporting “upwards”. This was highlighted by one of the participants:

*Our very own capacity features, which are usually associated with local actors such as local knowledge, language, culture, and the ability to get access to complex environments, are often sidelined.*

Research participants agreed that there is a broad perception among international humanitarian organisations that local actors have limited capacity in several areas, ranging from administration to technical capacity. Most of these claims are not backed by evidence and may be influenced by racist and neocolonial prejudices.

In addition, there is ineffective capacity building of local actors as the elements are often designed and delivered by international actors who are not privy of the needs and context of the local actors and may not even have the capacity to

deliver. Research participants also agreed that:

*We are a little low in terms of funding that is why it is a bit difficult to pay a full-time worker. The international organisations are not willing to put resources towards capacity building for local organizations because the minute you play an implementing partner role you do not get access to funds beyond the project, which means when the project ends so does your engagement.*

This points to a lack of funding to support local capacity building. The impact of limited funding for capacity building for localisation efforts is profound. Local organisations are unable to develop the expertise and resources required to tailor programmes and interventions to the unique cultural, social, and economic contexts within their communities. As a result, the effectiveness and sustainability of localised initiatives are compromised, hindering the overall progress of localisation efforts in Africa.

For Caritas, engaging with other partners, such as governmental and non-governmental organisations, helps create a collaborative network

that shares knowledge and resources. This approach aligns with the principles of local ownership and empowerment as it enables local entities to play a central role in shaping and implementing humanitarian strategies, ultimately fostering sustainability and resilience in the face of crises.

#### 4.2.4. Communication issues

Research participants also highlighted that there were challenges regarding lack of clear communication between and among members and international partners. As one international respondent noted:

*There is a lack of communication, and often this lack of communication is not good. Our understanding is that there is a fear of what we can and cannot say. Communication is precisely to know, anticipate because we also have donors who also demand us too. Without good communication, we have a problem.*

It is important to highlight that without effective communication, local leaders may not be aware of the resources and support available to them

and may not be able to access the training and capacity-building opportunities that they need to effectively lead their communities. Secondly, lack of communication can lead to a lack of ownership and buy-in from local leaders and communities, which can undermine the effectiveness of aid efforts. Finally, without a strong communication strategy, it can be difficult to ensure that localisation and decolonisation efforts are well-coordinated and aligned with the needs and priorities of the local community.

#### 4.2.5. Perceptions of risk

The perception that local actors have a limited ability to manage funds properly and uphold humanitarian principles has led to the widespread belief that providing direct and huge funding to local actors is inherently high-risk. This perception is mainly peddled by global North organisations and donors in the humanitarian sector who at times want to maintain control of financial resources in order to influence the process of development. The result is that compliance requirements for funding, managing, executing, and reporting on humanitarian projects are quite high and the timelines can be quite tight, even to the point of not considering the operational context. Local actors have often observed that the level of scrutiny levelled on them by international donors is much higher than that levelled on international actors. One respondent argued:

*Despite the negative stereotypes surrounding Africans' perceived capacity to manage funds, it is crucial to recognise the multitude of areas where individuals from the continent excel, aligning with Caritas Africa's vision of*

*promoting the localisation of humanitarian aid and long-term development plans. Africans have consistently demonstrated resilience, innovation, and a deep sense of community. Their ability to effectively mobilise resources, foster social cohesion, and implement grassroots initiatives speaks to their capacity for sustainable development.*

#### 4.2.5. Contextual challenges

##### i. Poor governance

While national governments are viewed as important actors in the localisation of humanitarian aid, repressive, corrupt, or weak national governments are an obstacle to localisation processes. Corrupt governments can politicise aid, while repressive ones may simply enforce restrictive policies that make it difficult for humanitarian actors to operate. Weak governments may not have the required technical capacity to promote humanitarian work. When civil war broke out in Ethiopia, for example, the federal government blocked supply of humanitarian aid from getting into Tigray and there were reports that the humanitarian aid was being heavily politicised, with aid actors accused of partiality by both the government and its opponents. Poor governance can hinder localisation efforts. One participant observed that:

*another hindering factor to localisation is the mis-governance that characterises the present African state. If we come out of this mis-governance, I believe things will change.*

This mismanagement leads to a lack of accountability and trust in local institutions, making it difficult for aid organisations to work



©Philipp Spalek / Benjamin Kossi from Caritas Kouango visits the Association of Muslim Women Victims of Gender-Based Violence. / Central African Republic

*is becoming very critical in one or two dioceses now.*

The complex political, social, and economic structures within African countries can create challenges for humanitarian organisations and local actors seeking to provide aid and support to communities in need. Sometimes, conflicts within affected communities and between the affected communities and the host community can hinder the effective delivery of aid. For example, one participant from Uganda highlighted that:

*Due to political conflicts in the neighbouring countries, we have been able to host quite a number of refugees in Uganda. And definitely, there are quite a number of problems that we have been able to realise in that refugee context. There is inadequate food and low protection for the refugees in terms of tribal conflicts within the refugee settlement and also between the refugees and host communities. Whereas they are living in the refugee settlements in Uganda, there are instances where these people have conflicted among themselves and also with the host communities.*

directly with local communities and governments to address their specific needs. Additionally, poor governance often results in political instability and conflict, further complicating the efforts to localise aid and provide sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by African communities.

## ii. Instability

Participants noted that insecure environments, such as war-torn countries and areas controlled by rebels, pose a barrier to localisation. In order to reduce risk to their staff, international actors should partner with local actors on the ground. One participant explained that:

*Here in South Sudan, lacking peace is one of the challenges that we have. At some point, we had to suspend our operations due to instability in the country. And since that time of crisis, the team has been scattered, and people have been fleeing to different parts of the country for safety; some are out of the country, which has had a negative effect on our programming. It is becoming difficult in some areas to travel and work because, at our site, the security situation*

# 5. Recommendations

## 5.1. Possible practical steps to localisation and fraternal cooperation

### i. National and diocesan level

#### a. Power-sharing and decision-making

National Caritas should prioritise power-sharing and decision-making with local communities. This means involving them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of aid projects. Local communities should have a say in determining their own needs and the strategies to address them. Decentralisation of power and decision-making at the local level will allow for appropriate solutions to be implemented because, as a participant observed:

*...the challenge we have with any international organisations is that they might want to import something from their headquarters and want to operationalise it at a diocese like in Chinhoyi where context is quite different.*

The power-sharing and decision-making model can easily overcome such challenges. This should not be a problem for the bishops at all, since this falls in line with the church's doctrine of subsidiarity, which according to Catholic traditions as expounded by Pope Pius XI, refers to a "situation which ensures that power, decisions, and responsibility are carried out to the lowest level at which they can

be properly exercised". This principle maintains that higher levels of authority should only intervene when the lower levels are unable to accomplish a task as well or as efficiently.

#### b. Strengthening local capacities

Effort should be placed on investing in building the capacity of local organisations and individuals. This includes providing training, resources, and technical support to empower local actors to take charge of their own development initiatives. By strengthening local capacities, Caritas can ensure sustainable and locally led interventions. One of the participants stated that:

*We do not localise in a situation where the entity we want to localise is weak...if they want to make this a reality then they need to strengthen the capacity of the Caritas offices. Localisation and decolonisation do not happen in a vacuum. Caritas Africa needs to come up with relevant tools to assist that process.*

Another participant further added:

*We need to strengthen the systems so that we can account for the resources and monitor and evaluate the impact that we are making.*



### c. Partnerships, collaboration, and coordination

Caritas Africa should actively encourage partnerships and collaborations between national and diocesan Caritas, local organisations, community leaders, and grassroots initiatives. This fosters a more inclusive and participatory approach, where local knowledge, expertise, and networks are valued and integrated into the decision-making process. The case for effective partnerships and collaboration was raised by a participant, who stated that:

*Practically, there is a need to come up with a strategy for systematic learning from those organisations that are already practicing localisation.*

Another added that:

*It would be important that the regional Caritas Africa strengthen its coordination role. Caritas Africa should be seen as a leader in supporting the local country-specific Caritas.*

The Empowering Partner Organizations Working on Emergency Responses (EMPOWER) project that started in America and the Caribbean region is a great model to replicate in other regions because it utilises the localisation committees that emphasise the importance of fraternal cooperation. EMPOWER promotes the leadership of humanitarian response by local organisations that have nationwide coverage. It is an approach that is guided by the institutional and programmatic priorities identified within the organisations.

### ii. Regional and national Caritas organisations

#### a. Resource allocation at regional and national levels

Regional and national Caritas should prioritise resource allocation that supports local initiatives. This means directing funding, materials, and technical assistance towards locally-identified priorities and projects. It also involves ensuring that financial resources are accessible to local organisations, which can reduce their dependency on external funding. As one respondent noted:

*There is a need to shift the purse so that the decision around what needs to be done, how and where and by who at local level is with the local actors... Caritas Africa needs to build capacity of national offices in resource mobilisation to enable them access funding from partners. Also, Caritas Africa should take a role in linking dioceses to partners.*

Linking local partners with donors and building their capacity in resource mobilisation is crucial for Caritas Africa in promoting the devolution of power and achieving the localisation of humanitarian and development aid. Traditional donor funding models need revision for equitable allocation, shifting from short-term project-based funding to multi-year flexible arrangements.

### b. Advocacy and policy influence

Caritas Africa should engage in advocacy efforts to promote policies and practices that support decolonisation and localisation of aid. This includes advocating for changes in funding mechanisms, policies, and practices that empower local communities and prioritise their agency in decision-making processes. According to one participant:

*There is a need for Caritas Africa to do some advocacy work with funding partners despite some funding partners being hesitant to go the localisation route so that they gain confidence that the funds that they are giving are being used for the intended purpose.*

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### iii. Funding Partners

#### a. Cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding

Funding partners should prioritise cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding in their approaches. This involves recognising and respecting local customs, traditions, and ways of life. It also means adapting interventions to fit the specific social, economic, and environmental contexts of the communities

being served. One of participants referred to this as the need:

to involve the community in everything that we do and to try and understand how the community works at the base.

International actors should learn from local contexts. Emphasising contextual understanding enables international actors to learn from the experiences of local responders who possess valuable knowledge about their community's dynamics, culture, social structures, and vulnerabilities. Engaging actively with these perspectives can enhance programme effectiveness.

### 5.2. Possible role of national Caritas

In the pursuit of fostering a more localised, sustainable, and community-centric approach to aid, national Caritas can consider the following recommendations:

**Engage in active listening:** Prioritise the voices and perspectives of local communities and partners. The national Caritas directors need to initiate country fora at their level and invite locally based CIMOs for discussions to start the listening process and local ownership. These fora can provide platforms for dialogue and for local actors to express their needs and aspirations without external influence. This entails establishing mechanisms for ongoing feedback and ensuring that community input is a central element in decision-making processes.

**Capacity building:** Invest in building the skills and capabilities of local organisations and individuals to lead and manage aid programmes effectively. This involves developing tailored training programmes, providing resources, and facilitating knowledge-sharing platforms to empower local actors in their developmental initiatives.

**Local leadership:** Ensure that local leaders are at the forefront of decision-making processes and that they have the authority to guide aid initiatives in their communities. Embrace the principle of subsidiarity, allowing decisions to be made at the most effective and local level.

**Partnership approach:** Develop equitable partnerships with local entities, treating them as collaborators rather than as beneficiaries. Foster a collaborative ethos that recognises the value of local knowledge and expertise, which will help in creating a more inclusive and participatory approach to aid.

