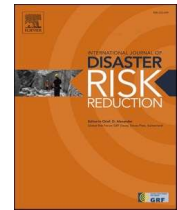




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“International humanitarian organizations’ perspectives on localization efforts”

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ABSTRACT

The humanitarian sector has formulated a collective strategic intent to localize. This involves delegating responsibilities and transferring capacities and resources to national and local actors. However, progress is slower than expected. Strategy execution is hard, and translating a general strategic intent to the actual way humanitarian organizations operate is not obvious. To suggest remedies for the slow progress, this paper investigates drivers and barriers for international humanitarian organizations (IHOs) to localize their logistics preparedness capacities. It is essential to understand IHOs’ perspectives as they are global and powerful actors in the humanitarian sector and by far represent the largest recipients of donor funds. We focus on logistics since it constitutes key activities of strong local contextual character, such as procurement, warehousing, and transport. By interviewing practitioners from a representative set of large IHOs, and connecting the empirical insights with relevant theory, we unravel reasons that hinder localization. These include IHOs’ strategic choices due to context-sensitive benefits of localization, mandated expectations on IHOs, the lack of internal drivers for IHOs to localize, and resistance to localize due to IHOs’ desire and motives for continued engagement in humanitarian aid. Based on these insights, actionable propositions are developed to help accelerate progress toward localization.

1. Introduction

Capacity development in disaster-prone countries has long been regarded as key in international development and disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts (e.g., Ref. [1]: [2–4]). Supported in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015–2030, most DRR studies argue for a bottom-up approach with capacity development processes owned by national and local actors and supported by international actors (see, e.g., Refs. [1–3,5]). Capacity development is also increasingly emphasized by international humanitarian organizations (IHOs) under the label localization, which aims at empowering national and local actors in humanitarian aid. The rationales for localization are both ideological and practical [6]. Besides being considered “the right thing to do”, localization is considered essential to increase the global response capacity with numerous advantages highlighted in the

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literature. First, national and local actors are already in place to begin a response immediately [7]. Second, national and local actors have capacity and indigenous knowledge that IHOs often overlook [8]. This, combined with the financial argument of using national and local actors [9], provides a potential for a more efficient and effective response. Third, national and local actors stay after the immediate disaster response, enabling a better bridging between response and recovery [7,10]. Their understanding of local traditions, norms and values would also make response and recovery more culturally appropriate and sustainable [11]. Fourth, national and local organizations may have more legitimacy in the crisis-affected areas and are more trusted by other local actors [12]. Finally, localization is argued to make disaster-affected countries more independent and resilient, which could decrease the need for international funding [9].

Localization particularly gained traction after the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, which committed a majority of IHOs and donors to “enable more locally-led response”. For example, 25% of international humanitarian response funding should be directly donated to national and local responders [13]. As such, localization is a declared strategic intent of the humanitarian world and represents a top-down approach where IHOs and donors transfer capacities and resources and focus on complementarity to national and local actors [14–16].

Despite the widely acknowledged role of national and local actors in DRR and humanitarian aid, the practical implementation – execution – of localization is lagging. Jessica Alexander, Policy Editor at The New Humanitarian [17], notes: “Five years after the Grand Bargain – as it came to be called – was negotiated at the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, momentum has slowed. ‘There’s nothing grand about the progress that’s been made,’ is how one group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) put it”. Two vice presidents of Care Canada (2021) add: “Despite our commitments to localization and partnership, we, like many of our peers, have been slow to change, stubbornly holding onto power and resources in the Global North and accepting donor requirements that are both archaic and inherently problematic in the name of organizational survival”. A multitude of reports reach similar conclusions: “While there are many laudable small examples of change, a lot remains to be done. Overall progress remains slow, and there is little evidence of structural or systemic change” [9]; “Further progress is needed to ensure that local agencies are empowered to respond without international support” [18]; “Change is happening, but slowly, since fundamental blockages in the system have not been addressed” [19].

To explain the slow change, research has pointed to a range of challenges both on the local level (e.g., project conditionalities, short-termism, and capacity retention) and on the international-community level (e.g., misguided accountability, quixotic control, and power imbalances) [2,4]. Addressing these challenges requires the entire humanitarian community to strive for local capacity development. However, recent studies conclude this is not yet the case (e.g., Refs. [20,21]). Specifically scrutinizing IHOs, Frennesson et al. [22] conclude that there is little evidence of strong execution of the localization strategy. Instead, most IHO representatives opt for centralizing decision-making authority and capacities at their internal HQ or consider decentralizing capacities to their own local offices only. That is, they augment internal structures rather than external national and local actors’ capacities. The authors also point at the inherent difficulties of strategy execution, as known from strategy literature. Suggesting remedies for the slow progress, therefore, requires an understanding of the IHOs’ main drivers and barriers to localization.

Accordingly, this study aims to understand better *why IHOs are slow to implement the localization strategy*, supporting *the transfer of capacities and resources to national and local actors*. We focus on logistics localization since logistics constitute key activities of strong local contextual character, such as procurement, warehousing, and transport. This contribution is important for two key reasons. First, while the strategic intent is on a sector level, the strategy execution is on the organizational level, and IHOs have considerable influence in the aid sector. Despite the Grand Bargain goals, the majority of international humanitarian response funding still goes to IHOs, with only 1.2% directly reaching national and local actors in 2021 [23]. Without adequate funding and decision-making power, national and local actors’ ability to effectively drive capacity development processes is severely limited (see, e.g., Ref. [24]). Thus, to make real progress on the localization agenda, it is key to understand IHOs’ strategic intentions and rationale. Successful local capacity development demands that IHOs “let go” of power and control [2,14,24]. Second, by unraveling barriers for IHOs, it is possible to suggest remedies that can advance national and local capacity development for DRR. Unraveling justified (and sometimes less justified) resistance against localization is necessary to understand how blockages can be removed by appropriate action. Thus, this paper aims to turn challenges into ideas and incentives and to suggest positive, concrete action to accelerate localization and make the non-trivial move from strategic intent to strategy execution. We do so by 1) conducting an inductive, exploratory study based on qualitative interviews and literature and 2) putting forward actionable propositions to help accelerate progress toward localization.

2. Methodology

This study is part of a larger research project. The first part of the project, reported in Frennesson et al. [22]; focused on operationalizing localization and identifying what progress IHOs have made to localize logistics preparedness capacities. It describes the current state of affairs. The second part, reported in this paper, focuses on explaining why progress has been slow in IHOs, aiming to suggest remedies for faster execution of the localization strategy.

This exploratory study focuses on humanitarian logistics and supply chain management, which concerns the planning, management, and physical distribution of relief items and services. In particular, we consider logistics preparedness capacities, which are essential to facilitate faster and more effective mobilization of resources in disaster response [25]. These capacities embrace a wide

range of resources and activities such as stockpiles and warehousing; setting up Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), policies, routines, and systems; knowledge about activities connected to procurement and framework agreements; assessing logistics needs/-gaps; educating and retaining human resources; and information exchange and coordination [22,25]. Logistics constitutes up to 80% of disaster response costs, including the value of purchased items [26,27], and, depending on the location and type of the disaster, each dollar invested in logistics preparedness is estimated to save between 2.3 and 13.2 dollars in disaster response [28]. Logistics preparedness capacities are therefore essential at the local level [29], making it a natural area for investigation, especially since logistics preparedness clearly benefits from intricate knowledge of the local context. While we focus on logistics preparedness, more general drivers and barriers to localization emerged during the study and are thus included in the analysis.

