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“Co-investigators but with different power”:

Local voices on the localization of humanitarian research

A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER PUBLICATION

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In memory of Sabina Carlson Robillard (1988–2022)

Finally, this report was the brainchild initiated by our colleague Sabina Carlson Robillard. It builds on the finding from her report entitled Localization: A "Landscape" Report published in late 2021 that only a small proportion of the literature and research in the humanitarian sector is produced by researchers from affected populations in the Global South (GS). Sabina, a constant champion of localization and equity, started the study behind this report as part of our team and made it much better than it otherwise would have been. We hope this report captures some of the amazing force of her spirit.

Acronyms

BHA	Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance
CAB	Community advisory board
ELRHA	Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance
GB	Grand Bargain
GN	Global North
GS	Global South
HRI	Humanitarian research institute
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PI	Principal investigator
S2S	Global South-to-Global South (partnership)
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive summary

Humanitarian research has long been dominated by institutions from the Global North (GN), while institutions and researchers from the Global South (GS) have been largely absent or relegated to minor roles. The GN dominance is maintained through control over funding. Control over funding ensures control of the research agenda, research standards, peer-reviewed publications, and the structure of partnerships with their counterparts in the GS, shaping knowledge generation and dissemination. Despite some progress in promoting GS participation in humanitarian research, continued under-representation of GS researchers undermines the quality of humanitarian research and its ability to improve humanitarian programming outcomes. The imbalance fails to acknowledge GS researchers and humanitarian research institutes' (HRIs') unique contributions, such as their positionality, contextual knowledge, and potentially more impactful innovative research approaches. This is a missed opportunity to enable research that is often more relevant to the affected communities and which therefore has a greater chance of influencing decision-makers.

Building on a previous report on the localization of humanitarian assistance (Robillard et al. 2022), this study focuses on issues unique to the localization of humanitarian research. It combines a literature review with 42 interviews of humanitarian researchers from 20 countries and a wide array of humanitarian research institutes. The first draft of the report was reviewed by 20 respondents to validate the study and provide further thoughts and nuance during two roundtable discussions. This study attempts to accurately represent the voices of the researchers who contributed their time and observations on the localization of humanitarian research.

The results of this research provide an overview of the challenges faced by GS humanitarian research institutes, the opportunities for increasing equitable participation, and recommendations for donors and INGOs to better support the work of GS HRIs. It highlights the importance of including GS voices and experiences in the humanitarian research literature and the need for donors and INGOs to provide equitable opportunities for GS researchers.

The self-reinforcing triad of power, funding, and language

Historically rooted power and funding differentials between GN and GS emerged as the main underlying barrier affecting the equitable participation of GS HRIs in humanitarian research. Over multiple generations, countries in the GN have accumulated considerably more wealth, power, and resources, often at the expense of those in the GS. This advantage results in GN institutions acting as gatekeepers of research, valuing and prioritizing their own approaches and concerns, making it difficult for GS HRIs to access their own grants, necessary to build their own credibility and agendas, perpetuating a cycle of underfunding and disempowerment.

The "mental legacy of colonialism", as one respondent called it, has led to invisible biases in humanitarian research, with GN researchers and their methods valued more than those of their counterparts. Some efforts have been made to redistribute power, but these are ad hoc and not systematic. The progress made so far has mainly been due to the efforts of individual researchers and donors who are willing to share power rather than a systemic change. Even those GN actors ready to shift power to their GS counterparts struggle to do so within the existing power structures and paradigms of the humanitarian system.

Most humanitarian research grants are awarded by GN donors to GN entities. GS governments and institutions often do not prioritize research due to smaller national budgets and significant urgent needs, leading GS researchers to rely almost entirely on subgrants from GN agencies. To satisfy some donor localization criteria, GS institutions are often included in projects as token GS subcontractors without real decision-making power. Instead of exploring the unique offerings of GS HRIs,

GN humanitarian research funding processes are structured to give more credence to research using methods, approaches, and frameworks developed according to the experiences of scientists in the GN. Through this process, GN donors dictate the humanitarian research agenda, focusing on their own priorities and interests, sometimes resulting in blind spots in humanitarian research, ignoring regions such as parts of Central America where climatic crises are common, but conflict is rare. As most humanitarian research to which GS HRIs have access is funding through humanitarian assistance grants to GN INGOs, funding for GS HRI research dries up between crises when INGOs are not present. Typically focused on smaller geographic areas, this gap in funding leaves GS HRIs unable to retain their technical experts and administrative structures, much less to explore root causes of humanitarian crises, or the sustainability of interventions.

Language provides an additional barrier for those GS organizations who most closely represent the affected populations. English – and, to a lesser extent, Spanish and French – dominate the humanitarian research sector. The dominance of these languages, along with complex systems for peer reviewed publication, often makes it difficult for GS researchers to access, contribute to, or publish research in the most respected journals or present their findings at prestigious conferences. This limits their voice while also preventing them from building their own credibility, entrapping them continually in secondary research roles.

Partnerships and GS-led research

Most GS HRIs rely on partnerships with GN HRIs or INGOs for research opportunities. GN partnerships can provide GS researchers with networks, technical training, and a shield from government sensitivities. On the other hand, the GN partner usually controls resources, the research agenda and the allocation of research roles, and nearly always takes the more significant portion of the funding. GN researchers often hold a supervisory or quality control role over research activities conducted by their GS partners. Although the roles allocated to GS partners are gradually broadening, GS researchers are still often underpaid and used as data collectors rather than true partners in research with their own skills and ideas. Though they have their own weaknesses, South-to-South (S2S) partnerships are often valued by GS HRIs because they are more equitable, with easier communication and flexible approaches to each step of the research process. But these S2S partnerships are rare because donor funds typically go through GN HRIs/INGOs. When available to GS HRIs, the competitive nature of grant awards can create unhealthy competition among GS HRIs rather than promoting collaboration.

GS HRIs report they are starting to get more opportunities to lead research. However, there is a perception that GS-led research is less credible or impactful than research conducted by GN HRIs. This study found that GS HRIs tend to identify more closely with a population than with a specific sector or crisis. Their values, therefore, dictate that when they lead on humanitarian research, it must benefit the population participating in the research, and the population is more often considered a partner in co-producing the research. The research design and methods are adapted for that population and the research question relevant to the population, potentially increasing the quality of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis. These values and resulting innovative approaches to co-producing humanitarian research increases the likelihood that their results will actually improve local humanitarian responses, with the potential for generalized learning beyond that context. These skills and capacities are rarely considered when donor compare proposals, or when GN partners are allocating limited roles to their GS partners.

Capacities

GS HRIs face challenges in terms of building and maintaining research capacities. They face structural limitations resulting from a lack of funds to invest in infrastructure unique to research, such as statisticians, access to technology and software, access to peer-reviewed journals, etc. Their difficulties in getting published in English language peer reviewed journals reinforces the GN misperceptions of low GS

technical capacity. While GS HRI actors are increasingly participating in or leading research, they are frequently still only valued for their operational skills in a particular context rather than their technical capacities in humanitarian research.

Most GS HRIs necessarily operate on small, restricted budgets, preferring minimal overheads and administrative procedures that are as lean as possible, making it difficult to comply with GN administrative procedures and requirements. Donors are risk intolerant and, due in part to double standards, consider GS HRIs' leaner administrative and financial processes riskier than their GN counterparts, leading to an emphasis on building administrative capacity that is usually impossible to support between rare grants, sometimes causing unsustainable costs to the GS HRI and, ironically, potentially weakening them as viable HRIs.

Context and risks

The sentiment and content of some of the findings in this report can be generalized to the experiences of most GS HRIs. However, other aspects of humanitarian research vary greatly between contexts, even within a given country. For example, a country's socioeconomic and political situation may make conducting research more expensive or especially dangerous for GS researchers from that country. Unlike GN researchers who can leave after conducting a study, GS researchers may face unique physical and security risks which may continue long after the study is complete, and may even extend to the researchers' families. Other risks are compounded by double-standards regarding acceptable levels of physical risk related to quality of housing or transportation. These risks often go unrecognized by their GN partners, who do not always provide appropriate support or funds to mitigate them. The assumption that GS HRIs can function on smaller operational budgets increases the dangers faced by GS researchers. Intersections of power, control of finances with the GN partner's lack of intimate understanding of the context-specific risks their GS partners face combine to worsen the severity of risks and the exclusion some of these researchers face.

While context affects all aspects of humanitarian research, sometimes it is not fully considered in GN-led research, reducing the quality of the research and applicability to the study population. Local researchers bring a deep understanding of the context and insights into research, but the definition of "local" is complex and contested. It is far more nuanced than simply being from the same country or community. The researcher's social distance from the community is as essential as their geographic distance, and their status and relationships within the community affect whether or not they are seen as local. Open discussions among all partners and their donors can help to mitigate these misunderstandings that may increase risk to the researchers, the researcher, and ultimately, the well-being of the target population.

Ethics

While ethical review processes are necessary to protect participants from exploitation and harm, overly lengthy and bureaucratic process can delay research initiatives in humanitarian emergencies where the situation may evolve rapidly and needs are urgent. Most ethical review processes are currently based on Western values and experiences. Although interviewees agreed that some basic ethical principles are universal, how they are applied in humanitarian research is very context specific. Many Western procedures are often alien to populations participating in humanitarian research, but may lead GN researchers to a false impression of protecting participants. For example, the promoted GN consent process requires an individual to be able to refuse to participate in research, but this individual level of choice may seem wrong in societies where such choices are made either as a group or by the individual's leader. Deeper consideration of how to adapt the application of the core universal ethical elements is needed to ensure true participant choice and protection.

Many GS countries do not have a formal social and behavioral research ethical review board (though medical ethical review boards are much more common). Where social ethical review boards do exist, they are most often closely modeled on a GN ethical review board, regardless of local norms.

Adaptation of methods and processes considered acceptable to humanitarian crisis affected populations is an area of research that warrants additional exploration, an area in which GS HRIs could provide invaluable insight.

Visibility

GS researchers are underrepresented in academic journal articles, as participants in conferences, and in numerous other ways in which researchers are given credit for their work among their peers. Publishing processes controlled by GN actors reinforce the power differential between GN and GS researchers. GS humanitarian researchers often focus more on uptake of their research results within the local context of the humanitarian crisis studied, targeting affected populations and local policymakers. GS HRIs therefore emphasize the need for co-production of research with affected populations and returning study results to the participants, with the benefits of reducing survey fatigue and increasing trust in future research efforts. Nevertheless, GS HRIs value opportunities to publish in internationally respected peer-reviewed journals. This broad, respected form of visibility is crucial for building credibility and reputation, necessary to secure funding for continued research.

Conclusion and recommendations

Four major themes emerge from the report. 1) Power differentials define the relationships between GN actors and GS HRIs and dictate how the HRIs engage in humanitarian research. 2) What it means to conduct research is defined by GN HRIs, based in some cases on prejudice towards GS researchers and GS research methods. 3) GS HRIs are more likely to engage in more participatory research, more closely aligning with the needs and norms of the crisis-affected population. 4) There has been a shift toward more equitable access to research, but it is still ad hoc and far from equitable. This results in lost learning and, therefore, less effective humanitarian assistance.

The barriers to GS HRIs' equitable participation described are systemic and profound, necessitating structural changes. Below are some key recommendations we developed for GN donors, NGOs, and HRIs.

- Recognize the power differential between GN donors or research partners and GS HRIs.
- Engage GS HRI actors as early as possible, providing the space for them to set research agendas.
- Build flexibility into donor expectations to value research methods, designs, and uptake appropriate for different contexts and consider capacity differences among GS HRIs.
- Continue to explore new paradigms for funding or supporting GS HRI research. Adapt the funding process to make it accessible to GS HRIs. Use proposal evaluation criteria that do not favor the GN methods. Adjust donor research reporting requirements where necessary.
- Accommodate the many different languages used by GS HRIs. Budget for translations where necessary.
- Provide support for the publishing process to raise the visibility of GS HRI research among international audiences.
- Recognize that GS HRIs may need equal or larger budgets than GN HRIs to build their research capacity in the absence of national infrastructure or to cope with higher costs for basic infrastructure.
- Promote GS-led research and GS-GS collaborations and support long-term co-learning partnerships between GN and GS HRIs.

A complete list of recommendations can be found at the end of this report.

Introduction

It is not only counter to the ethical principles of both research and humanitarianism for the voice of crisis-affected societies to be underrepresented in the humanitarian research literature, but the products of that research will be more valuable, more accurate and more likely to be acted upon with their participation and leadership. Social science research is made richer, and operational outcomes are made stronger, by including as many different perspectives as possible. There is a noted lack of southern voices in the literature of humanitarian research (Robillard et al. 2022, HAG et al. 2022). This underrepresentation is not only unethical, it also weakens the effectiveness of most current humanitarian research. This report aims to introduce the voice and experience of those researchers in humanitarian research institutes (HRIs) based in a wide variety of contexts throughout the Global South (GS) to inform the current discourse and make it stronger.

Research on humanitarian issues incorporates the separate but overlapping norms, standards, and expectations of both humanitarianism and research. While humanitarian researchers and research institutes from the GS face many of the same challenges as their GS humanitarian assistance providers and GS researchers in other fields, they also face many challenges unique to this overlapping space. This report, conducted by a partnership between the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) and the Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, and funded by the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) at United States Agency for International Development (USAID), **aims to describe and analyze those dynamics unique to the localization of humanitarian research, focusing primarily on the opportunities and challenges of HRIs in the GS using the voices of the researchers themselves.**

Research on humanitarian issues has long been dominated by international research institutes based in the Global North (GN) that primarily study crises happening in the GS, with little meaningful participation of GS researchers. Some recent progress has been made toward improving GS opportunities and voice in humanitarian research, but the situation is still far from equitable. By "equitable participation," we don't mean all are treated as if they are the same, but that there is a "just" distribution of voice and control of the research agenda that embraces the potentially complementary voices.

> "There is an evolution. Until about five years ago, foreign researchers would come to collaborate with local researchers, and our researchers were reduced to only execution—like data collection—the foreign researcher amassed all, took it to the North, and analyzed [it] in the North. Published by the North, in the North, infantilizing our participation. Now they've begun to understand—they bring the local researcher into all steps of the process, but it is all still generally in connection with the foreign researcher. Still not the ideal, but it is getting there" (Interviewee M010).