**Cultural sensitivity:** Respect and incorporate local customs, traditions, and knowledge systems into aid programmes. Tailor interventions to align with the specific social, economic, and environmental contexts of the communities being served, promoting cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

**Transparency and accountability:** Be transparent about the sources and uses of aid funds and be accountable to both donors and the communities served. This involves open communication with stakeholders regarding the financial aspects of aid

programmes and ensuring clarity and trust in the allocation and utilisation of resources.



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**Long-term commitment:** Focus on sustainable development rather than short-term relief. Support long-term goals that are set by the communities themselves. This requires a shift in perspective from immediate needs to enduring solutions, aligning aid efforts with the broader developmental aspirations of the local communities.

**Diversify funding:** Encourage and facilitate access to diverse funding sources for local organisations to reduce dependency on international aid. This involves exploring alternative funding models and establishing mechanisms that enable local entities to access financial resources independently. In addition, when funding is diverse and sufficient, Caritas is able to retain competent staff, pay them well and hence able to maintain required capacity at the local level.

**Policy advocacy:** Advocate for policies supporting local communities' rights and capacities to lead their development. Engage in strategic advocacy efforts at the local, national, regional, and international levels to influence policies that empower and prioritise local ownership and control over aid initiatives.

**Reflective practice:** Continuously reflect on and evaluate the impact of aid work and be open to learning and adapting approaches based on feedback from local stakeholders. Implement a reflective practice that involves regular assessments, learning from successes and challenges, and making informed adjustments to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of aid programmes.



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### 5.3. Possible role of bishops

An analysis of the responsibilities assigned to bishops overseeing Caritas reveals that their role is intended to advance both local leadership and fraternal cooperation in the context of decolonisation or localisation. It is important to note that while the church may employ terminology that differs slightly from that commonly used in the humanitarian sector and international development, the essence of its mission aligns with the principles of empowering local communities and fostering collaborative efforts. While analysing the role of bishops, it is important to remember that they are pastors and not Caritas managers. To fully decolonise and localise aid and long-term development, Catholic bishops can play a pivotal role by taking the following strategic steps:





### Setting the tone or taking the lead

Bishops are expected to create a diocesan branch of Caritas and oversee its operations and growth. They should provide clear leadership and set the tone and direction for the decolonisation and localisation agenda, setting policies that guide partner organisations and advocate for local approaches. As mentioned by participants in the group discussions:

*The role of the bishops is to provide an environment conducive for cooperation between partners and stakeholders because they have the power to invite the partner to the country and tell them this is the way we want you to operate, and once they do, the partners will likely oblige.*

Another participant mentioned that:

*Bishops should act as the localisation agenda...as part of the synodal process, then we are likely to have some substantial steps towards localisation.*

*Bishops should encourage autonomy for entities like Caritas by releasing some control, allowing them to operate more independently.*

### Fostering partnerships with local communities

Bishops play a crucial role in involving local communities in decision-making processes, and in ensuring that aid initiatives align with their priorities. They raise awareness and bridge the gap between local fraternal cooperation and Catholic social teachings. Bishops also have the power to address power imbalances between international actors and local responders, fostering equitable partnerships, and challenging dominant narratives that undermine local knowledge and leadership, as entailed in the principal of subsidiarity.

### Supporting local capacity building

Sustainable partnerships involve investing in local responders' capacity to respond to emergencies and build resilience. This involves providing training, resources, technical support, and long-term funding for sustainable development. Bishops can contribute by dedicating resources to strengthen local entities and individuals, enabling them to address humanitarian needs effectively. This includes implementing training initiatives, providing resources, and facilitating knowledge-sharing platforms. As one participant noted:

*Bishops' involvement in advocacy efforts ensures veffective collaboration with national*



*and local entities, and their role extends to advocating for capacity-building considerations in interactions with donors and government agencies.*

### Advocating for policy changes

Bishops can play a crucial role in advocating and contributing to policy changes that promote the localisation and decolonisation of humanitarian aid at the regional level in Africa, a cause championed by Caritas Africa. As

influential spiritual leaders deeply embedded within local communities, bishops possess the moral authority to amplify the voices of the marginalised and vulnerable. They can use their platforms to engage with policymakers, urging them to prioritise locally led initiatives and ensure that aid efforts are sensitive to the unique cultural and socio-economic contexts of the regions they serve.