2.1. Selection and description of the organizations included in the study

With the aim of exploring localization from the perspective of the IHO community, we conducted an inductive study using qualitative interviews as the primary data source. Exploratory and inductive studies commonly build on qualitative data, and methodology researchers acknowledge its importance when studying *little-researched phenomena* (e.g., Refs. [30,31]). Localization of logistics preparedness capacities fits that description, given its novelty in scientific research. Qualitative interviews provided the opportunity to acquire in-depth information based on the respondents' perceptions and experiences [32,33]. Empirical data was collected through 28 semi-structured interviews with experienced humanitarian professionals working for 12 large, global IHOs (of Western origin) to capture different perspectives, see Table 1.

The 12 organizations constitute a representative set of IHOs and a large part of the total humanitarian aid contributions. Analyzing data for the most affected countries in 2021 (Yemen, Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and South Sudan), the 12 selected IHOs received approximately 5 billion US\$, corresponding to over 50% of the funding (<https://fts.unocha.org/>). Furthermore, applying selection criteria [34], a desirable diversity was achieved with a spread in mandates and products/services delivered. Various attitudes to the sector-wide localization agenda are present, with ten out of 12 IHOs having signed the Grand Bargain, the two exceptions being MSF and SOS. The selected IHOs, all considering logistics as an essential part of their operations, represent the three main IHO types: UN agencies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The UN's prime attention is on host governments and providing support where needed [35]. Differing on the balance between humanitarianism and politics, INGOs are commonly divided into Dunantist, Wilsonian, and faith-based organizations [36–39]. Dunantist organizations, such as MSF, following the footsteps of Henry Dunant, strongly emphasize the humanitarian principles and a clear departure from politics. Wilsonian organizations, such as CARE and World Vision International (WVI), are rooted in the historical tendency to combine humanitarianism with US foreign policy objectives [36]. WVI is also (together with, e.g., Catholic Relief Services and Caritas) recognized as a faith-based organization. While these combine humanitarianism with their religious values, they claim not to impose them on their beneficiaries [38]. Finally, the IFRC has a unique mandate of being auxiliary to the governments while remaining independent [40]. In our analysis and discussion, we refer to IHOs as internal actors and all other actors as external. The latter include, for example, local NGOs, host governments, and the private sector. We do this to *show the clear IHO perspective* of the study. This contrasts, for example, with Hagelsteen et al. [24]; who term the local/national actors as internal (to the country/region in question) and all others, including IHOs, as external.

Table 1
Selected organizations.

Type	Organization ^a	Focus/mandate	Commodities	Respondents
UN	UNFPA	Reproductive health, all disasters	Reproductive health kits	R1, R2
	UNHCR	Refugees and internally displaced people, human-induced disasters	Multi	R3, R4
	UNICEF	Children, all disasters	Multi	R5, R6
	WFP	Food, all disasters	Food	R7, R8, R9
	WHO	Health care, all disasters	Health care	R10, R11
INGO	CARE	Women and girls, all disasters	Multi	R12, R13
	MSF	Health care, all disasters	Health care	R14, R15
	NRC	Refugees and internally displaced people, human-induced disasters	Multi	R16, R17
	Oxfam	Poverty, all disasters	Multi	R18, R19
	SOS	Children, all disasters	Multi	R20, R21
	WVI	Children and families, all disasters	Multi	R22, R23
IFRC	IFRC	Government auxiliary, disasters caused by natural hazards	Multi	R24, R25, R26
N/A	Consultants	Humanitarian system	N/A	R27, R28

^a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), CARE (CARE), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Oxfam International (Oxfam), SOS Children's Villages International (SOS), World Vision International (WVI), International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

2.2. Data collection and analysis

We conducted 28 interviews to reach theoretical saturation [41]. For each IHO, at least two interviews were conducted to enable triangulation of results [42]. Due to the limited number of respondents per organization, the respondents represent the IHO community as a whole rather than their specific IHO or type of IHO (UN agencies, INGOs, and the IFRC). Thus, the study focused on analytical generalization to paint a rich picture of the whole IHO community's reasoning [43].

The individual respondents were purposefully selected [44] through professional networks and snowball sampling [45], which allowed a very high acceptance rate to participate in the study. To cover a large range of localization perspectives, the respondents represent logistics professionals (46.5%), along with experts in capacity development (21.5%) and emergency operations (25%). All respondents working for a particular IHO had between 7 and 45 years of work experience in the humanitarian sector. Two respondents (7%) had worked for more than 30 years in different organizations and were categorized in a separate group (consultants) as representatives of a sector perspective. Approximately half of the respondents (47%) have field experience in countries and regions highly vulnerable to disasters (e.g., in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the Middle East).

The interviews were conducted between May 2018 and January 2019, using a semi-structured guide (see Appendix I). The first author conducted each interview together with one of the other authors. This improved transparency, ensured replication logic, and reduced interviewer bias. The interviews lasted between 75 and 110 min, resulting in 42 h of recorded and transcribed empirical material. Next, we conducted two levels of coding [34] of the empirical material.

In the first step, we applied open (initial) coding [46] to identify information-centric terms and thereby group statements in different "forces" pushing IHOs in one strategic direction or another (e.g., drivers for external localization vs. drivers for internal decentralization). Appendix II presents an overview of the forces.

In the second step, we used axial coding [46], comparing and contrasting the identified forces (presented and discussed in section 4 below). This analysis was augmented by connecting our empirical insights with DRR and IHO-centric literature as well as multinational corporations (MNC) theory. MNC scholars have studied forces pushing global organizations in different strategic directions. As we argue in section 4, these pressures also apply to IHOs, albeit in a different way. MNCs, sometimes referred to as stateless or transnational corporate organizations, are the IHOs' commercial equivalent. They have offices and operations in different countries, which report to and are coordinated from a centralized headquarter [47,48]. Although IHOs and MNCs differ in various aspects, including revenue sources, goals, stakeholders, and performance measurements [49], they also share several characteristics. IHOs and MNCs both operate in the international arena, deliver products and services to customers/beneficiaries in a range of countries, and face similar strategic choices such as the balance between cost efficiency and local responsiveness (see, e.g., Refs. [50,51]). Furthermore, MNCs need to balance the functions that should be centralized (e.g., IT and procurement) and those that benefit from decentralization (e.g., marketing adaptation to the local context). Accumulated knowledge on this matter is relevant for IHOs, which face the similar choice of what to keep at a central level and what to keep at a national/local level. MNC theory cannot completely explain localization as MNCs do not face the ideological pressures of shifting power and resources to other actors. They do, however, divest or de-internationalize their business, and knowledge of related motivations and challenges can give insights to the localization discussion.

3. Empirical findings

Our empirical findings reveal a range of forces pushing IHOs in different strategic directions as illustrated in Fig. 1.