There is a considerable and growing body of literature and experience in the localization of humanitarian assistance but very little about the localization of humanitarian research. Many issues that affect the localization of humanitarian programming also affect humanitarian research. This report builds on a previous report on the localization of humanitarian action from Feinstein (Robillard et al., 2021). That report provides an excellent and extensive background on the general localization effort. It goes into detail on the history of the localization movement and discusses the multiple ways the terms "localization" and "local actors" are used. Since the localization landscape report was published, USAID has made public its localization strategy (USAID, 2022a), which closely follows the recommendations of that report. This paper will not repeat the discussions in the previous report. Instead, it will focus on those aspects unique to the localization of humanitarian research, only touching on some areas common to the entire humanitarian system.

The localization landscape report highlighted "funding, partnerships, coordination, capacity, and leadership" as the "main operational issues related to localization" (Robillard et al., 2021, 6). GS researchers interviewed for this study also highlighted similar themes but applied them slightly differently when discussing humanitarian research. In addition to barriers GS HRIs face, we will describe enabling factors and opportunities to promote more equitable opportunities for GS research. The concepts and issues described in this report are rapidly evolving, with multiple reports with new views and information published (primarily by GN researchers) between the time of the initial literature review and the writing of this report. We hope this report will provide insights and recommendations to influence this evolution toward more equitable opportunities for GS HRIs to engage in research on humanitarian issues.

The first section of this report describes our methodology and the major concepts central to the discussion. The second section individually reviews the main themes that emerged from a review of the literature and interviews with GS researchers, focusing primarily on the observations of the GS researchers. Finally, the third section concludes the report with a discussion of these themes as a body and their implications for promoting equitable opportunities for humanitarian research. As most funding for GS HRI research currently comes directly from GN donors or international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), the discussions and recommendations of this report are geared toward this audience, though they may also be helpful to other actors.

Methodology

This study depends on a combination of a review of the literature and interviews with humanitarian researchers. After a quick search for documents and a review of these documents, and based on the past experience of the investigators, the team created a list of search terms. The terms were divided among a group of research assistants who searched JSTOR, Project MUSE, Google Scholar, and Jumbo Search (a search engine specific to the Tufts University library system), and conducted a general Google search using combinations of the terms: research*, humanitarian, development, peace, international relations, global south, developing countries, north south disparities, partnerships, scholars, diversity, equality, equity, inequality, inequity, decolon*, power, and locali*. Following from a theme of academic coproduction that had a strong element of localization of research, terms were expanded to: authorship, publish, underrepresent*, knowledge production, co-production, anthropology, and academia. Hundreds of documents were identified. Each of these were culled for quality and relevance to humanitarian research as they were found. The citations of relevant documents were mined for other documents not identified by the search terms. Relevant blogs and websites were scoured. The study ended up with 251 documents that included discussions related to equitable opportunities for humanitarian implementation or research. Many of these simply quoted other documents within this group of 251 documents without presenting new information, or simply did not provide original information or views, leaving 105 relevant documents that provided novel information or perspectives. These 105 documents were further reviewed for their content, and 41 documents that most directly addressed equity or GS participation in humanitarian research or mechanisms related to equity in humanitarian research were coded using NVivo version 12.7 and a basic structure of codes (available from the authors upon request). After an initial set of documents was coded to ensure consistency in the process, the coding structure was adjusted and expanded. Finally, the coded information was analyzed and discussed by the team, then summarized in a literature review submitted separately. Between the literature review and the writing of this report, 20 additional relevant reports were published or discovered and were included in the analysis for this report.

An analysis of the literature review identified gaps in understanding. These gaps formed the basis of the guide for interviewing GS researchers in GS HRIs, and a few GN researchers who have worked extensively with GS HRIs. Starting with contacts from the investigators' own networks, including the vast network of 180 NEAR member organizations, and snowballing from there, the study team individually interviewed 42 researchers representing 20 GS countries, conducted in four different languages

(see Annex A for more detail on the types of HRIs and countries represented by the interviewees). All interviews were conducted remotely. The extensive interview notes were then coded using a coding structure similar to that for the identified gaps and adjusted after the first eight interviews to capture emerging concepts (Annex B). Each major node and sub-node in the coding was consolidated and analyzed jointly by three to four investigators. The results of these analyses form the basis of this report. The views and experiences expressed by the diverse set of humanitarian researchers interviewed were remarkably similar, supporting and adding depth to observations made in the literature. We therefore feel confident that this relatively small sample of researchers interviewed provides an accurate picture of the major dynamics.

The first draft of this report, along with translations of the discussion and recommendation sections in French, Arabic, and Spanish, was sent to 20 respondents to review. They were then invited to two different roundtable discussions with simultaneous translation in French and Spanish to further validate the views and experiences presented, seek further thoughts and nuance, and promote dialogue among the Southern researchers.

Ethics

The protocol and study tools were reviewed and approved by the Tufts Social Behavioral and Educational Research (SBER) Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Limitations

The conduct of this study does not follow many of our own recommendations. Although we attempted to engage mainly study team members from the GS, three of the five researchers in this study (including the principal investigator (PI)) were from the GN. Of the two partners, the prime was a GN organization. The research question was set by the GN partner before the engagement of the GS partner, though the GS partner felt the research question was important, and this partner was engaged in the research design.

Although some interviewees were identified through other respondents, the initial interviewees' identification depended on the study team's networks. Although this is a considerable network, it may not be fully representative of those in other networks. The broad range of respondent background, context, and specialization, coupled with the very consistent picture they conveyed, leads us to believe that expanding to other networks would not have made material changes to the results.

Humanitarian research is often embedded within humanitarian assistance grants and reported as part of the assistance budget. General statistics on humanitarian research activities or funding are not readily available. However, a recent report from Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance (ELRHA) provides a snapshot of funding related to humanitarian research and innovation, while noting that most humanitarian research funding was couched within humanitarian interventions (Issa et al., 2022). To obtain the snapshot in the report, the writers had to first identify those grants that were explicitly research focused or had elements of research, then they had to individually analyze each budget. Even with this effort, they found it provided an incomplete picture as many of the databases did not consistently record the country where the research was conducted or listed it as "global" or did not separately report the research component. While this analysis provides a rough individual snapshot, such an approach is too cumbersome to monitor trends in humanitarian research funding over time. Similarly, literature about humanitarian research or the localization of humanitarian research is often found only as a side topic within larger reports on humanitarian assistance or localization.

Although humanitarian researchers are generally among the elite in their communities and the study team aimed to accommodate as many limitations as possible, several of those invited to participate in roundtable discussions had difficulty participating due to poor connectivity on the day of the discussion or differences in time zones. The team provided translation to allow participants to freely express themselves and to participate in the roundtables. We were unable to source an appropriate simultaneous translator for Arabic, limiting the participation of at least one researcher.

Basic concepts described

This report uses a number of central basic concepts that may be used differently in other fields or reports. To clarify how this report uses these concepts, each is described below in some detail.

Local

"The meaning of 'local' is relative; it goes beyond the simple binary relationship of 'international' versus 'local' that is used in much of the current literature" (Robillard et al., 2021, 6). The term implies a sense of belonging and shared origins. Inferring from the participant comments about what "local" truly means, we propose that in humanitarian research to be "local" means to be of the same identity—having the same frames of reference, norms, language, and general history as the affected population. (This concept is explored more fully in the Localness subsection of the Context section below.)

Global South/Global North (GS/GN)

> "Within the GN there is the GS, and within the GS there is the GN" (M003).

The Global North (GN) and Global South (GS) are not geographical terms and are used to replace older, value-laden language including "developed" and "developing" countries, "first world" and "third world." Although this study often treats this division as if there is a binary GS/GN relationship, this is a gross oversimplification for the sake of discussion and does not reflect the incredible variety of actors, experiences, positionality, and roles that blur the distinction. As one GS researcher pointed out, some GS researchers work for GN HRIs, many are trained in the GN or have lived extensively in the GN, and many GN researchers have lived and worked extensively in a GS country. There are also elites within the GS whose perspectives are more closely aligned with GN researchers than with GS populations.

Similarly, there are tiers of GS HRIs. Some may work within a single community or among a single ethnicity, while others may have offices in a provincial or national capital with multiple sites for studies and activities and a national or even international outlook. Some of the larger GS HRIs have spun off of GN HRIs or GN INGOs and have taken on the character of GN HRIs in their operations and relations with donors, sometimes at the expense of their unique "localness," but others retain that localness, at least partially.

There are many countries and organizations that are not clearly GN or GS. For example, many Middle Eastern countries are not aligned with either typical GN or GS modes of operating or thinking and have separate historical trajectories. Many of these countries' governments have emerged as a distinct set of "non-traditional" donors who often operate differently than typical GN humanitarian donors. Although we interviewed four researchers from these countries, their donor agencies operate within the European-/North American-centric mechanisms, and many of our discussions are not well informed by these Middle Eastern donors and their activities. They form a somewhat grey area in our discussions.

The literature uses many different definitions for these terms. For the purposes of this review, we will use a slightly modified version of NEAR's working definition:

> The GN includes wealthy and politically stable countries. The GS comprises countries with agrarian-based economies, that depend on the GN for humanitarian and development assistance, and that have a history of political and/or social dominance by governments in the GN.

GS HRIs are often assumed to be "local" or "national" with only local mandates, interests, networks, and impact, while GN HRIs are assumed to be "international." Though this distinction is frequently the case, it is not always the case. We recognize these terms are problematic and contested, often obscuring complex geopolitics, the wealth in the GS, and the poverty in the GN. However, they remain uniquely relevant in the context of aid, given the financial dependence actors in the GS have on those in the GN.

Humanitarian research institutes (HRIs)

We began this study with a relatively narrow view of HRIs as institutes in which humanitarian research was the primary activity. It quickly became clear that the vast majority of HRIs in the GS conduct research as a secondary activity, the organization's primary activities being either implementing humanitarian assistance programs or providing university education. Therefore, we expanded the concept of the HRI to include any agency or organized group of individuals conducting humanitarian research as a part of their mandate. This classification includes organizations that self-identify as research institutes with research as their primary purpose, universities with departments or faculty that regularly participate in humanitarian research, humanitarian practitioner organizations that also engage in research, and collaboratives of independent researchers or networks of researchers. This classification may also include government agencies that conduct research as a part of their mandate. Most of the HRIs located in the GS are national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who maintain their basic operations through subgrants from INGOs to implement humanitarian assistance, and who conduct research when they have the opportunity. Their research is sometimes funded through their own resources.

Research

Researchers in the GN typically define research as the systematic generation of generalizable knowledge about a topic or to inform theories. GS researchers interviewed for this report tended to focus more on the elements of the process rather than the aims when defining research. They included systematic data collection activities that were not necessarily generalizable, such as needs assessments and program evaluations. This study focuses primarily on the former but did not exclude references to assessments or evaluations, as the researchers we interviewed often used the broader definition. The messages in their remarks often applied equally to both.

Wealth disparities

This report discusses how colonialism and its legacy have led to economic disparities between GN and GS countries. As argued by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non repetition, the wealth and resources taken from colonized peoples and their ongoing racialization has led to their current social, economic, and cultural exclusion (OHCHR, 2022).

While adopting this frame because interviewees mainly reflected in these terms, we recognize that the factors that led to wealth accumulation and the technological development of certain societies over others are more complex. For example, capitalism and the patriarchy are interconnected systems that create and compound wealth disparities (Suliman, 2019), particularly between GN and GS societies, and foster intersectional disadvantages for traditionally excluded groups. We also recognize that there are significant wealth disparities among colonizing and colonized societies.

Findings

The self-reinforcing triad of power, funding, and language were foundational themes that the researchers interviewed referred back to, regardless of the topic.

As sparse as the literature was on issues related to the localization of humanitarian research, it agreed very closely with the information provided by the interviewees themselves, and the information provided by the interviewees was remarkably similar among the interviewees regardless of the country, continent, or education of the researcher. To keep interviews brief, all the points in the interview guide were not asked in every interview, and yet the researchers interviewed brought up, again and again, many of the themes discussed below. The researchers were frank and open about their experiences. Their frustrations, their dignity, and their indignance, as well as their sincere desire to improve the situation of their populations, are felt through their quotes posted throughout the findings as communicated to our team.

The self-reinforcing triad of power, funding, and language were foundational themes that the researchers interviewed referred back to, regardless of the topic. Other themes that emerged included partnerships, the drive toward GS-led research, the unique capacities of GS HRIs and the capacities that require support, the role of context, the unique risks GS humanitarian researchers face, their own interpretations of research ethics, and their approaches to research uptake and visibility. Each of these themes is covered individually below before continuing on to a general discussion.

The self-reinforcing system of power, funding, and language

The barriers that prevent GS HRIs from participating equitably in humanitarian research are rooted in structural power and resource imbalances that are historically entrenched.

GN institutions hold a significant advantage in humanitarian research due to the wealth, power, and resources their countries have accumulated, often at the GS's expense. A body of literature has already established that control of funding results in power and that the systems that dictate this control are remnants of colonial systems (Dodsworth, 2019; Fast, 2019; Lokot and Wake, 2021a, 2021b; Lombe et al., 2013; Humanitarian Health Ethics Research Group, 2019).

This resource and power advantage allows GN HRIs to dominate the humanitarian research field, setting standards, dictating research agendas, controlling the execution of projects, and influencing the way results are communicated. Their dominance also means that **GN institutions are the gatekeepers of research and funding**, causing GS HRIs to struggle to secure grants and leverage more power, resulting in a self-reinforcing cycle of underfunding and disempowerment. Ultimately, power is the thread that connects all other issues related to equitable participation in humanitarian research that we explore in this report.

Power

As previously noted in Localization: A "Landscape" Report (Robillard et al., 2021), power asymmetries in the humanitarian research field are not split into a binary relationship of "international" and "local." Instead, they tend to exist between all larger and better-funded HRIs and smaller ones, whether in the GN or GS (M007, I009). Even within the GS, there are power imbalances between local and national HRIs, with larger institutions in urban, well-connected areas often holding more power than their smaller counterparts in rural areas (I016). However, the enormous resource differentials between GN and GS researchers amplify and deepen power inequalities in the humanitarian research field. These power imbalances prevent GS partners from pushing back, potentially leading to their involvement becoming tokenistic (Hammond et al., 2020). Importantly, inequality in humanitarian research intersects with other oppressive structures and is distributed along

identity, gender, race, and class lines. As a result, traditionally excluded groups often face more significant power imbalances (I002, I003, I014).

> "Let us collect visual data, photographs, drawings, and illustrations, not just numbers" (I014).