Bishops can foster collaboration between religious institutions, non-governmental organi-



sations, and governmental bodies, creating a united front for policy advocacy. Additionally, their pastoral care role allows them to directly witness the impact of aid interventions on the ground, providing them with valuable insights to inform policy recommendations. By leveraging their moral authority, facilitating collaboration, and offering firsthand perspectives, bishops can significantly contribute to the development and implementation of policies that advance the goals of localising and decolonising humanitarian aid in Africa. According to a participant:

*Bishops are instrumental in supporting the "policy of change and development", emphasising the necessity to reform and professionalise the operations of church developmental arms.*

One participant contended that this is critical for the success of the decolonisation and localisation discourse. This further underscores that bishops, as leaders of the church and its structures at the diocesan level, should actively engage in understanding local realities and championing processes that advocate for relevant systems tailored to their specific localities. Recognising the comprehensive influence and authority vested in bishops, it is opportune for them to wield their power to drive meaningful change in the pursuit of decolonisation and localisation. The Bishops at the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) level can do effective advocacy at the African Union level and those at the zonal level can do the same at that level, through SADC and ECOWAS, among others.

## Collaborating with other stakeholders

Bishops should collaborate with like-minded individuals and organisations with influence, emphasising the idea that no one operates in isolation. As one participant noted:

*Bishops can play a crucial role in ensuring effective coordination among international civil society organisations and their collaboration with national entities.*

Bishops, according to another participant:

*possess the potential to engage in collaborative efforts with a spectrum of organisations, both local and international, fostering the exchange of best practices, resources, and experiences.*

Such collaborative endeavors contribute to establishing a more inclusive and well-coordinated approach to aid, preventing redundancy, and ensuring that initiatives complement each other. This advocacy for collaborative action aligns with the principles outlined in Article 12 of the Motu Proprio, emphasising that diocesan bishops should actively promote collaboration between national and international charitable organisations under their care. The call for collaboration thus becomes not just a practical necessity but a directive rooted in established principles, emphasising the interconnectedness and collective responsibility within the charitable landscape overseen by bishops. In addition, bishops at national and international levels can collaborate with like-minded faith-based actors like the ACT Alliance, the Ecumenical Council, and the Red Crescent, among others.

## Encouraging sustainable development

Bishops are responsible for promoting sustainable development practices that foster self-reliance in local communities. They endorse initiatives in education, healthcare, agriculture, and economic empowerment. According to the teachings of Benedict XVI in 2012, as church leaders, they ensure the faithful execution of the church's mission, including promoting and supervising charitable activities, particularly the Caritas branch. This aligns with the church's vision of empowering local communities to cultivate self-sufficiency. One respondent said:

*Bishops play a multifaceted role in steering the church's charitable endeavors towards impactful and sustainable outcomes. They should also monitor the aspirations of fraternal cooperation to ensure they align with the church's vision.*

By implementing the above changes, Caritas can move towards a more locally driven approach, embracing decolonisation and localisation in its ways of working. This will ensure that aid efforts are responsive, sustainable, and respectful of the agency and dignity of the communities being served.

By incorporating these recommendations into its operational framework, Caritas can make significant strides toward a more community-driven, sustainable, and respectful approach to humanitarian efforts. These steps not only align with the principles of decolonisation and localisation but also contribute to the empowerment and dignity of local communities.



*Kevin Mandakone, head of the mobile clinic, during a consultation in the village of Toko Kotta / Central African Republic*



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