Next, we describe what IHOs consider to be the main drivers and barriers to localization and why IHOs instead pursue centralization or decentralization within their own organization. In Fig. 1, the arrows between centralization and decentralization reflect the oscillation between these two paths throughout an IHO's lifetime. This oscillation is a well-known phenomenon in which organizations try to prevent too strong alignment with either pole (see, e.g., Refs. [52,53]). Localization stands in contrast to this internal IHO process as it involves a transfer of capacity and power to external actors such as host governments, national/local NGOs/civil society organizations (CSOs), and communities. Localization as a concept suffers from being overly broad with various interpretations. This paper follows the more radical view that localization is a transformational process aiming to shift power to and strengthen the capacity of national and local actors (see, e.g., Refs. [6,9,22]).

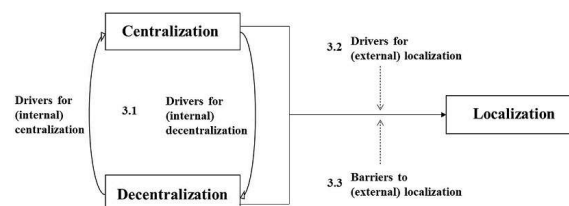


Fig. 1. Overview of forces pushing IHOs in different strategic directions.

3.1. Why do IHOs pursue centralization vs. decentralization?

Our interviews reveal several drivers of *centralizing* decision-making authority and capacities internally at HQ. First, substantial savings can be gained in logistics functions, such as procurement and warehousing, with a centralized strategy due to economies of scale. Respondents also discussed risks associated with national/local logistics capacities, such as duplication of operations and low utilization of resources:

“If you are stockpiling the goods in every country, you have to make sure that the stocks are not duplicated”. (R14)

The type of product delivered in the supply chain also seems to influence the centralization choice. For example, one of the respondents stated that due to a limited number of suppliers and high product complexity, contracts concerning medical items need to be centralized:

“My belief is having this centrally managed will be associated with a lot of cost savings and benefits”. (R1)

The respondent also claimed that no country could manage the medical supply chain themselves:

“I think that would be impossible because of the management of getting all this consolidated into kits”. (R1)

The respondents further argued that IHOs may need a centralized supply chain to respond efficiently and effectively to large-scale disasters:

“If you are talking about substantive disasters, you need to mobilize global resources, and so things need to go hand-in-hand. What you have locally will not be enough”. (R20)

“Even if the Philippines become extremely developed, if you have another super typhoon running through, wiping out, then I think they still require some kind of international assistance”. (R9)

Respondents argued that centralization yields a higher level of flexibility of internationally needed stocks and fewer challenges in coordination. Consequently, some respondents argued for having one large warehouse with enough resources to send in large-scale disasters instead of collecting goods from scattered national warehouses.

Constraints in national markets also form a reason to centralize logistics capacities. For example, respondents stated that the high requirements for certain products' storage and transportation conditions were better met with a centralized supply chain. The lack of high-quality local suppliers forms an additional reason for remaining centralized:

“Another challenge is procurement, and the availability of local suppliers. The goods available can be quite poor or be very volatile, access can change from bad to worse. It is not very reliable”. (R16)

A few respondents mentioned difficulties finding local staff with the right expertise or education:

“Having medical staff on a country level can be quite difficult, so we try to do it on a regional level. With medical staff, it's not training for distributing food. We are talking about 3-7 years training”. (R14)

“Being able to have expertise sufficient to deal with the humanitarian context in each country is, I think, a real challenge”. (R23)

Security risks at a national level also incentivize some IHOs to keep a centralized supply chain. This ensures accountability and avoids reputational risks. Safety risks for beneficiaries form another reason as respondents saw a lack in quality of, for example, medicines at the national level:

“As soon as you are talking about drugs and medical devices, you need to consider the quality issue. (...) The drugs that you can find in Thailand, South Africa, etc., are worse than ten years ago, so, therefore, we have not made the shift at all”. (R14)

Our interviews also reveal several drivers of *decentralizing* decision-making authority and logistics capacities. Recall that decentralization refers to delegating tasks (internally) to the IHO's national/local offices or affiliations. Many advocated that decentralization can offer benefits in terms of a more rapid and nationally adapted response. This may also help make the response more effective:

“If you have the context, if you have the structure and the system in place, this helps it to be cost- and time-effective. It makes it possible to fine-tune your response in a way that is culturally appropriate. It's about what the people need, what helps the most and as quickly as possible”. (R20)

In addition, stronger and capacitated country offices enable more sustainable operations and reduce the need to fly in and out expatriates:

“From the global perspective, the humanitarian agenda, you understand that in order to be sustainable and have effective responses, you need to be local”. (R7)

Compared to a centralization strategy, decentralization of procurement may also be more efficient and effective due to the disaster context. The respondents associated decentralization with cost savings in mainly supply and staff:

“The way it's going to help us to reduce the cost is when a crisis occurs. Rather than sending international staff, which means flight costs, long flights on time, high carbon footprint as well. When they arrive in a country you need to pay for accommodation, food, and drink ...”

the benefit package might be very, very big. If you have the capacity in the country, you will be able to make a big saving on the staffing using more local staff than international staff". (R19)

Almost all respondents emphasized the importance of access to local networks. A decentralization strategy, where country offices have more resources and decision power, enables IHOs to exploit such networks and gain access to local knowledge, information, facilities, and sensitive geographical areas:

"If you have people that know the context, people who know where to find the right people, where to find the right supplies, whom to talk to for permissions, you can very quickly contextualize your response and make it effective". (R20)

"Aid organizations are not very good at assessing the local context. It's important to understand how the local supply chain works. It's important to find a better way to share knowledge between organizations and others". (R27)

The respondents further acknowledged that host governments are influential actors who can drive IHOs to decentralize capacities by imposing constraints or delays on international relief flows and staff legislation:

"You don't get a visa or you don't get a technical agreement signed for whatever kind of activities. Then you have these tags and customs problems where your material is blocked and all these problems in that they want to delay activities on the ground. But if you are locally prepared and you can respond within the first couple of hours even, then you can save a lot of lives". (R21)

"In some contexts, for example, as I said, governments will not let you in". (R20)

Establishing strong national offices and national stocks is a remedy to the increased political pressure or instability and ensures IHOs' physical access to the area.

3.2. What do IHOs consider as the main drivers for localization?

A majority of the drivers for *decentralization* mentioned by the interviewees apply to *localization* of logistics preparedness as well. Localization can lead to more rapid, effective, and locally tailored responses. Respondents acknowledged that national and local actors are key in humanitarian operations and possess qualities that international actors lack:

"You have to recognize that those local actors (...) are bringing a value that we can't do, so they might have the trust of the community, or they might have access to a geographic area". (R23)

Furthermore, the increasing pressure on saving costs and reducing resources call for localization of logistics preparedness:

"It is among others the huge requirement in the humanitarian supply chain and the understanding that you don't have enough resources to meet the needs and you need to be innovative". (R7)

"When the money dries up, by the OECD countries, there is no longer money that will actually fund the traditional things that we have done." (R28)

Consequently, some respondents argued that IHOs need to reduce their operational capacity:

"The organizations themselves have fewer resources because funding is more challenging. They need to continuously improve their approach to programs for delivery of assistance and not retain as much operational capacity as they used to have". (R27)

Localization saves operational costs for IHOs and may increase the efficiency of the entire humanitarian supply chain. As with decentralization, storing relief items locally will save costs in transportation and distribution. Several respondents highlighted local companies as key future actors in carrying out humanitarian logistics, seeing that they already perform similar activities on a day-to-day basis:

"We need to learn how to involve local businesses and local corporations much better. Traditionally we have not engaged; now we do, but on a global level with the big ones. It is not happening systematically enough on a country level". (R12)

Respondents also acknowledged cash-based interventions (CBI) as a driver of localization. In CBI programs, cash or vouchers replace disaster relief items. As such, CBI reduces logistics costs in for example, transportation and warehousing, since beneficiaries buy their needed goods at the local market. CBI can therefore promote the local economy and empower beneficiaries:

"For me it [CBI]'s part of the localization completely, I mean, you put more decision power in the hands of the beneficiaries and most probably, they will use the money locally. So, for me, it's a critical component of the localization". (R26)

"It [CBI] increases the ecosystem, you invest in the local market and jobs are created and it brings back a broken economy on their feet again". (R21)

In addition, respondents identified several general drivers. Global initiatives such as the Grand Bargain, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Charter for Change were commonly mentioned as localization drivers. Respondents argued that IHOs cannot support countries forever, and localization is the right thing to do.