The "mental legacy of colonialism" (M003) has left behind biases, such as prejudice, racism, and elitism, which are often not visible because they are built into the system, giving more value to GN researchers and their methods, ethics, perspectives, and research products (I006, I011, I014, I015, I026, I017, I020, M003, M006) (Bian, 2022; Lokot and Wake, 2021a, 2021b). The GN defines the accepted research methods and practices, with those proposed by GS HRIs often considered inferior, unacademic, and lacking rigor (I006, I011, I014, I017, I020, M003). GN expectations tend to be for text-heavy written outputs following specific conventions, which are accessible to a limited audience, primarily within the GN. But some GN researchers, donors, and partners may also struggle to break with conventional and widely accepted approaches to research, despite a desire to do so. For the audiences targeted by many GS HRIs, other methods that are less dependent on large volumes of text may be more appropriate but are not considered robust research products by the existing GN paradigms. However, GS researchers themselves were not clear among themselves as to what the new paradigm should look like. Some interviewees argued that there needs to be more discussion among GS actors to identify what they wanted a new paradigm to look like.

> "What is the paradigm shift we are wanting? We need more conversation among ourselves" (I017).

Racist stereotypes may lead to double standards and a lack of trust in local actors and their capacity (Robillard et al., 2021). GS researchers may need to work harder to obtain the same recognition as their GN counterparts (I004, I017, I020). **There is a tendency to view GS researchers as lacking capability and to devalue their research. This attitude implies that they cannot conduct reliable research without the supervision of GN researchers.** GN researchers are thus "helicoptered" or "parachuted" into GS countries to lead research projects in contexts they do not know, regardless of the experience and contextual knowledge of the local researchers involved (I008, I009, I016, I017). Being from the same country as the affected population (please see discussion on what it means to be "local" in the Context section) does not automatically provide a researcher with insight into the context or researched population. Similarly, an international researcher who has extensively worked in an area or with a population may be well positioned to research that context or population. However, the widely accepted practice of "parachuting" GN researchers from one crisis to another means that some GN actors are asked to lead research projects not by virtue of their specific contextual knowledge but rather because their skills and qualifications are considered superior to those of their GS counterparts.

In some cases, this devaluing of GS researchers becomes learned by the GS researchers themselves, undermining their confidence and willingness to push back when they see methods that are not appropriate. Even among local researchers, there is a hierarchy, with those who have studied in the GN commanding more respect within both the local and international humanitarian community by virtue of their connection to GN institutions and experiences.

The power differential is perhaps most evident in partnerships between GN and GS researchers. These partnerships are sometimes seen in a positive light, but they are rarely horizontal or equal relationships (I001, I002, I004, I006, I007). **This gives the GN HRI a quality control or supervisory role, requiring GS HRIs to seek approval for planned activities** (I001, I002, I009, I010, I012, I013, I014, I016, I017). As the prime for a grant, the GN HRI is necessarily responsible for financial accountability as well as having the responsibility to oversee all activities. However, this control is sometimes taken to the point which it limits the ability of the partner to make timely, reasonable, informed decisions. Even those GN actors who may be willing to shift power in favor of their GS colleagues may struggle to do so within the existing power structures, standardized coordination and procedural systems, and paradigms

of the humanitarian system, ultimately perpetuating the status quo despite a willingness to change it (M003, I028).

Since the nature of partnerships is nearly always controlled by the GN partner, GS researchers are often underpaid, exploited, and segregated into lower-status roles. The exclusion and disempowerment experienced by GS researchers are deeply entrenched in the system. They are built on deeply rooted assumptions that GS researchers are less qualified than their GN counterparts. As a result, GS researchers are treated as "data-collecting mules" rather than equal partners in research (I006, I011, I014, I015, I017). The data they collect are often sent for analysis to GN researchers, who are considered more qualified, even with parity of experience (I014, I017, I020, M007). This method of conducting research can be deeply extractive, putting GS researchers at significant risk of collecting large amounts of data they must turn over, losing all credit for their work. In many instances, GS researchers do not have intellectual property rights over the data they collect (I008, I011, I017, I024). As a result, they cannot analyze or publish the data for professional recognition. This visibility is necessary to successfully apply for larger grants and command more respect before the international community. The common exclusion of GS HRIs from data analysis also reduces the quality of research, leading to less-effective humanitarian responses and an increase in suffering and wasted resources.

> "It is very insulting to us to be asked to only gather data and pass it on to a country thousands of miles away from us. That level of superiority is something that is very wrong" (I017).

Power is maintained through a system of control, conscious and unconscious, that reinforces the dominance of the powerholder in various ways. **Language was identified as a key exclusionary factor** for many GS researchers. The interviewees felt that GN journals that publish articles on humanitarian topics in English were the most respected. Publishing in them is seen as a mark of credibility and prestige in front of GN actors but also among GS actors (I004, I005, S002). GN-hosted and -led conferences in English are where the most significant connections happen (I006, I020). In addition to language, power may also be exerted in smaller but significant ways, such as through meetings timed and held in places and languages convenient for the more powerful GN partner (I011).

Recently, there have been some attempts at redistributing power in the humanitarian research field (I006, I016, I020, I024), but these efforts have been ad hoc. They need to be consolidated systematized. Instead, **progress made so far has been at the hands of individual researchers and donors who have willingly shared power in given partnerships or on individual studies, rather than being a system-wide change** (I020, I024, I028).

> "You can have an extremely sensitive, ethical, and emotionally intelligent person [leading the partnership], but they are operating in a system that is screwed up. Bless them, but they are drops in the ocean" (I028).

One interviewee recounted an example of a positive experience with a GN research consultant who demonstrated commitment to the localization of research and collaborated closely with the local team. The consultant was described as a leader who involved the team throughout the research process and guided them in developing their own high-quality research. The interviewee stressed the importance of having more leaders like her and reported feeling more empowered in her job after working with this consultant.

"When she drafted the recommendations, she walked us through them, and we rewrote them together, added some things and removed others. She was a good leader. After this experience, I became a local consultant and an expert in rapid gender assessment. Usually, GN researchers are not like [her]. They don't have the patience to learn together or build capacities. Usually, it is not really a participatory process. For them, it's like any other task to be accomplished. They email each other, and don't involve us in decision-making" (I20).

In another example, a researcher at a GS university described a long-term collaborative project with

a GN university funded by USAID that had as its objective to build the capacity of the GS university to conduct research in public health (M010). This effort was championed by a researcher at the GN university and required him and several other faculty to move to the GS country. A number of the GS university students were sent to the GN university to be trained. Many of them returned and became faculty at the GS university. Though there are vestiges of this relationship remaining, when the GN champion retired and returned to the US, the relationship waned. When the students and new faculty returned to their GS university, they couldn't find support from the state to continue to conduct research. Many resorted to taking jobs with the government or sought other external partnerships. They have slowly built some relationships and credibility of their own; now they are considered a credible source of quality students, if not research. Both the GN and the GS researchers (M009, M010) in this case highlighted that only the dedication of the GN researcher to the project ensured continued support for the partnership, and that the humanitarian research system tends to leave capable GS HRIs stranded after their capacity building activities are over.

Localizing humanitarian research involves more than a few superficial adjustments. It requires a structural rethinking of these power asymmetries and a shift in perspective, in which local researchers, and their approaches, methods, and unique contributions are recognized and valued. In GN–GS partnerships, discussions of power differentials must be encouraged from the outset of a research project (Bukalidi et al., 2021; Lokot and Wake, 2021b; Sultana, 2007). Research partners must engage in open communication about power dynamics and challenge the assumptions underlying those dynamics at each stage of the research process so as to establish a trusting and mutually beneficial relationship (Lokot and Wake, 2021b; van der Haar et al., 2013).

Funding

GN institutions maintain a dominant position as both the main contributors to and receivers of humanitarian aid grants. A recent study by ELRHA specifically investigated the financing of humanitarian research (Issa et al., 2022). They found that most humanitarian research was embedded in a humanitarian project and the grants awarded to a GN NGO. If a GS institution was listed, it was as a partner or subgrantee. They also found that most grants specifically designated for humanitarian research and innovation were awarded to GN universities or research institutes and were almost universally led by a GN PI.

With smaller national budgets, GS governments often do not prioritize the production or use of research. They do not budget for research, especially when faced with cycles of humanitarian crises (M003, M007, I002, I007, I016, I017, I020, I026), leading most GS HRIs to rely on GN funders, especially bilateral and multilateral donors who may come with their own very specific national agendas (I001, I002, I003, I019, I022, I023). Respondents expressed a need for some "soul-searching," with the feeling that resources were indeed available within GS countries if only governments would appreciate research as an investment (I017, M006, M010).

Funding differentials at once reflect the power dynamics already discussed and are a structural means of preserving that power imbalance. **The HRI controlling the funding controls the research agenda, process, and the roles and responsibilities of the other partners** (I001, I003, I004, I006, I007, I009, I011, I012, I016, I017, I024, M002). This is almost invariably GN HRIs since GN donors are more likely to fund GN researchers, who have more experience and support in producing and submitting proposals to GN donors (Blicharska et al., 2017; Hammond et al., 2020; Issa et al., 2022). This can make it difficult for GS organizations to participate in large grants or studies funded by GN donors unless they enter a partnership with a GN HRI prime (Nimer, 2019). As a result, GS institutions are often only included in projects as tokens or subcontractors without decision-making power (Blicharska et al., 2017; Issa et al., 2022).

> "It is very rare that we have the luxury to undertake research for the sake of research. It deprives us of higher knowledge on something that is not as practical but important. … I look at [GN colleagues] with envy. … Everything they decide to research seems to be legitimate a priori, whereas the GS has to prove the worth of anything they want to study" (I011).

Humanitarian research in the GS is seldom a priority for GN donors and NGOs, who prefer funding tangible interventions. To resource research, many GS HRIs, particularly NGOs, must embed research components into larger strategic partnerships and projects, but even this leaves minimal funding for research (I015, I016, I019). Because the majority of humanitarian research funding was embedded in interventions, it was not possible for the ELRHA study described above to determine exactly the division of interventions and research in the available data. But from 2017 to 2021, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Common Reporting Standard (CRS) databases, funding for "humanitarian projects that had research and/or innovation components" accounted for 0.26% and 1.32% of the total humanitarian assistance budgets (Issa et al., 2022, 30). Meaning that the funding going to humanitarian innovations was likely more than 100 times the amount going to research. This is an issue since a "learning culture" must be cultivated among all humanitarians, which necessitates setting aside funding for research. For some HRIs, therefore, interventions rather than research are their core mandate. Many of the GS interviewees said that they see projects with research as the sole aim as a "luxury" that they often do not have, unlike their GN counterparts (002, I003, I007, I010, I011, I012, I014, I020). Though they may participate in GN-led research-only project, it is especially difficult to obtain research-specific funding independent of interventions for GS-led research projects and South-to-South (S2S) research collaborations, i.e. research projects without a GN lead (I011, I017).

Funders set the agenda and the research standards

GN donor evaluations of research proposals use as their standards GN methods, approaches, and frameworks, thereby systematizing preferences for those that use them, and perhaps unintentionally preventing other methods or approaches (and the GS HRIs that tend to use them) from being funded and recognized more widely (I011, I017, I028). A recent ELRHA report found that "while a small number of recipients of project funding for humanitarian research and innovation are located in crisis-affected regions, the majority are located in high-income countries at a distance from humanitarian crisis events" (Issa et al., 2022, 6). This can create an unfair advantage for GN HRIs who are already larger and better funded than their typically smaller, underfunded GS HRI counterparts, who are more likely to propose innovative research approaches that are more contextually appropriate but not recognized or even widely known by the GN.

Since GN donors and HRIs fund virtually all humanitarian research, they dictate the humanitarian research agenda. Through funding, they set the focus on specific countries or crises according to their priorities and interests, leaving blind spots in humanitarian research (I003, I007, I008, I011, I014, I017, I019, I020). For example, interviewees from Central America felt that not enough humanitarian donor attention was given to the region despite its vulnerability to frequent natural disasters. As another example, the co-creation of research and taking research results back to the study participant communities are technical blind spots that the GN community is only now becoming aware of but that have long been core values of GS HRIs and often fundamental to their study designs and methodologies.

> "You ask me about equitable partnerships and meaningful participation, but donors don't care about that. They give the big organizations all the money and forget all others". (I020)

Since funding for research follows donor priorities, it fluctuates significantly. When a humanitarian crisis occurs, there is typically an influx of cash, which quickly dries up (I019). GS HRIs, who are more likely

to focus on a single geographic area of population, then struggle to maintain their research agendas and continue to employ staff between crises. More funding emphasis on pre- and post-emergency research agendas would allow GS countries to study and address the underlying long-term issues that caused or resulted from the humanitarian crisis while maintaining their research capacities during a time when few GN HRIs or INGOs are present.

GN-funded research typically focuses more on the topics of interest to GN funders and institutions than on the needs of the communities and countries being studied (I001, I003, I004, I006, I007, I009, I011, I012, I016, I017, I024, M002). As with many GN HRIs, some GS HRIs have opted out of grants if the donor's requirements or agendas were too far from theirs, but doing so is still a luxury for most GS HRIs as they tend to have fewer alternative sources of funding (I017, I019, M002). At the same time, since GN donors set the agenda, often without consulting GS experts, there is a risk that they may fund research on topics that have already been studied locally and published in local languages, leading to duplication of existing literature (I011, I016, I017). For the same reason, when GS researchers come across findings that don't align with the GN donors' or partners' interests and priorities, they may have to ignore them, limiting the potential impact of research projects and humanitarian responses. The GS researcher may feel pressure to either reframe or dismiss information that is irrelevant to donors' agendas, but may be unable to use it in other ways beyond the initial study because they frequently lack intellectual ownership over the data collected. "You know it is incredibly important, but you have to tailor and frame it in a way in which the client will respond positively to and will accept" (I017).

Funding policy reinforces power differentials.

Most, but certainly not all, GS HRIs are small and lack the flexible, core funding that would enable them to set their terms and research agenda. Overhead funding allocated to GS actors is significantly lower than that available to international organizations (M002, M005, I008, I023) (Robillard et al., 2021), making it difficult for them to retain employees (I008, I015, I016, I017). There is an assumption that expenses are cheaper in GS contexts because people tend to live on much smaller household budgets, and that expectations of comfort while working should be lower than that of GN researchers because the population's comfort level is generally lower. But to be able to conduct research of a quality equivalent to that conducted by GN HRIs, GS HRIs need facilities and services at a higher quality than the local average. Salaries of support staff need to be high enough to compete with international organizations, buildings need to be especially secure as a higher quality facility within a low resource setting is at high risk of theft, and internet connectivity and electricity often need to be augmented in the same way that international organizations' offices in the GS do.

> "It's the cofunding, the unconditional grants, and the blank checks from donors that allow us to push back. You can only stand your ground if you know you will survive tomorrow" (I028).

GS HRI dependence on short-term, project-based funding in the form of subgrants from GN HRIs rarely allows for real investment in research capacities, keeping them from securing their own larger grants, and hindering their ability to develop their organization and provide compensation to their employees between projects (I008, I016, I015, I023).

GS researchers' salary scales are generally significantly lower than their GN counterparts, even when they work on the same project and possess similar experience levels (I015, M005). With generally lower salaries and fewer safety nets, they are in general less able to weather gaps in their income. This particularly applies to data collectors and lower-ranking researchers (I015). This precariousness perpetuates power asymmetries between GN and GS researchers and pushes qualified local experts to relocate to take advantage of the benefits associated with being classified as "international," resulting in a worrying brain drain in countries that could greatly benefit from their expertise. Lastly, GS researchers are sometimes exposed to heightened risks due to inadequate operational budgets necessary for risk mitigation.

Since covering administrative costs is a constant struggle for many GS HRIs, their members often

go to significant lengths to ensure the continuance of the HRI (I011, I014, I016, I020, I023). Sometimes researchers volunteer hours, undertake private consultancies, or use the HRI's leftover funds to complete research projects. Lack of appropriate funding for indirect costs also results in limited access to research infrastructure and technology that facilitates robust research (I001, I002, I003, I005, I007). This creates hierarchies in research and knowledge production to the advantage of the GN HRIs and their researchers who do have access to this infrastructure. For example, GS-collected data are often analyzed by GN researchers with expensive software and technology—inaccessible to their GS counterparts—and published under the name of the GN institutions, which provides the GN institution but not the GS counterparts with credit for and respect from those research outputs (I004, I005, I006, I007, I009).

Despite this dynamic, this study did find some GS HRIs that have managed to grow significantly and are emerging as respected HRIs. The Africa Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) is an independent think tank based in Kenya and founded by Kenyans (https://amadpoc.org/)that is now working in multiple countries throughout the region. While they are sometimes able to secure direct grants from donors, most grants still come from subgrants on GN INGO humanitarian programs, with staff taking consultancies to fill gaps, or being poached by higher-paying international organizations. The Partnership for Economic Policy (https://www.pep-net.org/), also based in Kenya, provides grants, training, mentorship, and peer review for GS researchers to produce high-quality studies. A larger HRI, the funding they receive from GN donors is mostly restricted. Another example, GLOW Consultants in Pakistan (https://glowconsultants.org/) does both humanitarian research and interventions. They have an endowment that provides most of their funding and is unrestricted. Even so, they struggle to negotiate when they do compete for grants with GN donors or partners.

The Grand Bargain (GB)

The Grand Bargain was the main agreement emerging from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey. Intending to promote the localization of humanitarian assistance, it committed to "making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary" (UN, 2016) . As summarized by (Robillard et al., 2021, 12), the Grand Bargain committed to: "(1) increasing direct funding to local organizations; (2) investing in the institutional capacity of local humanitarian actors; (3) forming more equitable partnerships; and (4) ensuring that coordination platforms are inclusive of local humanitarian actors." Unfortunately, progress on all commitments has been mixed (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2022).

Interviewees for this study have indicated that the GB has had no impact on the quality or quantity of their financial resources for research (I019, I021, I023, I024) and insist that the commitments made under the GB must apply to the localization of humanitarian research as well as humanitarian assistance (I024).

"I've been waiting for the Grand Bargain to have an effect. I just finished a three-day reflection meeting with other centers in Colombia and Uganda, and we kept asking ourselves: 'When does it get easier?' Funding becomes harder to find because the whole pocket is shrinking. Aid money is decreasing" (I019).

Yet, the GB does appear to at least have advanced the dialogue on localization (I019, I024). "Buzzwords like 'Grand Bargain' and 'localization' have helped shift the discourse. … I'm thinking of humanitarian orgs we work with. I don't know what the statistics would say. But I see increased opportunities—maybe not funding—but for strengthening their structures" (I024).

One interviewee argued that the best result to come out of the GB so far has been the emergence of networks like NEAR (I019).

Smaller GS HRIs sometimes have a limited administrative, financial, and grant management capacity (Dodsworth, 2019), which is necessary to meet the complex and cumbersome GN donor reporting requirements. To respond to this issue, rather than outsourcing their financial and administrative tasks to GN partners while maintaining control of the funding, as suggested by some scholars (Blicharska et al., 2017; DSAI Humanitarian Action Study Group, 2020), some interviewees have argued that the rise of large GS HRIs and networks presents an opportunity for South-to-South cooperation that would allow more direct, localized funding to stay within the GS (I011, I017). However, donor reporting requirements are based on the culture and context of the GN. Realities in many GS humanitarian contexts make these requirements nonsensical, offensive, and difficult to comply with (I011, I014). The requirement to have receipts for any purchase when they are not a part of the normal commerce process, for example. Or, another common example, the use of an official exchange rate rather than the street rate when there is a 50% difference or banks do not have sufficient cash. Innovative, context-aware, and simplified funding solutions and reporting requirements are necessary to rebalance the power and resource differential between GS and GN HRIs.

As USAID's strategy makes clear, localization would redress some of the issues discussed in this section, but requires more than providing funding to local organizations (USAID, 2022b). Donors and partners must rethink their relationships with the GS and contextualize their processes and requirements. This is imperative because excluding GS HRIs from direct funding overlooks the unique contributions that GS researchers can provide by bringing their positionality, contextual knowledge, and potentially more effective research approaches to the table.

Language

The English language—and to a lesser extent, Spanish and French—dominates the humanitarian sector, academia, and research (Humanitarian Governance: Accountability, Advocacy, and Alternatives and IHSA, 2022). Humanitarian operations, publications on the latest humanitarian issues of interest, publishing one's work, conferences, donor reports, and calls for proposals are all in the primary colonial languages. The GN establishes and maintains its control and power in the humanitarian sector through language. For example, most calls for proposals are published online and in the donor's language—usually a former colonial language. This practice excludes local actors who often do not operate in these languages, may have limited access to the internet, or simply may not be savvy enough in GN proposal processes to know how to identify opportunities within donor portals (Robillard et al., 2021).

Language in research is important for the conduct of the research and the uptake of the findings, both of which can be difficult when the language of the affected population and the GS HRI is not one of the dominant colonial languages.

> "[Respondents] can say anything, can lie. The expat doesn't know, but the locals know better, especially with the local languages, you feel more a part of the participant community and know if the information is really trustworthy" (M007).

When implementing research through a language that is the affected population's first language, either the researchers must speak the local language or conversations must be translated. When the local language is not a dominant colonial language, then it is rare that GN researchers will speak this language, forcing them to use translators to speak directly to the affected population and sometimes even to the local data collectors.

Not only does this risk the researcher and the informant misunderstanding each other, but it also increases the time required for interviews and therefore the burden on the informants. As one respondent explained, "If the PI doesn't understand the language and you translate for him, this interrupts the interview. The [respondent] asks, 'Did you give the right interpretation?' It extends the time of the interview, [and the respondent] says, 'You said 20 minutes but now it is an hour.' You have to placate them. By the end of the day, you feel the weight" (M007). GS humanitarian researchers were much more likely to speak the language of the study participants, allowing them to catch nuances and facilitating trust and the rapport needed to get good,

credible information from informants. There may still be times, though, when it may be difficult to find GS researchers who speak the language of the affected population, such as when the affected population are displaced out of their language zones and the GS HRI is from the host population.

> "It's not only translation costs. It's also making sure it is contextualized and understandable for locals. Donors don't expect or realize that this is necessary, and there's always some negotiation we need to do" (I019).

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, language provides a form of gatekeeping for securing humanitarian research opportunities or getting credit that favors the GN. For many GS researchers, the literature in the former colonizers' languages is difficult to access, use, or contribute to (I003, 002, I004, I009, I010, I020, I021, I027, M003, S002). Language also limits their ability to publish in the most respected journals, which are predominantly in English (Blicharska et al., 2017). While GS researchers could publish in other languages, they would not reach a broad international audience or receive the same exposure (Smith et al., 2014). Due to language, GS researchers are also unable to present their findings at the most prestigious conferences, mostly held in English or other colonial languages (I011). As a result, GS HRI research findings are often disseminated no further than the donor reports, in English, to meet requirements (I001, I004, I008, I014). Important research findings may be lost to the broader local and international humanitarian community, preventing the GS HRI from building its credibility through publication. The very limited resources and time allocated for research must be prioritized to effectively reach the audiences targeted by the donor. The donor's target audience rarely includes the affected population, and therefore the resources necessary to appropriately adapt and translate the findings are often not included in the budget (please refer to the section on research uptake for a detailed discussion).

> "A big proportion of the reports we publish are in English, for international organizations or to meet the requirements of the projects we undertake. This is problematic. It is clear that the knowledge doesn't reach where it should. I often need to choose between producing something useful or publishing" (I004).

Literature produced in English is very often inaccessible to affected communities (I002 I003, I004, I010, I028). Even Spanish and French may still represent hurdles to accessing knowledge in countries with indigenous communities (I003, I010, I028). This is contrary to the values expressed by GS HRIs, that research should first benefit affected communities rather than only generalizable knowledge. For this reason, GS researchers tend to "use the languages that victims use" (I014), even if this approach does not bring them academic credit. To reach affected people and local communities with their research outputs, GS HRIs utilize visual aids, bite-sized social media content, audio recordings, and in-person consultations (I003, I008, I012, I016, I019, I024).

> "People who do research in countries with such big problems, with such unstable political apparatuses, have an ethical and moral responsibility to use and convert our research into public policy proposals. But the academy that makes proposals has less prestige. … Especially when we do research involving people who open up and tell us about what they go through, our job is to make contributions that can improve their life concretely" (I012).
>
> "Even when we try to translate technical tools and frameworks or even reports, we will end up blind or confused, without any benefits. Why? Because we are not used to this alien terminology, it's not in our practice" (I020).

Instead, the international humanitarian sector often employs jargon and publishes lengthy reports in colonial languages, contributing to making research inaccessible to the populations most affected and the policy makers who most need it (I014, I017, I020,

I028). The international humanitarian sector should consider the impact of language on equitable participation in research and make a concerted effort to shift away from the current English-centric and jargon-filled model. This is particularly important as all interviewees noted that language barriers are a significant obstacle to their involvement in research.

Partnerships

GS HRIs find almost all of their research opportunities through partnerships with GN HRIs or INGOs. GS researchers repeatedly referred to these partnerships in relation to every aspect of their work. Examining the benefits and barriers of different types of partnerships and inter-partner relationships can provide guidance on how to promote healthy, productive humanitarian research partnerships. There are many types and configurations of partnerships. **GS researchers define partnerships by who are in it, its power structure, and the research roles allocated to each partner.** The defining factor is the imbalance of power and control over the roles the GN partner allows the GS partner to take on. Interviewees often used "equal" and "ethical" together when describing partnerships they felt were most successful (I005, I017, I028).

As a partnership endures over time (I004 mentioned 25 years, I005 said 10 years), trust in each other's contributions builds, and the relationship naturally becomes more equal and more productive. The short-term nature of funding is a significant barrier to building these relationships between GN and GS partners (I004, I005, I011). Relationships among GS partners tend to be longer-term because they are based on more than individual grants. **GS HRIs' ideal partnership was equal, horizontal, and respectful, with long-term funding to build a long-term relationship. Each partner learns from the other. They work together as peers, make decisions together,** and are flexible so as to adjust to changes in the humanitarian context or the capacities and research priorities of each partner (I011, I012, I024, I025).

GS–GN partnerships

> We are "co-investigators but with different power" (I004).

GS researchers very often initially described GS–GN partnerships in negative terms, then gave a nod to the benefits or necessity of these partnerships. GS HRIs continue to accept unequal partnerships with GN HRIs or NGOs, mostly because they are almost the only source of research funding available to them. Some GS HRIs value the networks and technical training that often (but not always) come with a GN partnership (I013, I016, M001) (Ekzayez et al., 2021). GN HRIs can shield GS research from government sensitivities or obstruction (I004, I020, M005). Working with GN partners in a collaborative manner can help the GS researchers to better understand GN donors and their application processes (I008, I016). GS HRIs make use of networks within GN HRIs/donors, explaining, "those who leave this institution, they go to these [GN] partners, creating a network that helps us—when there is a problem, we can suggest a solution and they trust us" (M010). The GN partner benefits by increasing their understanding of the context, by being exposed to methodologies more appropriate to the context developed by the GS partners and to new cognitive frameworks with which to approach research questions or to develop new methods, and by gaining a better understanding of norms and values influencing a humanitarian crisis (Bukalidi et al., 2021; Dodsworth, 2019; Green and Mudinga, 2021; Lokot and Wake, 2021b).

> "The system is stacked against GS researchers—the methods considered respectable are defined by GN, the journals that are prestigious are all GN, the conferences where connections happen are mostly hosted by GN, the money is in GN orgs. … The exclusion and inequality are systemic" (I006).

GS HRIs nevertheless chafe at the limitations in control and leadership opportunities imposed by these partnerships, as they reinforce power inequities. One researcher described these partnerships as "co-investigators but with different power" (I004). Interviewees described these partnerships as

"unequal" (I001, I004, I015), **"one-directional"** (I011), **"extractive and rapacious"** (I028), and **"exploitative"** (M002), **with the GN partner controlling resources, the research question** (I011, I016), **and the delegation of roles** (I003, I011). GN partners sometimes even bring their own teams (students) rather than using the GS HRI's staff/students (I008). The GN partner nearly always takes the larger portion of the funding, even if the GS partner is doing the data collection and the logistics (I004). One GN academic said his institution requires that more than 50% of all grant funding stay with their university, regardless of the roles taken on by the GS researcher (M008).

> "Sometimes the GN organization also gives freedom for researchers to research political themes they may not be able to otherwise" (I004).

GS roles in GN partnerships

It is the GN partner who controls the funding and therefore determines the selection and engagement of partners, including the allocation of research roles (I006, I007, I017). Engaging all partners as early as possible in the research process is as beneficial for the study's outcome as it is for the partnership itself (Steinert et al., 2021). If GS researchers are involved from the beginning, the GS partner can inform the research question, sampling methods, data collection methods, and the data collection tools to be more appropriate, generating better-quality results (Megaw et al., 2021). Unfortunately, the research question and major research design are decided before the GS HRI is engaged, leaving little scope for the GS partner to meaningfully shape the study design or methods.

The level of control or participation allowed to the GS HRI beyond data collection depends heavily on the personal traits of the GN PI, often a consultant hired by a GN INGO. In many cases, a GN PI "parachutes" into a crisis without any experience of the context and yet retains control of all aspects of a study (I009). Preferred examples were GN PIs who used a more egalitarian "learning" coproduction approach that sought to make each partner stronger through the experience (I020).