Respondents further highlighted increased resilience and self-reliance of countries and local communities as benefits of localization. They also stressed it has the potential to drive the local economy. Awareness of these benefits encourages host governments to drive localization, especially in countries that have grown economically and institutionally in the past decades:

“Local governments in the countries where we are working are getting better and better at preparing and responding to an emergency. And as a result, they want to be in charge”. (R12)

“Localization emerges as a reaction to aid dependency. Dependency is very traumatic and destructive; it undermines social and economic development”. (R8)

One respondent shared another view that localization has emerged from a history of inadequate responses:

“I think there’s some criticism and some of it is justified, that international organizations coming to a situation, they push aside local organizations and local communities, local government; probably very good intention, but very poorly executed ways of engaging with humanitarian communities”. (R22)

A few respondents feared that host governments are driving localization for their own political agenda and that it is used as a tool to keep international audiences at arm’s length:

“No government likes being looked up closely. In a lot of the localization talk, governments are basically saying: ‘Look, you need to give us the power, you need to give us the resources’. This comes also from not wanting to be exposed”. (R20)

Finally, respondents acknowledged that localization is driven by the belief that it leads to a better link between response and recovery:

“It [localization] is more sustainable. I believe the expatriate-driven approach where you bring people, specialists in different areas, into a country and hire 10 times more local staff this is for sure knowledge and experience transfer. But when the organizations have left, people are most of the time not where they have been before the disaster. And this, the linking of relief, rehabilitation development never really worked out”. (R21)

To sum up, localization drivers are both logistics-related and general. Respondents claimed that localization could solve challenges faced by both IHOs and the humanitarian system at large – while promoting national and local growth. It can also enable IHOs to focus on specific expertise, advocacy, funding, and other core competencies. One respondent (R28) went as far as arguing that IHOs should not be part of operational delivery of aid at all, but instead must question, reimagine, and play their new role and part in the 21st century aid sector.

3.3. What do IHOs consider to be the main barriers to localization?

Several of the drivers to centralized logistics preparedness capacities, as pointed out by IHOs, were also seen as barriers to localization. These include the risks of duplication of operations and low utilization of resources. For example, one respondent questioned the appropriateness of national stockpiles:

“Does it make sense that they [American Red Cross] have 500,000 blankets all the time on a standby (...) because they have a Katrina every 10 years or 20 years or so? Maybe it’s not efficient”. (R26)

Availability and quality of resources also induce resistance to localizing in specific contexts. Medicines were mentioned as an example due to the fear of counterfeits. Another example is the perceived lack of educated local staff.

A more general barrier revolves around resistance in IHOs to shrink and lose power:

“They [IHOs] are resistant to developing local capabilities because they want to retain control as much as possible ... they don’t need to be involved in delivery of certain types of assistance, but they still want to be involved because it’s their business”. (R27)

Several respondents highlighted a fear of losing jobs and a lack of mindset to support only temporarily:

“I haven’t seen that mindset in any of the places I’ve been, to where we’re here to work ourselves out of a job. That is missing”. (R10)

The interviews brought up several barriers connected to external actors’ performance. For example, the respondents claimed that most national and local actors lack the experience, capacity, and knowledge IHOs have gained over decades. In addition, national and local NGOs were argued to be neither prepared nor willing to handle the increased responsibility:

“The bottleneck around the capacity of local NGOs to absorb the funding, the capacity building, their interest in doing it, you know, some of these actors [being development organizations] they don’t want to do humanitarian work”. (R23)

The respondents saw additional risks in the ability of national/local actors to deliver according to the humanitarian principles:

“When you’re talking about conflict ... how impartial is an actor, the national state in its own country. If they are not willing to support part of their communities because they are more representative of a certain part of the population but not the other, then that investment purely into the national state will not work”. (R21)

Some respondents claimed international actors have an advantage as they can be neutral in ongoing local conflicts and adhere to the humanitarian principles without compromising. Corruption was also frequently mentioned as a barrier to localization. The respondents further argued that localization demands certain prerequisites for country development and host government actions. For example, the country must have reached the required levels of political stability, wealth, and development for localization to be implemented. Host governments also need to recognize, allow, and support other actors in DRR and response activities, including national/local NGOs and private actors; they must also be willing to prioritize disaster preparedness in their national budgets and

decentralize decision power and capacities to the communities. The respondents proposed that host government influence is one reason why certain products and services do not fit with a localization agenda:

“Because our mandate is so sensitive, there are many situations where our organization needs to push for our products to enter the country, and we need to push for our mandate to be even recognized”. (R1)

In the interviews, it was suggested that IHOs’ mandate affects their willingness and ability to localize. One respondent acknowledged that localization changes the footprint that the IHO can have in a country which in turn has implications from a financing, political, reputational, and visibility perspective (R8). MSF, for example, hesitates to transfer capacities to the local level as it may conflict with their principle of independence from host governments. One of the representatives from MSF declared that they recently set up a new organizational supply strategy with eight objectives, and none of these says anything about localization (R18). Steering a mandate toward localization can also indirectly be impeded by donors:

“It’s not difficult to convince them [the donors] of the philosophy of capacity strengthening. It’s difficult to convince them that the WFP is the right organization to do it. Because donors are not used to invest in WFP for capacity strengthening, they are used to investing in WFP to get the job done on the spot, right when it’s needed”. (R8)

More generally, respondents acknowledged that localization barriers are related to the humanitarian system at large and require a system transformation. For example, they argued that a change in the funding system is essential. Some respondents claimed that donors, generally, have much more influence over strategic decisions than IHOs since they control the money. Earmarked, fragmented, project-based, and inflexible funding were mentioned to constrain all strategic decisions. Another major impediment is the lack of sustainable funding for national/local organizations. According to the respondents, donors oppose working with many small organizations and see a risk of losing visibility and accountability of funds. This means that national/local organizations dependent on funds will struggle to survive in the long term and in-between disasters. At the same time, the respondents argued that national/local actors are not given the space or long-term funding to build capacity, implying a catch-22 situation:

“It gives an opportunity for local organizations to start something and then there’s a pause, and then start, stop, start, stop. They get people on board, they train them, they get them the experience, but then they have to stop.” (R18)

“One that I’m really concerned about is where do we get funding for ongoing capacity building, you know, particularly in disaster prone countries. This is not something that you come in, and you do in a week. So, your work with local and national actors to build their capacity and undertake humanitarian work should also be an ongoing thing, but no one funds it. We’re having to use our private funding”. (R23)

4. Analysis and discussion

Fig. 2 summarizes (with details presented in Appendix II) the forces pushing IHOs in different strategic directions. It shows multiple drivers for localization and highlights even more barriers. The findings also show many forces driving IHOs to centralize and/or decentralize internally instead of localizing.

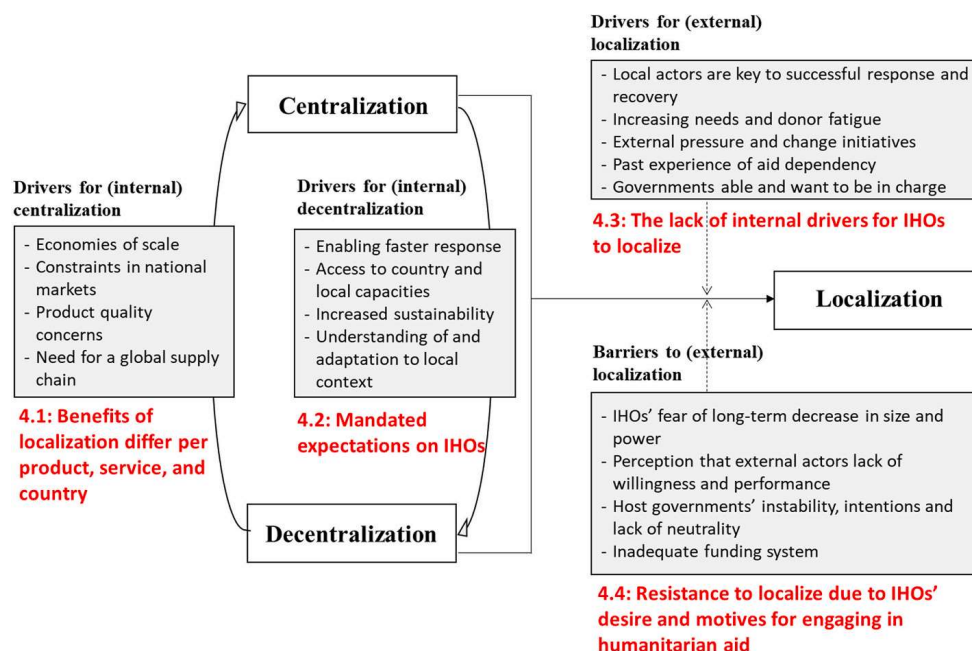


Fig. 2. Forces pushing IHOs in different strategic directions, and key themes explaining why localization progress is slower than expected.

In the following, we unravel and discuss the reasons why localization progress is slower than expected. We do so by further analyzing our empirical insights, searching for patterns, and connecting these insights with DRR and IHO centric literature as well as MNC theory. Our analysis revealed four key themes (highlighted in Fig. 2): Benefits of localization differing per product, service, and country (4.1); Mandated expectations on IHOs (4.2); The lack of internal drivers for IHOs to localize (4.3); Resistance to localize due to their desire and motives for continued engagement in humanitarian aid (4.4). Next, we discuss each theme and submit actionable propositions that can accelerate progress toward localization.

4.1. Localization benefits may not always outweigh the costs

The importance of localization for social and economic development cannot be neglected. Benefits include a positive influence on the local economy and increased resilience and self-reliance of countries and local communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. However, our analysis shows that for certain products, services, and countries, localization may come at a significant “price” regarding cost-effectiveness, flexibility, and quality control. The question arises if, in specific contexts, the loss in efficiency can be too high for localization to be rational.

First, humanitarian funding is constrained. Some respondents even claimed it would decrease in the future. If this trend continues, pressure to cut operating costs (where logistics stands for the largest share) will rise. One remedy is integrating across borders by coordinating main functions and activities and standardizing processes [48,50]. By establishing centralized, large-scale supply chain operations, IHOs generate economies of scale and thereby cut costs [51,54,55]. This is possible as products and services (e.g., basic needs for water, food, shelter, medicine, and hygiene) are, to a high degree, standardized in disaster response. Concretely, IHOs cut the cost per unit by procuring large quantities of certain products or sharing warehouse and transportation costs across multiple products and organizations. IHOs also strengthen their negotiation position, pushing down prices and getting hold of scarce supplies. Such benefits may be challenging to achieve through localization, suggesting that a global approach may be justified for some products, services, and countries.

Second, to handle global threats, a centralized rather than localized approach may be a better fit [56]. IHOs are expected to respond to (sudden) disasters anywhere in the world within a few days. Meanwhile, the uncertainty of what, when, and where a disaster will hit and its magnitude is high. This uncertainty may increase due to climate change. To cope, the respondents emphasized that IHOs should invest in flexible resources that can be deployed globally. In the context of prepositioning, for example, this can take the form of global or regional hubs. Examples of centralized logistics services include the preparation of medical kits, stock loaning between countries, and access to long-term supplier and transport agreements to ensure the availability of items.

Third, certain products benefit from global approaches to ensure control over the entire supply chain. Supplying medicines is particularly demanding due to strict quality, temperature, and traceability requirements. By centralizing the medicine supply chain, IHOs gain a better overview and control over the entire chain and become more efficient and effective, for example, in preventing counterfeit drugs from entering the supply chain.

In short, our analysis suggests that localization should not be a one-size-fits-all solution and that IHOs still have an important role to play in contexts where international support is vital. Hence, IHOs could carry out several strategies simultaneously depending on the context and evaluation of their strategic advantages and core competencies. Numerous reports support the context-specific nature of localization (see, e.g., Refs. [6,14]). The following propositions capture this notion:

Proposition 1a. *For certain products, services, and countries, localization leads to a significant loss in economies of scale and resources that can be deployed globally.*

Proposition 1b. *The costs and benefits of centralization differ strongly per product, service, and country, making a one-size-fits-all localization aim inappropriate.*

Proposition 1c. *Increasing funding gaps and uncertainty put more weight on cost-effectiveness and flexible resources, thereby disincentivizing localization for certain products, services, and countries.*

4.2. Mandated expectations on IHOs

Our analysis illustrates that the mandate of an IHO can put constraints on localization. The most apparent example is MSF, which emphasizes its independence from host governments [57]. The representatives from MSF confirmed this in their interviews, stating that localizing (i.e., transferring) logistics preparedness capacities and resources to external actors was not an organizational goal. Another example is the IFRC. Their role is to act as the host government’s auxiliary [40]. For this, investing in strong national offices is key, as emphasized in the IFRC’s Strategy 2030. Though it is in the IFRC’s interest to strengthen other national and local actors, transferring their own capacities and resources to external organizations would conflict with their mandate.

Steering a mandate toward localization can be impeded by stakeholders’ expectations, particularly those of donors. IHOs are accountable to donors as their operations depend on the funds received and, therefore, must deliver on their expected mandate. This was particularly highlighted by the respondent from the WFP, who claimed it is difficult to get funds for capacity strengthening as donors expect them to perform other activities. Many respondents shared the view that donor incentives and resources for localization are scarce or lacking. This further suggests that IHOs may only execute the localization strategy when funds are made available.