> "Sometimes as GS you are the 'data-collecting mule.' You are the extra animal running around in the field; it is a great underutilization of power and skills" (I014).

GS HRIs and independent researchers are most often used as a service to collect data or translate for GN researchers, or facilitate contact with study populations. Although roles are slowly broadening, GS researcher input is still most often related to contextualizing survey instruments or conducting data collection, and they are least often included in analysis and reporting, as if GS HRI's capacities of value are purely context specific (I014, I017, I020, M001, M002, M007) (Alinirhu, 2021; Freschi, 2011; Hammond et al., 2020; Lokot and Wake, 2021a; Pinet and Leon-Himmelstine, 2020; Humanitarian Health Ethics Research Group, 2019). In all tasks, the GN partner provides "oversight" (I002, I007, I013). During the COVID-19 lockdowns, GN researchers were forced to relinquish some control to local researchers. This was seen as a step toward more equitable research, but in the end, GN researchers still maintained control of the essential elements of the research process, and the same system remained in place (Pinet and Leon-Himmelstine, 2020) (I016).

This power imbalance between partners undermines the quality of the study by depriving it of the other forms of expertise the GS partners offer. If a partnership endures, the GS roles tend to grow as the GN partner comes to trust the GS HRI, though GN researchers are assumed to have sufficient capacity from the start (I005).

Global South-to-Global South (S2S) partnerships

Many of the dynamics that define GS–GN HRI partnerships are altered in S2S partnerships. They were generally used by interviewees as examples of more equitable relationships, though they have weaknesses of their own.

S2S partnerships often look and function differently from GS–GN HRI partnerships, and form for different reasons. One interviewee said there is "good collaboration among local organizations due to the difficult context in the country; sticking together is the

only way to survive" (I010). The GS HRIs also often referred to the affected populations and local governments as a partner rather than as a source of information, the object of study, or the audience to influence.

> "We were created to respond to public health needs [in our country] and those countries similar to ours. We couldn't do research in isolation from communities or local institutions" (M010).

Interviewees described S2S partnerships as being more equal, with easier communication, all members constantly present, and more flexibility in deciding roles (I001, I004, I015, M002). S2S partnerships tend to form around long-term relationships between organizations and individuals who share a common reference of the needs and dynamics in the local context (M001, M002). One interviewee stated, "You feel that you understand each other so it is easier to trade ideas" (M004). GS HRIs partner with a wide array of local actors (I009). "Communication is easy, and implementation is easier because they are there and can attend any initiative" (I015), unlike GN "helicopter" research. Though GS researchers report they prefer S2S partnerships, we find fewer of them, largely because donor funds go directly to GN HRIs, but only indirectly to GS HRIs (I004, I 010). Even when eligibility for a grant is limited to GS HRIs, **the competitive structure for securing the grants often pits GS HRIs in competition with one another instead of in collaboration with one another, preventing shared infrastructure, key personnel, or administrative capacities** (I007, I012, I020).

GS-HRI led research

Discussion of GS-HRI led research in humanitarian spaces for their own aims, with control of their own funding, was almost entirely absent from the literature and was therefore a focus of the interviews. The interviews conducted for this study reveal a predictable set of barriers, but more interestingly, they also show how very differently GS HRIs approach humanitarian research. Their unique, complementary voices mean GS HRI-led research has the potential to significantly strengthen our understanding of humanitarian crises and responses.

Barriers to GS HRI-led research

Numerous contextual, procedural, and practical barriers impede GS HRIs from taking the lead on humanitarian research, even in their own countries. A fundamental barrier identified by interviewees to GS leadership in humanitarian research is the unfounded assumption that, if humanitarian research is GS-led or if GN researchers are not involved, the research must necessarily be less robust, the results less credible and less impactful (I004, I008, I009, I016, I017, I020).

> "First, recognize the challenge. This requires more focus in some of the agendas and issues like decolonizing research, anti-racism in research, etc." (M003).

As GS researchers gain more experience (or their research is gaining more recognition), GS HRIs report they are starting to get more opportunities to lead research, but this is still less common than partnerships led by GN institutions. "Leading" research entails more than receiving grants. It is also about setting the research question and designing the methods, interpreting the meaning of the data, and disseminating the results to the target audience. We did not find examples in the literature or in our interviews where a GS–GN partnership was truly led by the GS partner, or the GN partner had a subgrant from a GS partner. When funding passes through a GN partner, ultimate control and oversight go to the GN partner. **With funding goes the power to determine the agenda and study design; therefore, for GS-led humanitarian research to happen, grants need to be awarded directly to the GS HRIs.**

Most GS governments, especially during humanitarian crises, have little funding allocated to research. When they do fund research, interviewees noted that the results of the research might be influenced by government pressure (I003, I008, I015, I020, M003). To study humanitarian crises in their own countries, GS HRIs struggle to compete against better-resourced, more esteemed GN HRIs for funding from GN donors who prioritize GN research interests, not local

research interests (I007, I012, I020). Most often, the result is that the GN HRI wins the funding opportunity, and the GS HRI has little influence over research in their own community.

> "International organizations compete with local organizations for funding, but this is an uneven battle. Even if they try to form consortiums, they still would get a smaller amount of money than international organizations" (I007).

Donors are risk intolerant and see GS HRIs as riskier than their GN counterparts, especially in terms of administrative noncompliance, which is assumed to be due to corruption when it may actually be due to an incongruence in administrative norms (I011). Hence, the GN donor emphasis is on administrative capacity building rather than on investment in the unique structures upon which research depends. For example, GS HRIs generally conduct research without access to staff statisticians, staff proposal writers, reliable high-speed internet, licenses to analytical software, extensive access to journals behind paywalls, etc. Though they doubtless exist, we did not find in our interviews, or the literature reviewed, examples where donors made significant adjustments to their procedures or requirements to meet the administrative and financial realities faced by GS HRIs beyond making certain bids eligible only to GS entities. Instances where the GN donors included building research-related infrastructure such as those listed above, were equally rare. Instead, **GS HRIs are expected to remake themselves in the image of GN HRIs**, starting with administrative procedures but also with regard to research priorities and methods, while struggling with weak research-related infrastructure.

Most GS HRIs are relatively small and are working on a shoestring budget, keeping their overhead as low as possible and simplifying or minimizing administrative and financial infrastructure while meeting local accountability norms. GN financial and administrative structures are based on different operational norms and scales than those of most GS HRIs. **GN structures are not always suitable for GS HRIs, who need to be light and flexible to survive.** Some interviewees suggested that instead of working to create an unsustainable structure of procedures and administrative staff, larger GS organizations could support smaller GS HRIs to make them more competitive, either by underwriting them to reduce risk to donors or by handling their financial processing for them (I011). Another solution would be for donors to either adjust administrative requirements or to provide practical support by building a central structure that would serve these capacities for multiple GS HRIs simultaneously.

Research agendas

GS HRIs' preferred research agendas focus primarily on issues that are important to the population affected by the humanitarian crisis. Local researchers are likely better situated than GN researchers to shape research questions and methods that are relevant to the study population, to interpret subtle but important dimensions of meaning from the data, to interpret nonverbal communication, and to ensure uptake among local stakeholders (Bukalidi et al., 2021). They may also be more flexible and responsive to changes in context (Ekzayez, 2020). GS HRIs sometimes focus on a particular type of shock to which an area is prone, or on the plight of a particular population to whom they have a connection or from whom they are derived. With this very local focus, they often intermingle needs assessment and evaluations with research.

GN HRIs, on the other hand, focus on more generalizable research that serves the evidence needs of the larger international humanitarian community across multiple contexts, which often does not benefit the population bear the burden of the research. As discussed in the ethics section, many **GS researchers stated they felt it is unethical to conduct research on a population suffering from a humanitarian crisis if that population does not directly benefit from that research** (I001, I002, I012, I024). When asked for their preferred research topics, most interviewees stated that "it depends on the context." In other words, GS HRIs were motivated more by crisis-driven needs than by their own internal interests,

which they considered a "luxury" (I011).[1] Importantly, some, but certainly not all, GS HRIs noted that they have recently been able to secure funding to study all topics they were interested in (I001, I008), albeit admittedly often through creative approaches such as embedding research into larger projects or utilizing leftover funds. This use of creative approaches to securing funding is progress that can be expanded upon going forward.

Unlike international HRIs or NGOs, national or local GS HRIs are present even when there is no crisis, or during crises that do not elicit an international response. Some would like to research neglected but important issues such as disaster risk reduction (DRR), resilience building, or recovery. They find, however, that when the INGOs are not present, the context and the GS HRIs themselves are not on the donors' radar. So funding is not accessible to the GS HRIs for this type of research. The GS HRIs' larger focus on the affected population naturally leads to research that expands the role of the population in determining the research questions, methods, and analysis. By including the population in the research process (coproduction), the population knows, understands, and can make use of the results. **While coproduction of humanitarian research is a "new" value among GN HRIs, most GS HRIs have always valued and practiced coproduction.** Many interviewees expressed frustration at the common GN HRI approach that extracts data from the population but seldom revisits the populations to discuss the results of the data they themselves generated (I001, I002, I012).

GS-led research is well positioned for uptake and impact within the context (and beyond). Coproduction increases the research's validity to local decision-makers and buy-in from the population. An interviewee in Latin America, for example, said they conduct studies in which communities themselves collect the information, identify where they are on the map, and discuss the natural disaster risks in the area. Participation in the research itself may have helped the communities prepare for disasters. Because GS-led humanitarian research usually focuses on topics relevant to the population, it is also highly relevant to local decision-makers (I008). Some GS HRIs also involve policy makers in the research process to ensure the questions are relevant to policy, and ultimately increasing government trust in the research outputs (I006).

GS HRIs do face some unique challenges in pursuing certain research questions. **In certain contexts, some topics of research, or even the conduct of research, can be too risky to be GS HRI-led.** In conflict settings, or in authoritarian or controlling regimes, research that may question the policies or actions of the regime or may promote alternative views on sensitive topics can put local researchers at a high risk of pressure or reprisals. In these cases, GS HRIs prefer not to lead the research but rather to be shielded by a connection to an international body.

Capacities

GS HRI interviewees report increasing capacity to participate in or even lead research, increasing confidence in their own research capacity, and an increasing recognition by others of their capacity, leading to more opportunities (I016, I024). Yet, according to some interviewees, GS actors are still frequently valued mostly for their operational skills in humanitarian research and not for their research or technical capacity. GS actors therefore remain generally behind GN HRIs in knowledge production, mostly due to structural limitations (I013).

Greater access to research funds helps GN HRIs to build and maintain more operational capacity, reinforcing their competitive edge for further funding. GN researchers have more experience with producing and submitting large research proposals to GN donors and tend to have more support through the proposal process (Blicharska et al., 2017; Hammond et al., 2020). Most GS HRIs, on the other hand, are primarily humanitarian NGOs or universities, and research is a secondary activity (I001). GS universities are often structured to support teaching rather than research. GS NGO-HRIs are structured

[1] One example is Adeso's CORE initiative that provides operational, administrative, finance, and due diligence for local or national NGOs (https://adesoafrica.org/adeso-in-action/innovation-enterprise-development/).

to deliver humanitarian assistance. Researchers in these **GS HRIs, therefore, must be somewhat self-sufficient in their research, while researchers in GN HRIs are very often supported by internal "infrastructure"** unique to research, such as statisticians, access to technology and software, access to peer-reviewed journals, etc.

> "In the GS we are mostly practitioners rather than research institutions. Even where there are institutions, the financial capacity is very low. The research these institutions put out is limited because there is a lack of means, financial resources, and research infrastructure" (I001).

GS HRIs do not necessarily have fewer capacities, rather they often possess a different set of capacities or strengths. Those controlling the funding, mainly GN donors or GN NGO partners, control the power to define "capacity" by inferring the comparative worth of different capacities. As USAID recently recognized (USAID, 2022b), "capacity building" in the humanitarian realm historically focuses on compliance with USAID donors; this approach often does not consider the other unique capacities GS HRIs offer. Such capacity building comes across as pushing GS HRIs into the GN HRI mold by building an overly heavy set of procedures that are impossible to maintain between grants from the donor. These procedures are suitable for the donor's needs, but inappropriate for the context or the HRIs' needs (I011, I014) (Robillard et al., 2021). Thinking beyond administrative capacity, interviewees suggested a role for GN researchers to provide technical support on specific research skills (M001) and English writing skills to facilitate proposal and report writing (I024).

Learning goes in both directions. The default focus on administrative and financial capacities ignores the many other types of capacities and **assumes that if a GS HRI or NGO lacks administrative capacities, they must necessarily lack other capacities.** However, GS HRIs have developed many innovative participatory research methods and strong policy advocacy skills the GN HRIs could learn from (M001). Some interviewees suggested that GS HRIs should compile a collection of GS-designed or GS-inspired research methods and tools to showcase their distinct approaches and contributions to research (I001). Many GS researchers have the personal skills to conduct good research but struggle without research-specific organizational infrastructure or a pool of qualified research assistants. With their more localized networks, conferences and strategic partnerships become even more important to GS HRIs, since conferences and partnerships can extend both their exposure and networks.

The pool of skilled researchers in the GS is much smaller. In part, this is due to the higher salary scales in GN HRIs, and partly because only the elite in most GS countries can obtain an advanced education (I003). Many GS researchers were trained in the GN, then return to work for GS HRIs. They sometimes leverage their GN networks to get funding and thus maintain their skill base. If they cannot, they risk losing the relevancy of their skills because of the dearth of opportunities. To maintain their skills, they sometimes shift to more profitable and available monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, or they take work with GN HRIs. Those being trained in the GS are now trained at universities with little ability to really teach research or provide research experiences, which limits the pool from which to select researchers (M004, M005, M006).

> "You have the skills, you know how to search in Google, how to conduct the research, we don't. Even the universities don't teach them" (I020).

The very crises humanitarian research aims to investigate has an impact on the capacity of HRIs and researchers from that context. National crises, especially if protracted, can reverse gains in capacity through erosion of the infrastructure to access information and to connect with others because of embargoes and declining education systems. One interviewee described the deterioration of internet and communications infrastructure, while others described increased government suspicion of humanitarian research (M002, M003, M004, I020). Finally, and very importantly, where there has been a protracted crisis, the quality of local education suffers, further reducing the quality of the human pool to draw staff from (I025).