The mandated expectation to respond quickly and effectively to sudden disasters forms a driver to *decentralize* rather than *localize* logistics preparedness capacities. Internal decentralization means IHOs can still control the response, with resources, expertise, and local partnerships already in place. MNCs reason in a similar way. With an (internal) decentralization strategy, they can quickly respond and adapt to national markets’ diverse needs and local culture through their subsidiaries [47,51]. As subsidiary managers

have better knowledge of the market they serve, they can better identify and deploy necessary physical, technological, knowledge, financial, and human resources [50]. Internal decentralization resembles localization in many ways, especially if the country office only employs national staff, procures locally, and acts like a stand-alone affiliation with a higher degree of autonomy, authority, and local flexibility [56], as exemplified by the IFRC's National Societies. This can further increase the potential for knowledge creation, internal capacity development, and innovation [58]. Further, it facilitates partnerships with governments and other national/local actors, increasing operations' effectiveness [59].

Internal decentralization also ensures access and timely response in countries with cross-border regulations. Regulations may restrict IHOs from entering a country during a pending disaster, as was the case in Indonesia during the Sulawesi earthquake. Covid-19 and the global border restrictions have also shown the importance of decentralizing (internally) to a certain degree by, for example, employing local personnel and having the most necessary items within national borders. This may be even more important in fragile contexts as respondents fear that some host governments use localization as a means to keep international actors out. Consequently, cross-border regulations mainly coerce a decentralization strategy as it becomes important to build national stocks, develop local partnerships, and have sufficient expertise in place when a disaster hits. The following propositions are submitted:

Proposition 2a. *Instead of following a one-size-fits-all approach on a sector level, the extent of localization should be organization-specific and aligned with IHOs' mandates.*

Proposition 2b. *To enable localization, the mandated expectations on IHOs regarding operational response to emergencies must be adjusted accordingly.*

4.3. The lack of internal drivers

Our analysis implies that internal drivers to localization are lacking. Establishing strong internal drivers and a sense of urgency for change are prerequisites for any major change process [60]. Our respondents highlighted that IHOs lack motivation to change, which has also been stressed in recent research on capacity strengthening [2]. Transformative localization is a radical reform to the current humanitarian aid system. Without strong drivers, it is unlikely that the localization strategy will be executed successfully and timely.

In part, the lack of internal drivers is not surprising as localization entails a decrease in IHOs' power, resources, and control of operations. Localization would imply losing valuable location-bound assets, for example supply chain distribution channels. This may cause further hesitation as such assets are difficult to regain (see, e.g., Ref. [61]). A third explanation is that organizations, in general, desire and are inclined to grow. Despite that, reduced engagement in foreign operations is not uncommon in other sectors. For MNCs, this is often referred to as foreign divestment or de-internationalization (see Refs. [62,63]). A divestment decision often emerges from within the organization because of low financial performance [64] or a strategic change [65]. Similar internal drivers are missing for IHOs.

This suggests that IHOs lack the motives to make a transformative change unless forced by other stakeholders. Interestingly our empirical findings in fact do suggest that localization is mainly driven by external pressure. For example, decreased funding can force IHOs to shift focus from operational delivery and supply chain management to more strategic activities (such as advocacy). Global initiatives and pressure from host governments were mentioned as drivers. The latter is similar for MNCs: powerful host governments can shape MNCs' chosen strategy by regulations and/or incentives [66,67]. There are also examples from the humanitarian sector where external actors are (or should be) influencing IHOs' decisions. In Southeast Asia, for example, host governments increasingly strive for a response capacity that is nationally led and regionally supported, keeping international interference at a minimum [68]. During the earthquake in Sulawesi in 2018, the Indonesian government only approved help through national/local NGOs already within the country [12,69]. Enhancing pressure on IHOs to transfer funds directly to national and local actors has also been advocated in the context of the Ukraine crisis: "organizational change won't happen without incentives" [70]. However, as evidenced by the slower-than-expected progress of localization for IHOs, external calls and commitments have so far not been enough. One reason is that these pressures are formulated on a sector level, whereas the execution is on the organizational level. This way, the question remains who should take the lead. Instead of letting the IHOs figure this out on their own, we posit that external pressure must be put on an organizational level. The following propositions are submitted:

Proposition 3a. *To advance localization, it is important to identify and encourage strong internal drivers for IHOs to transfer their logistics preparedness capacities and resources to external national and local actors.*

Proposition 3b. *Additional external pressure from powerful stakeholders such as host governments and donors is necessary to force transformative change.*

Proposition 3c. *External pressure must be put on an organizational rather than sector level.*

4.4. IHOs' desire and motives for continued engagement in humanitarian aid

The respondents' statements suggest that IHOs' resistance to localizing originates in part from their desire for continued engagement in humanitarian aid. Several respondents acknowledged that IHOs might want to keep control and capacities in-house – partly because it is "their business". This may be explained by the institutionalization of humanitarianism, which, during the 1990s, brought more deliverers, donors, and regulators with demands on accountability and demonstrated effectiveness [37]. Humanitarian aid has developed into a multi-billion dollar business [71,72], and large organizations keep growing in size [73]. This has led organizations to become more bureaucratic, following standardized rules and procedures [37]. Our analysis finds that this is fueled by the donor system, which to a large extent supports the traditional approach involving earmarked, project-based funding to large IHOs

rather than long-term funding to smaller, local organizations for capacity building (see also [4]). In fact, the respondents suggested that donors prefer working through larger IHOs that possess higher capacity and credibility compared to smaller, local organizations. The current reporting, auditing, and accountability system can thus be described as tailored for IHOs, and not for localization. The humanitarian intervention in Ukraine serves as a good example of where the aid system fails in shifting power and resources to local organizations due to donors' compliance requirements [70]. By the end of May 2022, only 0.003% of Ukraine funding had gone directly to local organizations despite them representing the majority of the operational presence in Ukraine [74].

The field has also become more professionalized with specialized areas of expertise and career paths. In 2017, ALNAP estimated that the humanitarian sector employs 570,000 people [75]. Hence, IHOs increasingly resemble commercial firms and behave like them (Joachim and Schneiker, 2013). According to Ref. [37]; the sector's institutionalization comes with changes in mindset in the organizations where their own survival may at times "overshadow their principled commitments". This was clearly highlighted in our analysis: the organizational and individual mindset is set on preserving jobs and creating internal career paths; (human) resources are encouraged to stay, not to be localized.

IHOs' resistance to localizing also originates from their motives for engaging in humanitarian aid. IHOs differ from MNCs in this aspect as they are not driven by profits but by social purposes [49,76]. A majority of IHOs have specific agendas to convey their religious, political, or ideological values [36–39]. Although claiming not to impose such values on their beneficiaries [38], organizations may have motives (e.g., foreign policy objectives [36]); that conflict with the goals of localizing. IHOs' *raison d'être* can thus form a barrier to localization when transferring capacities and resources to external national and local actors violate those motives. Related, the respondents voiced numerous reasons for their organizations not to localize in any given country. Those reasons concerned national and local actors' attitudes, capacities, and capabilities and the host country's economic, social, and institutional development. However, such reasons were not substantiated and could rather be perceived as influenced by IHOs' values, motives, and the will to keep power. How aid should be carried out, and the international (Western) interpretation of various constructs, such as capacity, complementarity, and the humanitarian principles, have been questioned in many reports (see, e.g., Refs. [14,16,77]). For example, in Southeast Asia, non-traditional actors, such as the military, private sector, and volunteer groups, fill an important logistics capacity gap in humanitarian responses but are not globally recognized due to the dominating Western view of humanitarianism [12]. The following propositions are submitted:

Proposition 4a. *“Changing the game” such as requirements for funding, reporting, and rules, is required to help local, smaller organizations tap into donor resources.*

Proposition 4b. *Localization requires a change of organizational and individual mindsets from preserving present IHO jobs.*

Proposition 4c. *IHOs must be (made) willing to trade off advancement toward their own objectives with advancement toward localization.*

To summarize, Fig. 3 depicts a framework with positive, concrete actions to accelerate localization and move from strategic intent to execution.

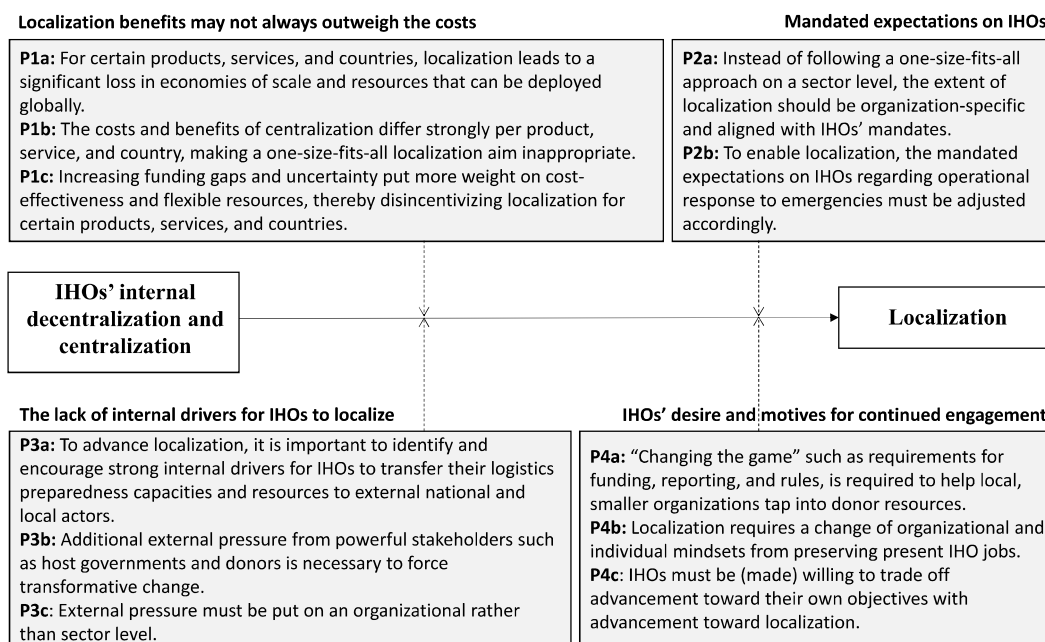


Fig. 3. Framework for overcoming barriers to localize

5. Conclusion, implications, and future research

Acknowledging that strategy execution is very difficult [78], this study aimed to understand why IHOs are slower than expected to implement the localization strategy – transferring (logistics preparedness) capacities and resources to national and local actors. We did so by identifying forces pushing IHOs toward one strategic direction or another. Our analysis of these forces resulted in four main findings, explaining the barriers to localization and propositions to overcome those.

First, we suggest that IHOs have some valid reasons for pursuing (internal) centralization and decentralization rather than transferring capacities and resources to external actors. Current expectations on IHOs (such as responding instantly to any large-scale disaster anywhere in the world) imply the need for efficiency and effectiveness in operations. For example, it may be necessary to keep some elements centralized due to strict requirements of quality and cost-efficiency, while decentralization may be needed to access certain countries. The analysis concludes with some driving forces toward centralization when responding to large global uncertainties. The expected increase in disasters implies that localization efforts may take a back seat as large IHOs are incentivized to use the scarce funding to build global capacity. As one of the respondents stated: “If your choice is ‘I am cutting my global resources in order to invest locally, but locally you spread yourself too thin,’ then you have nothing gained”.

This mindset can be seen in recent developments where many donors have shifted their funds from long-term development to emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic – both at an international and a local level [79]. As IHOs depend on donations, they will likely prioritize global preparedness and find it harder to focus on localization efforts. Another indication is that IHOs are struggling to deliver on their core mandates due to a larger funding gap [79]. Consequently, to progress with the localization agenda, the expectations on IHOs must be realistic and perhaps moderated.

Second, our analysis identifies the lack of internal drivers as a significant barrier to localization. This is exacerbated by the general view that decentralization is an effective strategy to gain local responsiveness. Decentralization activities, such as procuring locally, developing local partnerships, and employing and educating local employees, can, in many ways, be considered as efficient and effective as localization. Localization is also new ground for many IHOs and therefore filled with risks and uncertainties, whereas decentralization will allow IHOs to keep power and resources in-house. Thus, there may be few reasons for IHOs to pursue localization as intended in the global initiatives. Instead, they may prefer to view decentralization as a path to adhere to the localization goals without making an actual capacity transfer to external actors, i.e., without true delegation. Decentralization can then result in localization. One example is the Red Cross National Societies, where decentralization indeed builds local capacity and reduces aid dependency. However, in most situations, a decentralization strategy will not adhere to the core aim of localization, that is, to reduce countries’ aid dependencies. From the IHO perspective, localization drivers can be reduced to a moral obligation and “doing what is right”. It is unlikely that this is sufficient to drive localization efforts in the future.

Third, the analysis suggests that external pressure may be one key to making localization progress more rapidly. External pressure may come from host governments by increased wealth and capacities that make IHO presence redundant or by regulations that hinder IHO operations. It may also come from donors that possess the money and power to direct IHO decisions. However, the complexity and bureaucracy of the funding system act as additional barriers, and it must undergo massive changes to serve the localization goals. The likeliness of increased donor pressure and major system changes in the foreseeable future is debatable, as also argued by Hagelsteen et al. [24]; and the respondents’ statements concerning the future of funding did not align. A few indicated that funding to IHOs will decrease due to more bilateral agreements. Others suggested the opposite: that donors want to work through large intermediaries and not small local organizations. A donor representative confirmed the latter during the humanitarian network and partnership week in 2021, saying that large and known organizations are preferred due to their capacity and deemed safer to collaborate with as they have higher credibility among taxpayers. Consequently, external pressure from donors may be lacking, implying that such pressure would have to come from host governments. The lack of progress has led some promoters of localization to lose faith in transformative change. Instead, they argue for the withdrawal of both international organizations and international funds altogether to promote local capacity strengthening in the long run [80,81].

The high expectations on IHOs - resulting from the declared collective strategic intent to localize, combined with the few incentives (internal or external) to do so - suggest a fundamental deadlock in the sector. Until these significant systemic issues are addressed, transformative localization efforts, in which countries substantially reduce their aid dependencies, will likely fail. The Covid-19 pandemic can serve as an example of this. At the beginning of the pandemic, many humanitarians argued that Covid-19 provided a chance to reform the humanitarian system and accelerate localization [82,83]. However, with a few exceptions [84], national and local actors have mainly taken on more responsibilities and risks without earning access to increased funds [79]. The report from Brubaker et al. [79] indicates that Covid-19 may, in fact, have exacerbated existing inequalities in the sector rather than resolving them.