It takes resources to build and maintain the support structures unique to research. Many GS HRIs work in a resource-poor environment with unreliable infrastructure. Access to many materials and technology GN HRIs take for granted is more expensive for those in the GS, especially those regions highly affected by humanitarian crises. Unable to compete with larger, better-resourced GN HRIs, GS HRIs often partner as subgrantees with GN HRIs or INGOs and remain at a disadvantage when negotiating or competing to become a prime in a joint proposal (Blicharska et al., 2017; Dodsworth, 2019; Nimer, 2019). Lack of adequate funding for GS partners to cover their running costs, much less build infrastructure, further undermining their capacity to secure their own grants in the future (DSAI Humanitarian Action Study Group, 2020) and further reinforces the unequal power dynamics (Dodsworth, 2019; Fast, 2019; Lokot and Wake, 2021a; Lombe et al., 2013). Fewer research opportunities mean more gaps in funding, making it hard to maintain a skilled, experienced pool of personnel and other sorts of infrastructure. Building infrastructure takes time and reliable income. Gaps in income make it difficult to retain the skilled workforce necessary to build corporate memory and experience. To fill the gaps, researchers often take on consultancies doing other work, like program assessments and evaluations, or donate their time to their HRIs (I014, I011, I016, I023).

In place of traditionally offered administrative capacity building, GS HRIs request support to build internal organizational infrastructure to support research activities. GN HRIs, especially universities, provide their researchers with access to statistical advisors, peer-reviewed journals, computer software, reliable internet, proposal writers, finance managers, etc. to support their research efforts, usually paid through high indirect cost rates. The shorter grant periods and lower overhead allowed for GS HRIs, in comparison to GN HRIs, are insufficient to build and maintain, such research infrastructure (DSAI Humanitarian Action Study Group, 2020). Although the vast majority of GS HRIs found during the course of this study fit the above profile, not all GS HRIs are small and struggling. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), we found two examples of HRIs that have managed to grow to command international respect, and to build the necessary infrastructure to function at that level. In the first example, the key was a long-term partnership with a GN HRI that aimed from the start to build this infrastructure: a partnership between the Schools of Public Health at the University of Kinshasa and Tulane University (M006, M008, M009, M010). The faculty at University of Kinshasa now teach students who become researchers for the school. These students also go into the government, building the capacity of the Ministry of Health to create and use evidence in their work. The other example is the world-renowned Institut National de Recherche Biomedicale (INRB), a Congolese biomedical research institute led by Jean-Jacques Muyembe. While not specifically a humanitarian research institute, it is best known for its expertise in developing the most effective treatments for Ebola and for its management of outbreaks of Ebola, COVID, and other highly infectious diseases. INRB often works in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO). In a presentation found online, Muyembe explained his frustration at being trained as a pathologist in Belgium, but on arriving back in the DRC (then Zaire), being unable to use his laboratory skills due to a lack of laboratory infrastructure. Over the years since 1973, he has been able to build this infrastructure within the Ministry of Health and the INRB using grants from multiple GN donors. While not all GS HRIs strive to become such significant HRIs, these examples show the breadth of their size and their potential when donors invest in their research-specific capacity.

Context

Context matters in nearly every aspect of humanitarian research. The context is the conditions, circumstances, and norms of a particular place and time. Throughout the interviews, questions seeking universal generalizable answers received the response, "It depends on the context" or "It depends on the situation." Preferred topics for research, the localness of the HRI and its researchers, the ability to partner with other GS HRIs or the government, the risks faced by researchers, the application of ethical principles, the appropriate language or complexity of the language to use, optimal research methods, and even the dynamics of power are different in different contexts.

The remarkable consistency in sentiment and content regarding certain topics suggests that some of our findings can be generalized to most GS HRIs due to their shared history of subjugation and its legacy. Responses to some topics, though, varied considerably between researchers, or as on researcher noted, some dynamics could vary even within a given area depending on the situation at the time or on the subpopulation. For example, a country's socioeconomic and political situation, or physical infrastructure, may make conducting research more difficult, expensive, or dangerous in some regions than in other relatively more politically stable countries or regions, or those with more developed physical infrastructure (I010, I012, I020). Similarly, while GS female researchers overall tend to be more at risk and marginalized than their male counterparts, the exclusion they face may be more significant in more patriarchal societies than in other societies, while matriarchal societies may foster more female participation in research (I010). The issues that HRIs felt were a priority during our interviews also varied considerably based on context. Rather than internally generated long-term research interests or specializations, their research priorities were based broadly on the specific needs of their target populations at a given time and changed as those needs changed. Interviews with HRIs in countries with repressive governments more often focused on the state's stifling of knowledge production (I002, I020, 021). By contrast, interviewees from countries with indigenous populations more often reflected on the limitations posed by publishing research in colonial languages (I003, I022).

Research ethics, humanitarian principles, and codes of conduct based on Western values and influences are often alien to a given context (I011, M001) as they are not based on the specific humanitarian crisis-affected communities' shared aspirations and values and may even run counter to local values. Their application often overlooks a more nuanced and contextualized interpretation of norms (Robillard et al., 2021). For example, countries in Asia and the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) regions that do not identify with Judeo-Christian principles may not agree with the individualistic values imbued in these principles. They may perceive the principles as an imposition from Western neocolonial influences (I011). Yet, local researchers and GS HRIs are still generally expected to follow or replicate GN humanitarian principles, standards, procedures, and requirements for their research to be accepted by GN actors. Interviewees emphasized the importance of adapting and adjusting the interpretation of the ethical principles to their local context, even though some core principles may be applicable everywhere (I003, I021, M001, M003) (Robillard et al., 2021).

Contexts determine the nature of humanitarian research regarding such aspects as which researchers in a GN–GS partnership are most suitable for each research role, the risks and logistical constraints of different research designs, the norms and ethics of interactions with the population, and the social and political sensitivities involved. Despite the importance of understanding these contextual differences, most humanitarian research conceptualized from a GN perspective limits the inclusion of local contextual knowledge and nuances to the actual interview. Under this setup, research design and questions are set by GN HRIs or PIs before or without GS HRI or local partner/researcher involvement, reinforcing the power differential between the GS and GN in the research process. This lack of attention to context can reduce the quality of the research and its application to that particular study population and context (Lombe et al., 2013).

When GS HRIs are truly local, one of the most obvious values they bring to the research or to a research partnership is not just a deep, intuitive understanding of the context, but also insights into the most effective ways of getting and analyzing information on topics that may be most relevant to responding to that crisis. But what does it mean to be "truly local"?

Localness

"Local" is a fluid and complex construct (I002, M003, M005, M004, M008, M009, M010, I016). The understanding of "local" remains contested and nuanced, and varies by context (I016, M003, M007, M010). It goes beyond an HRI's founding origin within a particular country to include ethnicity, region, education, social status/class, gender, etc. Local has many levels, from the community to the province, to the nation. Actors at the national level may be considered local by an international organi-

zation but not be considered local by the communities where they are working. On the other hand, researchers may be raised in a city but "belong" to a rural community where their families originate and may or may not be considered local in that village, depending on their personal relationships within that village. Social distance matters as much as geographic distance. A researcher with a GS HRI is often among the elite of a population. The researcher may possibly have been trained in the capital or even another country, so although the researcher may originate from and reside in a community, the researcher may not experience the same risks as the rest of the community. The community may not see the researcher as "local," someone who could understand their problems or accurately represent their voice. Inferring from the participant comments about what "local" truly means, we propose that in humanitarian research to be "local" means to be of the same identity—having the same frames of reference, norms, language, and general history as the affected population.

> "The fact that I am [from this country] makes a difference but not completely. The people who know the language and situation can pick up information, or people volunteer it and warn them of imminent dangers. But [nationals] from other parts won't get that spontaneous support" (M010).

One researcher in a GS HRI with coverage throughout their country said that their organization did not presume to consider themselves the experts throughout all of Kenya, only in the parts they came from, that is, where they would be considered "local" (I006). There are some limitations to the benefits of localness. **The positionality and power structures of some larger GS HRIs or elite researchers, and restrictions by some GS governments, may eclipse their localness and ability to gain local connection and acceptance** (I016, M007, M003, I020). For example, GS researchers from minority or marginalized communities, regardless of the HRIs they work with, may face unique challenges in gaining acceptance among nonminority communities (I002, M010).These complexities challenge the GN versus GS and local versus international binaries, and the idea that local is dependent on one's nationality or origin in the GS.

> We propose that in humanitarian research to be "local" means to be of the same identity—having the same frames of reference, norms, language, and general history as the affected population.

Pulling from interview statements, someone who is truly local will be able to see meaning in that context, meaning which would be missed by nonlocals. For an HRI to be local often implies that it is dedicated to serving the population of that context specifically, changing its research focus as the population's situation changes. Local identity and belonging can therefore help to inform research design and gain access to the study participants (M007, M010, M004). When truly local researchers are part of all steps in the humanitarian research process, they can bring these insights and this understanding of the local context to inform everything from the research design and the type or structure of survey questions to the analysis and publication to ensure they reflect local nuances and reality (M007). Their presence in research provides an essential link to the study population for the purposes of facilitating data collection while promoting data reliability: "The locals know better, especially with the local languages, they feel more a part of the participant community and know if the information is really trustworthy" (M007, M004). Sadly though, when partnering with GN HRIs, the GS partners who have this connection to the study population are often brought on board long after the research approach and tools have been created. The GS researchers are used simply to access the local populations and not for their own unique perspectives and experiences. This leads to research that may be generalizable, but is not context specific or beneficial to the local community bearing the burden the research.

In summary, within GN-led partnerships, GS HRIs and researchers should be brought on board from the initial planning of the research to get their grounded perspectives and input in the design and conceptualization to ensure they reflect the study population's realities and interest. Moreover, the understanding of local is complex; thus, GN HRIs and

donors should not assume that all GS researchers are considered "local" in their own country or community. Some, but certainly not all, of the unique contributions that GS HRIs may bring to a study will depend on their degree of localness. By the same measure, some of the barriers or risks the GS HRIs and researchers face may be due to being local.

> "In Latin America, we have developed a good degree of professional, technical, and institutional capacity, and we, therefore, demand respect, funding, and strengthening of our own institutions and capacity in our complex countries" (I007).

A tendency to apply a "one size fits all" approach among many GN donors and GN HRIs in their engagement with GS HRIs fails to recognize that regions or countries can differ in nearly every important aspect of society, geography, humanitarian vulnerability, and research needs. Instead, research that recognizes these variations can capitalize on these differences and can learn from them (I007, I026, I020).

Risks

There is a tendency to generalize risks faced by GS HRIs and those encountered as part of providing humanitarian assistance. Risks to researchers are contextual and may differ from risks encountered by practitioners providing humanitarian assistance. Risks may also differ between the GN and GS researchers. Fieldwork in humanitarian and development settings entails exposure to multiple types of risk, including risks to physical safety and risks of emotional distress, both of which may be heightened for local researchers (Ansoms et al., 2019; Cirhuza, 2020; Lokot and Wake, 2021a, 2021b; Mwambari, 2019a; Steinert et al., 2021; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2019).

Underfunding increases physical risks for GS researchers.

Humanitarian work very often happens in underdeveloped regions, where infrastructure has been damaged or where other physical threats are heightened. Humanitarian research designed without the involvement of GS HRIs and researchers may not recognize the physical security risks faced by all researchers and the required mitigation measures. This issue was raised by multiple researchers interviewed, as **GS researchers generally face the same or more physical and security risks as their GN counterparts do, but often have fewer resources to mitigate them** (I003, I017, M002, M003, M004, M005, M008, I017). This is particularly relevant to female researchers who work in a male-dominated field and within patriarchal societies where it is less common to see women working at all in a professional capacity. They are often exposed to greater marginalization, sexist pressure, and higher risks than their male counterparts (I002, I003, M005, M010). The risk and exclusion researchers face are, however, intersectional and may be compounded by other identity lines. For example, for members of the LGBTQ+ community and other minorities, the threat of violence from their communities or the authorities may be heightened (I003, I010).

Donors or GN partners are not always aware of the logistical risks that GS HRIs encounter and therefore may not be willing to provide adequate support or funding (I001, I002, I003, I006, I008, I010, I011, M005, M008). If local researchers are not allowed to participate in planning the data collection, the GN researcher or HRI may not recognize the risks and potential mitigation strategies that their GS counterparts face, leading to insufficient funds or time allocated for field activities to be conducted safely (Ansoms et al., 2019; Kaplan et al., 2020; Mwambari, 2019b; Steinert et al., 2021; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2019; Lokot and Wake, 2021a). Within humanitarian contexts, transportation infrastructure is often very poor, as are options for lodging. The fact that GS HRIs often work in areas that GN HRIs cannot access creates the potential for even greater physical risk.

Basic risks associated with context are often faced by both GN and GS humanitarian researchers, but there are sometimes double standards for what is considered acceptable levels of risk or of reasonable expenditures for risk mitigation (M002, M004). For example, GN researchers may expect to fly to remote sites but may expect a local researcher to take the bus, especially if the GN researcher is not traveling to a particular study site. It simply costs

more to stay in a more secure hotel where staff and equipment are safe, and to hire vehicles with solid tires and reliable engines, or boats with sufficient power to arrive on time.

> "Finding a safe place to stay, people are more worried about foreigners— need to look at all with the same perspective. A plane can take you, but they ask the [national] to take the bus" (M004).

If underfunded, GS HRIs may be forced to settle for less-secure or less-efficient options, which may affect their ability to protect their researchers and research equipment from physical risks. They may also risk delays in activities or the quality of research results (I002, I003, I011). For example, they may be forced to use vehicles unsuited to road conditions or underpowered boats that may leave them exposed to weather changes. They may have to choose housing in unsafe hostels, etc. (M005) (Cirhuza, 2020). There is sometimes an assumption that national researchers are safer because they are in their own country, and therefore they can be exposed to more risk.

A better appreciation of who is at risk of what and why in the different settings will ensure that budgetary supports and contracts are sensitive to the various logistical challenges that GS HRIs face. For example, women researchers may be more vulnerable to some risks than men because of local tradition, requiring extra measures to address their unique vulnerability (M005, I009, M004).

GS humanitarian researchers face unique risks, and not all GS humanitarian researchers face the same risks.

Many of the physical risks mentioned are also faced by GS NGOs carrying out humanitarian interventions, but GS HRIs and their researchers face some risks unique to humanitarian research. Humanitarian research often involves asking sensitive questions about a crisis or topics that authorities or certain parts of the population may not want to be known in detail. Humanitarian researchers are often asked to go to many areas where they do not have a long-term presence or relationships, or where their very ethnicity may pose a danger.

> "Because I belong to the XXX minority group, I couldn't even go to some big cities in the South of the country because people didn't accept me. So, I often couldn't do fieldwork there. Sometimes I went, and I would be in a hotel and have to ask for the hotel to help me hide" (I002).

GN researchers may retreat to the safety of their own countries post-research, while GS researchers do not have the same opportunity. The risks associated with sensitive research can extend beyond the period of the research and may risk even the safety of their families far from the site of the research.

> "I was taking part in renewing the law curriculum for universities. Now the Taliban have my name and are looking for me because they say that I have secularized the curriculum" (I002).

More financially vulnerable local researchers may accept low pay and high risk for lack of alternative income, especially in smaller GS HRIs that do not have the infrastructure to provide certain mitigation measures (I003, I017, M005, S001). The GN partners' unwillingness to cover—or unawareness of—the risks to GS HRIs and researchers in research funding and contracts sometimes leaves the GS HRIs without sufficient and flexible funding, including sufficient time to safely conduct quality research (I004, I006, I008) (Ansoms et al., 2019; Kaplan et al., 2020; Mwambari, 2019a; Steinert et al., 2021; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2019). Research decisions and plans should be based on consultations with GS HRIs and researchers from the onset and throughout the research process to address the risks they face while doing their work (M003).

Authoritarian and repressive governments are a source of physical risk to GS HRIs, especially over sensitive research topics and publications (M001, M003, I002, I003, I010, I015, M005). In particular, where authoritarian regimes have politicized research as a tool to control political dissent and messaging, GS HRIs may be prone to political and social pressures. The risk is compounded for GS HRIs and researchers researching sensitive subjects (Mwambari, 2019b).

"If the topic is related to conflict, as a [national] researcher you don't have freedom [like internationals do], [research permission] needs lots of papers and permissions. It will take long compared to internationals. If a [national] has international organization as an umbrella, then he can do it; you feel more protected, and the government becomes more serious [less obstructive]" (M005).

"The right to think, free conscience, speech, and human rights are limited in political regimes. We don't have the freedom to conduct research because of the government" (I020).

Refusal to comply with political demands related to research results and pressures may result in suspicion and mistrust, putting local researchers and GS HRIs at increased physical and emotional risks. They and their families could be subjected to extreme surveillance by state security agents, limiting their freedom, independence, and impartiality (I021, I020). At the same time, politically driven humanitarian research may be perceived by other researchers as biased and unreliable, risking the GS HRIs' and researchers' credibility.

Partnering with a GN NGO/HRI can sometimes shield GS HRIs and researchers from political risk, especially when publishing reports of sensitive subjects. At other times, partnering with a GN entity can increase their risk by raising their profile, suspicions of hidden agendas, or fear that certain activities will be reported (I004, I008, I009, M001, M005, I011).

Increased expectations and pressures on GS HRIs may raise physical and emotional risks. In general, humanitarian researchers are not funded to spend extended periods in the field gathering data, increasing pressure to gather the required information in the stipulated timeframe. The relatively short time allocated for fieldwork may also reduce the researchers' ability to develop strong and trusting relationships with those affected by humanitarian crises, yet they are often expected to hold deep conversations about sensitive issues. This dynamic can both affect the researcher's well-being and reduce the quality of the research findings.

The presence of GN researchers often complicates the project, raising community expectations that the GS HRI will provide the respondent with material support. GS humanitarian researchers, finding themselves in a situation with great humanitarian need, but without the resources to respond, can be distressed by the situation (Ansoms et al., 2019; Kaplan et al., 2020; Steinert et al., 2021). Respondents who expect some material support from the HRI, especially if some of the researchers are from that population, may become suspicious that the researcher is withholding or diverting this imagined assistance and begin to pressure the researcher (M004, M007, M008, M0010).

"When the PI goes into the field, and is white, the community perception is negative. They may believe that the study received lots of money … and make it look like it's an important study, but for a GS expert … they won't believe it" (M007).

Some GS researchers may be mistakenly thought to carry the same privileges as their GN counterparts, increasing expectations of them (M010). These expectations may on occasion lead to physical attacks on the GS HRIs and local researchers (M004).
The risks faced by GS HRIs are exacerbated by the structure of the global humanitarian system and are unique to different GS HRIs and researchers. However, some of the constraints and risks they face during fieldwork could be addressed by ensuring that GS HRIs and local researchers, particularly those at the forefront who face the most risks, have a meaningful voice throughout the entire research process, including at the design stage. If these open, equitable, and meaningful channels of communication are maintained throughout the research process, issues with the study and risks to researchers can be anticipated, mitigated, and addressed in a timely manner (Fitzpatrick and Satti, 2022; Lokot and Wake, 2021a)

Ethics

Nearly all research ethical review processes and principles are based on GN values. How they are applied using GN norms may go against the shared values and norms of the humanitarian crisis-affected population (S003, I011, I020).

The ethical review process: bringing it home

Every study that hopes to be published or that is based at an academic institution requires an ethical review to ensure the participants are not being exploited or put in unnecessary danger. The review is generally conducted by a formal board of individuals well versed in research ethics and who follow a well-defined protocol of ethical requirements. This review process often takes three to four months and sometimes longer if especially vulnerable populations are involved.

The timebound nature of humanitarian emergencies requires an immediate and swift response from humanitarian research institutions and actors (I001). Yet lengthy and bureaucratic ethical review processes and requirements often frustrate and delay research initiatives. The process of obtaining an ethical review of a study is usually the responsibility of the organization holding the funding, which is usually also the GN PI's organization (Lombe et al., 2013). Although GN ethical review boards require research under their purview to seek an in-country equivalent review, many GS countries (and some GN countries) do not have a formal review board for social and behavioral research (Woodward et al., 2017). Many of those that exist are essentially carbon copies of GN review boards, taking on the protocols and principles of a GN review board with little adaptation, regardless of whether the application of the principles is appropriate for that context. This replication of GN processes and requirements is partly to ensure they are considered credible to GN partners (Nimer, 2019). The current structure of publication processes linked to the ethical review process thus reinforces the credibility of GN research over GS research (Steinert et al., 2021).

Some GS HRIs and researchers use their organizational ethics, safeguarding policy, and code of conduct to guide research conduct with affected communities in place of formal ethical review boards, especially where the boards are few and far between, too expensive, or to slow. A number of GS researchers felt that the formal ethical review process in most instances was inconsistent with the urgency of humanitarian research, in which the research needs to be conducted in real time in order to benefit the affected population (I002, I001, I003, I007, I009). Certainly, the experience of this study is a good example, in which one of the researchers was located in a GS country, but after four months and $900, the process was still underway with the ethical review for that country. As a consequence, that GS researcher was unable to conduct interviews for this study, limiting her ability to participate and contribute fully to the research.

If a GS HRI has sufficient capacity and experience, they may create their own internal ethical review board that is recognized by other review boards and publishers. This is uncommon outside of universities, but at least one GS HRI interviewed had done this (I008). In the absence of any official ethics review board, where they are inefficient, or where they simply mimicked GN values and procedures without appropriate adaptation, interviewees recommended investment in localized research ethics processes and structures, developing and adapting them to the local settings (M003, I005, I004, I006, I011, I012). One example is community advisory boards (CABs) set up to advise on research ethics in areas where humanitarian research is repeatedly conducted. Some of the literature looks at CABs on the Thai-Myanmar border (Lwin et al., 2014). The authors found that by and large the CABs performed their function well, and that "an effective CAB will inevitably be an exercise characterized by flexibility and pragmatic judgement" (p. 8). Lwin et al. did note that, possibly because the CAB members were part of a community with roles that defined their interactions outside of the CAB, "hierarchy, cultural views and age sometimes made it difficult for CAB members to freely give their opinions in meetings" (p. 8). It is unclear how scalable such an approach might be. The primary threat to such an approach is not likely to be internal, but rather the lack of credibility

GN publishers or HRIs would give such platforms without significant evidence or references from a GN HRI.

While some locally adapted ethical review protocols and procedures exist, they are not widespread. Further development of new approaches, such as the CAB and other similar ethical review systems where they do not exist, would allow for a more informed and locally appropriate procedure for reviewing research that would provide improved protection for respondents, while also freeing GS HRIs from the burden of justifying their methods and approaches to a GN HRI that may not understand the context. Better access to formal ethical reviews would also promote increased visibility and uptake through opportunities to publish.

Universal core ethical principles, but contextual application

We often think of ethical principles as universal, but our perceptions of ethics depend on our cultural values and experiences. The researchers who discussed ethics in their interviews agreed that there are some basic universal research ethical principles, but that these should be applied according to the norms of the context, with additional principles specific to some contexts. The tendency of GN partners to assume the application of the principles is universal and to expect GS partners to apply it in such a way is another extension of the power differential.

> "A combination is needed. A set of principles agreed globally, but it can't act oblivious to reality on the ground. It has to take into account local context and culture. Every culture is different, and different communities have different social norms" (M003).

For example, several interviewees mentioned the importance of assuring the protection of less-powerful members of the research team, not just the study participants, from both research-related risks and exploitation. Although existing GN ethical research principles aim to protect participants from researchers due to the inherent power differentials, they do not check the power differentials between the primary investigators (mostly GN) and those collecting data in the field (usually GS HRIs and researchers).

The research ethics principles, review processes, and practices in the GN are based largely on the experiences of World War II and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study in the US (Lombe et al., 2013). It also appears that ethical review principles and processes employed by most GS ethical review committees are largely replicas of GN principles and procedures, often without appropriate adaptation for the local context or values. Some respondents viewed their **ethics requirements as "legalistic" or excessively overprotective and rigid in some aspects, but lacking in others, while describing the GS ethos in general as "more value-based and less legalistic"** (I014, M005). The current formal ethical process and requirements of both GN and GS formal ethical review committees are usually rigidly applied and overly bureaucratic, making it difficult to adapt them to local ethics and norms while also meeting the requirements of the ethical review committees (S003). In other words, strictly adhering to ethical research requirements (most often based on GN experiences and norms) in the ways expected by GN ethical review boards may violate local norms. Such strict adherence may create the opposite of the intended purpose of protecting respondents by intimidating them with unfamiliar procedures and expectations that the respondents will break those norms. For example, in some contexts, consent is normally conferred by a head of household or a community leader, and the individuals themselves may not understand that the researcher is asking them to speak for themselves. The individuals may feel that the researcher is asking for confirmation of what their leader has already decided. Even when the individual does understand the researcher, it is not clear that true consent is possible. While the usual pragmatic compromise is to obtain the consent from both the leader and the individual, this procedural solution does not really solve the problem. If the leader consents to the individual's participation, the participant may not feel they can refuse as that would contradict the leader's consent. The rigidness of the ethical review system may also reduce the quality of the research outcomes by preventing the research team from adapting the research tools according to the framework of a specific subpopulation to ensure the respondents understand the research process and questions (Steinert et al., 2021;

Sultana, 2007). One of the findings of the research on CABs described above was the expectation that these community-based review processes would be more flexible and pragmatic than typical formal IRBs (Lwin et al., 2014). Nevertheless, echoing the GN–GS power differential, GS IRBs and GS HRIs partnering with GN HRIs are expected to follow the GN-based ethics review process, standards, procedures, and requirements in order for the research to be accepted by GN entities, regardless of whether they may counter some GS local values (I011, I020).

Thus, **a core, basic normative international framework of research ethics and principles applicable or adaptable to different local settings was considered ideal for checking corrupt tendencies and ethical compromises** (I004, I001)**. However, the framework should allow for the local application of those principles in a culturally and contextually appropriate manner and ensure that local customs and values take precedence over nonlocal ones** (M001, M002, M003, M004, M005, M010).

Localizing ethics

In addition to the question of consent above, researchers interviewed noted two points where GN and GS views on ethical humanitarian principles diverged. First, GS humanitarian researchers noted that research conducted with a population experiencing a humanitarian crisis must directly benefit that population. Second, the ethical review process should address GS humanitarian researchers' protection from exploitation and unnecessary risk, in addition to protecting the study population.

Research that directly benefits the study participants is an ethical imperative.

The GN research ethos has long required that humanitarian research be relevant to the study population—that those who bear the burden of the research should benefit from it. Most GN HRIs interpret a vague, generalized interpretation to mean all affected populations, even if the people participating in the study themselves may not benefit. GS HRIs had a much more narrow view of the "study population" as encompassing those individuals or communities actually bearing the burden of the research rather than. Thus, according to the interpretation by most GS HRIs interviewed, the entire research process, including the design and research question, should be of concern to the specific population of study participants (I001, I012, M002) (Lombe et al., 2013). **Any humanitarian research that does not put the crisis-affected populations at the center of all steps in the research process should be considered "unethical."**

Because GS HRIs are more likely to have a connection to the local context, GS HRIs tend to use more pragmatic, flexible processes and approach crisis-affected populations somewhat differently than non-crisis-affected populations, which means different sets of ethos and principles depending on whether or not a population is crisis-affected. This is contrary to the practice of GN HRIs and researchers, who tend to treat both crisis and non-crisis-affected populations in all contexts with one set of ethics as if those ethics are universally applicable. By centering the needs of the crisis-affected population and their value systems, GS HRIs tend to carry out more practical and less theoretical research that is relevant to the local context and end users, including practitioners in the field. This comparative advantage of the GS also highlights a role in humanitarian research that is complementary to GN research that focuses on generalizability.

Protection for GS humanitarian researchers

While GN research ethics and principles aim to safeguard the protection of study participants, they do not consider protection for local researchers and GS HRIs. The apparent power differentials between the GN and GS researchers heightens the risks of exploitation of GS HRIs and researchers (I011, I017, I028). And for those GS researchers in extremely impoverished settings, or those affected by humanitarian crises, local research assistants may be even more vulnerable to exploitation or exposure to poor working conditions (S003, I010, I017, M002, M004, M007, M008). Humanitarian research, therefore, may require a code of ethical conduct that includes special consideration for GN–GS research partnerships, with an emphasis on the protection of local researchers.

Ethical standards in humanitarian research are important to safeguard both crisis-affected populations and local researchers, but they should be grounded in local norms and values of the GS.

Research uptake and visibility of research and researchers

To be of value, the results of humanitarian research must reach those making decisions about, or those affected by, humanitarian issues. The ultimate aim of humanitarian research is the use of research results to inform decisions and policies (i.e., uptake), the first step being to make it visible to others. Humanitarian researchers themselves need to be visible through their work to build their credibility. Those in the GN who control the visibility of humanitarian research beyond the local context also control the uptake of evidence on humanitarian issues and the dialogue on humanitarian issues beyond the local context.