In this paper, we argue that targeted actions can accelerate change and move localization forward. We support this with actionable propositions, which also present interesting avenues for future research. First, research can support IHOs in addressing internal barriers by visualizing and questioning their own norms and values, providing clearer communication to employees, and introducing performance indicators that drive change. Second, the emergence of general topics beyond logistics in interviews shows the need for more holistic research. Localization must be discussed in its broader context, considering the various actors involved, in particular donors and national/local actors such as host governments, NGOs/CSOs, local communities, and businesses. It must also address overall sustainability, thus, other aspects, such as social, cultural, financial, and environmental perspectives. A topic for future research is to find alternative ways of responding to global threats and discuss how current expectations on IHOs’ operations can be changed to enable localization progress. Third, connected to the relevant actors is the question of who drives or should drive localization. Future localization studies should consider not only the perspective of actors beyond donors and IHOs but also who gets to decide the design of future aid. Fourth, future research could assess how the strength of the proposed barriers and drivers depends on the characteristics of

the crisis, organization, and geographic area and how a person's perception of such barriers or drivers differs depending on his or her role and office (national/regional/international). Finally, to inspire change, it is essential to study current initiatives that explicitly aim to strengthen national and local actors. It is vital to increase our understanding of how localization is implemented on the ground, the challenges, and how they are addressed. Such studies could be longitudinal to account for an analysis of success factors, contextual impact, and how various challenges are best handled. As a next step, the studies could be turned into business cases and shared with the sector to inspire others to follow suit. In order to start unlocking current constraints, localization must progress from a strategic intent on a sector level into tangible actions on the organizational level.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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Appendix I – Interview guide

A. Respondent:

1. Name: _____
2. Position/title: _____
3. Areas of expertise/responsibility: _____
4. Experience (# years in hum sector): _____
5. Experience (# years HQ vs. field): _____
6. Experience (org/countries/operations): _____

B. Respondent's organization

1. Name of organization: _____
2. Budget (annually): _____
3. Number of staff (HQ vs. field): _____
4. Focus/mandate (type of disaster): _____
5. Presence/operations (# countries): _____

C. Interview questions

- 1) What will drive future localization of preparedness?
 - i. What are the main benefits of preparedness initiatives on a local level for the various stakeholders (e.g. IHOs, private actors, government, local community, donors)?
 - ii. Are there any strategic directives or demands from stakeholders toward localization? Why/why not?
 - iii. Do you as an organization have a strategy or strategic approach for localizing functions such as procurement, sourcing, distribution, transportation, warehousing and programming? Why/why not?
 - iv. Are there any activities, resources and/or actors that you specifically aim to (not) localize? If so, why?
- 2) What do you perceive to be biggest challenges for localizing preparedness capacity in terms of functions such as procurement, sourcing, distribution, transportation, warehousing and programming?
 - i. Can these challenges be overcome? If yes, how? If no, why?
 - ii. What main risks do you see in localizing preparedness capacities?
- 3) How does funding (structure/mechanism) affect your initiatives to develop preparedness capacities on a local level?
 - i. How do you believe that funding will change in the future? What effect will it have on your organization?
- 4) What characteristics are necessary for a country/country office to be able to prepare for emergencies in terms of the abovementioned supply chain functions?
 - i. How do you assess which countries that can develop or have the SC preparedness capacity in place to take (partial vs. full) responsibility for disaster preparedness?
 - ii. (How) does your organization adjust its initiatives to localize preparedness capacities accordingly?

Appendix II – Analysis of drivers and barriers

Drivers for centralized (internal) strategy				
Economies of scale	Constraints in national markets	Product quality concerns	Need for a global supply chain	
Improved negotiation position and utilization of resources (e.g., in procurement, warehousing, and distribution)	Availability, reliability, and capability of local suppliers (goods available can be quite poor or be very volatile)	Difficult to ensure quality of certain products (e.g., medicines) at the national level	Large-scale disasters require centralized supply chains to enable efficient and effective response	
Higher level of flexibility and coordination of stocks world-wide	Availability of local staff with the right expertise or education	High requirements for certain products' regarding storage and transportation conditions	Disaster-prone countries will continue to need international support	
Drivers for decentralized (internal) strategy				
Enabling faster response	Access to country and local capacities	Increased sustainability	Understanding of and adaptation to local context	
Being closer to operations helps it to be cost- and time-effective	Strong national offices ensure IHOs' physical access (avoid host government preventing international presence)	Reduced need to fly in and out expatriates	Local procurement may be more efficient and effective for the specific disaster context	
National stocks needed if host government impose custom regulations that delay deliveries	Importance of external local collaborations to assess local context and access external capacities	More sustainable operations (e.g. in terms of reduced need for international transportation)	Possible to fine-tune response in a way that is culturally appropriate	
Drivers for localization (external) strategy				
Local actors are key to successful response and recovery	Increasing needs and donor fatigue	External pressure and change initiatives	Past experience of aid dependency	Governments able and want to be in charge
Local actors possess qualities that international actors lack (understanding of context, trust of the community, access to geographic areas) and can better link response to recovery	Funding is more challenging and there is a fear that funding will decrease in the future (localization can save operational costs)	Global initiatives for change of the current system (e.g., the Grand Bargain, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Charter for Change)	History of inadequate responses (local organizations and communities pushed aside; poor engagement with humanitarian communities)	Increased resilience and self-reliance of countries and local communities to prepare for and respond to emergencies
Involvement of local businesses and local corporations has positive influence on the local economy	IHOs do not have enough resources to meet the increasing humanitarian needs.	Calls for IHOs to focus on specific expertise, advocacy, funding, and other core competencies	Reaction to traumatic and destructive aid dependency that has undermined social and economic development	Political agenda (e.g., not wanting to be exposed) to keep international audiences at an arm's length
Barriers to localization (external) strategy				
IHOs' fear of long-term decrease in size and power	Perception that external actors lack willingness and performance	Host governments' instability, intentions and lack of neutrality	Inadequate funding system	

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(continued)

Drivers for centralized (internal) strategy			
Change of IHOs' footprint which has implications from a financing, political, reputational, independence, and visibility perspective	National and local actors lack the experience and knowledge IHOs have gained over decades and are thus not prepared to handle the increased responsibility	Host government influence hampers sensitive mandates, products, and services, and compromises humanitarian principles (lack of neutrality in ongoing local conflicts)	Earmarked, fragmented, project-based, and inflexible funding pose constraints on all strategic decisions
IHOs want to retain control as much as possible to ensure accountability and avoid reputational risks	Bottleneck of national and local NGOs to absorb the funding and the capacity building required to prepare and respond to emergencies	Lack of willingness to prioritize disaster preparedness in national budgets, and to decentralize decision power and capacities to the communities	Lack of sustainable, long-term funding for local organizations to build capacity
Lack of mindset to only support temporarily (e.g., fear to lose jobs)	Lack of willingness to handle the increased responsibility (e.g., development organizations don't want to do humanitarian work)	Lack of required levels of political stability, wealth, and development (which could lead to, e.g., risk of corruption)	Donors oppose working with many small organizations and see a risk of losing visibility and accountability of funds

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