Visibility of the researchers and research

The literature review for this study followed fairly standard GN procedures and found that authors from GS countries are underrepresented in academic journal articles (Blicharska et al., 2017; Green and Mudinga, 2021; Neang et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2014). Of the 105 documents identified in our own literature review as directly addressing localization issues related to humanitarian research, only 16 (15%) were authored by a researcher in a GS HRI. Only 7 (11%) of the 61 peer-reviewed articles in our review and none of the institutional reports listed a researcher in a GS HRI as an author. Many GS researchers who do publish in journals have left their home countries to work for GN institutions (Blicharska et al., 2017).

Studies on authorship in scientific peer-reviewed journals indicate a lack of representation from Global South countries (HAG et al., 2022). **This lack of visibility in peer-reviewed journals leads to the assumption that GS-led research is either not happening, or it is of lesser quality.** Almost all internationally recognized peer-reviewed journals are based in the GN, applying GN norms, expectations, and standards. Many of these are not clearly apparent to GS researchers. Multiple studies, each looking at a different handful of journals, found that on average, the vast majority of peer reviewers and editorial staff were males when gender was considered and were from North America or Europe when nationality was considered (HAG et al. 2022, Neang et al., 2022). In this way, **GN publishing processes control what research evidence is deemed worthy of publication** and therefore control much of the evidence-based dialogue on humanitarian issues, structurally reinforcing the power differential in favor of GN entities. Even when working in partnership with GN HRIs, GS researchers are often delegated roles such as data collectors or interpreters, who are seldom included as authors along with the GN researchers who take on the more esteemed analysis and writing roles, indicating a certain prejudice on the part of the GN HRIs (Blicharska et al., 2017; Kaplan et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2014; Steinert et al., 2021; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2019).

There is considerable research being conducted by GS HRIs that is not visible to the international (GN) humanitarian community. While most of the researchers interviewed agreed there is a dearth of GS HRI-authored peer-reviewed literature, some of the interviewees proposed that we were looking in the wrong places or in the wrong language (I001). The GS HRIs we interviewed consider it an ethical imperative that research conducted in humanitarian settings be locally relevant, aiding the affected population. Instead of using global platforms to target a global audience, **GS HRIs focus much more on visibility and uptake within the context of the humanitarian crisis—local government, local humanitarian actors, basic service providers, etc.** (I006, I002, I001). Although interviewees described numerous significant barriers to international visibility, their prioritization of local audiences is a reflection of their own priorities and what many GS HRIs saw as their primary mandate—to ensure the most effective humanitarian response for their own populations.

Though GS HRIs may publish in many other ways and to local audiences, visibility in internationally respected peer-reviewed journals is also important to GS HRIs for the reputation of both individual researchers and the HRIs. Promotion criteria within

GS universities call for peer-reviewed publication and, for all HRIs, carry more weight with donors when competing for funding. The lack of visibility, therefore, reduces GS HRIs' credibility as researchers and therefore opportunities to lead research.

Uptake of the research findings

Like GN HRIs, GS HRIs listed a wide range of target audiences, but there were some trends that emerged. Some GS HRIs represented in the interviews were groups of consultants that worked with many populations, or large GS HRIs that worked across a large region, but most tended to have a strong connection with a particular study population and a desire to influence local systems and policies to serve and protect them. The target audiences for research uptake were therefore often the population themselves and local policy makers, in addition to the donors, humanitarian practitioners, and national policy makers often targeted by GN HRIs.

> "When it comes to the results or recommendations in the governments, there is no entry point—they are not going to use the results" (M001).

A major hindrance for local policy uptake is a low appetite for evidence in making policy, possibly exacerbated by the fact there is usually little locally relevant evidence available to stimulate that appetite. Local researchers, therefore, often struggle to find a path to insert their evidence into the government policy process. In frustration, one interviewee stated, "When it comes to the results or recommendations in the governments, there is no entry point—they are not going to use the results." (M001)

A common complaint was that GN HRIs seldom return with study results to the affected communities. **With their population focus, GS HRIs gave much more emphasis on uptake among the affected population and governments,** often through true coproduction of the research with the affected population or government bureaus (I002, I003, I011, I012, I014, M002). As well as seeing it as an ethical imperative, interviewees credited both the coproduction approach and circling back to the population with results as reducing survey/research fatigue (I007, I019).

> "Knowledge is power. We are consulted but often receive no information in return. Isabella, please, I am asking you to come back after your data collection and tell us what the product of this study is. We ask you, and all other GN researchers, to please come back and share your findings, and what you have learnt. It is only with knowledge sharing that we can all learn. We need to be able to share our opinions and feedback too" (I003).

Uptake in fragile or conflict settings can be difficult and risky to local researchers, especially when it challenges government official and unofficial policies (M005, M008). Study results or their uptake can be influenced by politics (I002, I015, I020). Promotional uptake activities of research coproduced with marginalized populations also serve as a sort of activism, giving populations voice through the evidence. In some cases, coproduction with local government not only reduces barriers to conducting the research, but also increases the likelihood they will accept the results (I019).

> "Results are accessible. Bite sized—we turn research into infographics, storytelling" (I019).

Because of the different audiences prioritized by GS HRIs, uptake is often structured very differently and in ways not recognized by international humanitarians. Only elites in the GS have access to peer-reviewed articles that require subscriptions (I015, I028). While the open-access movement has reduced this limitation, GS researchers still reported frequent difficulty getting access to full articles. Too often humanitarian research is published in a colonial language, in international journals, or on websites designed to reach international audiences, using GN research communication conventions. To feed back to the affected populations, or to policy makers of affected populations, evidence needs to be published in a language commonly used by the affected populations. The selection of messages and modes of communication needs to be carefully tailored to their needs and capacities. The participatory/coproduction process

used by many GS HRIs provides a type of uptake for the affected population and is one that goes hand in hand with local government policy makers (I006, I007, I019). GS HRIs may use shorter, bite-sized messages in accessible formats other than written documents—animations or pictorial formats that GN researchers may not consider robust or sufficiently formal (I010), or blogs and social media (Mwambari, 2019b). Much in-context uptake is also through personal interactions and simply supported by written documents.

Discussion and conclusions

This study is intended to provide some voice for GS HRIs and researchers, a voice that is currently missing from the humanitarian localization literature. The report is therefore based primarily on the interviews with a wide variety of GS researchers working in GS organizations, and a small number of GN researchers who have long worked in partnership with GS HRIs, and is supported by some of the literature. It must be noted that a GN donor funded a GN HRI to conduct this study, and a GS partner was subcontracted to work alongside the GN HRI. Three of the five investigators were from the GN. One of the GS researchers interviewed astutely asked what different insights would have been highlighted if this had been a GS-led study. While we cannot answer that question, the researchers for this study sincerely worked to accurately represent the voices of the researchers who contributed their time and observations. A draft of this report was provided back to the majority of participants, with the discussion and recommendations section translated into Arabic, French, and Spanish to promote transparency. The feedback validated the accuracy of our interpretation of their voices.

The localization of humanitarian research is linked to the localization of humanitarian assistance and has followed a very similar path. Many of the findings in this report are repeated again and again in the humanitarian assistance localization literature, but when applied to humanitarian research, these findings reveal lessons that are specific to research and to the nature of GS HRIs. Although there are numerous individual points discussed in this report and many which did not make it into the report, four major themes have emerged, and which underlie every topic broached by the GS humanitarian researchers we interviewed. We will list these here and then discuss them in more detail below. 1) First and foremost, power differentials define the relationships between GN actors and GS HRIs, and dictate how the HRIs engage in humanitarian research. These power differentials are a part of the humanitarian system itself and derive from the historical accumulation of wealth in the GN, often at the expense of the GS. 2) Research methodologies, theoretical frameworks, norms, and practices dominating research are based on the experiences, paradigms, and prejudices of the GN. These are expressed through many unfounded assumptions and unrecognized double standards. 3) GS HRIs are more likely to engage in more participatory research that closely aligns with the needs and norms of the crisis-affected population, and the ultimate goals of humanitarianism. GS HRIs naturally apply such norms and methods in ways GN actors are only now beginning to understand and value. 4) There has been a shift toward more equitable access to research, but it is still far from equitable. This inequity results in lost learning and, therefore, ultimately, less effective humanitarian assistance.

Power differentials between GN actors and GS HRIs are systemic.

Barriers to the Global South's equitable participation in humanitarian research are based on structural power differentials and are therefore systemic and profound, requiring structural changes. The lack of GS HRI participation in humanitarian research reduces the overall understanding of humanitarian issues.

Money is power, and power is exerted through control. GN governments provide the bulk of humanitarian funding, including funding for humanitarian research. Colonial conquests and regimes built enormous financial inequities at the cost of the GS economies and social systems, using commodities from the colonies to fund the development of industry and economies in the colonial (and neocolonial) powers. Although formal colonial structures are gone, the resource inequities and extractive tendencies remain almost unchanged. These resource inequities between the GS and GN translate to power inequities that permeate all fields. In the humanitarian sector, this takes the form of former colonial powers "saving" the GS during times of crises by giving them a token portion of their budgets without acknowl-

edging structural barriers that block GS HRIs from fully participating in humanitarian research.

By controlling the funding for humanitarian research, GN donors control what organizations and research questions are funded. The competitive nature of the current system of funding humanitarian research sets GS HRIs against much larger, better-resourced GN HRIs, and sets GS HRIs against each other in a competitive fashion rather than supporting collaboration and sharing of resources. This competitive process rarely values the unique insights, innovations, and skills that GS HRIs can bring to bear through their positionality, understanding of the context, and potentially more effective approach to research.

Even where there are GS–GN consortiums or collaborations, these are rarely equal, horizontal partnerships, and the GN HRI partner tends to receive more funding than their GS counterparts and higher indirect cost rates. GS–GN partnerships most often conduct research conceptualized from a GN perspective, limiting the roles of local researchers to "research assistants" or "interpreters" for non-native speakers. GS researchers are not valued for their unique perspectives, experiences, and skills. Financial asymmetries from this unfair competition cause the GS HRIs to struggle to retain qualified, experienced researchers or to fund their operations and costs in a self-reinforcing cycle of disadvantage in competing for new opportunities.

By controlling the research funding, GN actors control what is considered acceptable research and the research agenda itself according to their own priorities and interests rather than the needs of the affected countries and local responders. This often leads to more theoretical, generalizable research topics that have less practical relevance to the humanitarian response or related policy for the context studied, and ultimately **reduces the potential impact of humanitarian research on the populations participating in the research.**

Simply providing more research grants to GS HRIs through the current system will not effectively create equitable research opportunities. **A structural change is needed in how research is conducted and disseminated,** adding considerations for the unique value GS HRIs can bring to humanitarian research, and providing GS HRIs with opportunities to direct the research agendas in their own regions.

Research methodologies, theoretical frameworks, norms, and practices dominating research are based on the experiences, paradigms, and prejudices of the GN.

The field of research within which humanitarian research institutes operate follows a structure imbued with prejudice, white hegemony, and racism inherited as a legacy from colonial systems. These can pose practical barriers as well as unnecessarily devalue GS research.

Though attitudes are gradually changing to one of respect for the abilities of GS HRIs, interviewees reported that GS HRIs are still often treated as less capable and the research they produce as less reliable unless GN researchers are involved. This attitude depicts a GS body of researchers who need GN researchers to teach them how to conduct good research. Research practices and methods proposed by GS HRIs, when they differ from those promoted by GN researchers, are often considered inferior (e.g., written versus oral, word-based versus pictorial). On closer examination though, GS HRIs have naturally tended to use methods that the GN rhetoric now proposes as progressive and innovative. For example, the researcher-participant relationships in GS HRI-led research tend to be more horizontal and less extractive. Study participants tend to have a larger role in the design, data collection, and analysis of the research. As these approaches gain favor with GN HRIs, respect for the innovators of these approaches also rises. These more participatory, horizontal relationships with the study populations have helped **GS HRI-generated humanitarian research to use methods or tools more appropriate to the context or affected population (and therefore more likely to obtain accurate, useful data), with evidence that more directly benefits the study participants**

and that is more relevant to decision-makers within affected communities.

Some widely promoted aspects of research ethics reflect the principles and values of GN humanitarians and donors and may not reflect those affected by a humanitarian crisis. In GS humanitarian crises, GS HRIs tend to hold values and norms more similar to those of the affected population. Regardless, the GS researchers must follow the standard procedures and requirements of the GN ethics review committees for the research to be accepted by GN actors, even when they run counter to local values. GS ethics review committees often feel the need to replicate the requirements of GN counterparts to be deemed acceptable.

Language also poses a barrier. English, and to a much lesser extent French and Spanish, dominate humanitarian research. **There is a wealth of research generated locally and in local languages that rarely receives the same visibility as publications in English.** GS HRIs who do not operate in English have difficulty accessing this literature or adding to it. GS HRI research results are therefore most often disseminated no further than in reports to the research funders. The results are lost to the wider humanitarian community, and the GS HRI is unable to build its credibility. When GS HRIs promote their research, they tend to use more open, informal (non-peer reviewed) platforms that are more accessible to the affected populations and local governments, but that are less esteemed by GN researchers and donors.

Currently, because GS HRIs are located in the GS, they are expected to receive less compensation, lower indirect costs, and lower levels of funding in general. They are also expected to take greater risks that often extend beyond the period of a study and to do so with fewer safeguards. The message is that GS research and the researchers themselves are less valued. Such prejudice and racism are most effectively overcome by close interaction to build familiarity and trust. On an individual basis, **the more experience GN donors and HRIs have conducting intentionally equitable research opportunities with GS HRIs, the more these biases and prejudices will be broken down.** This will require intentional efforts and structural changes to provide longer-term flexible research funding that GS HRIs can control, allowing them more freedom to frame the research agenda and the terms of partnerships. As GS HRIs have different levels of experience and growth, funding and reporting requirements need to be appropriately adjusted.

Together, these barriers indicate a cultural hegemony of the GN, in which methodologies, research approaches, and theoretical frameworks of the GN are the only respectable and recognized ways to do research. Intentional structural changes are needed to include means to value and promote the unique contributions of GS HRIs, which are currently missing from humanitarian research, and to help them overcome barriers to conducting and disseminating research.

GS humanitarian research is more likely to engage in more participatory research that more closely aligns with the needs of the study population and the ultimate goals of humanitarianism.

GS humanitarian researchers repeatedly stated **it is "unethical" to conduct research on a population, especially one experiencing a humanitarian crisis, if that research does not benefit the population directly.** Emerging from this ethos of putting the needs of the study population first, GS research agendas tend to ask more practical, less theoretical questions, perhaps more relevant to practitioners and less relevant to global policy guidance, indicating that the roles of GS HRIs and GN HRIs may be more complementary than competitive. GS humanitarian research agendas, therefore, tend to focus on the information needs of the local context.

GN funding and GN-led research are designed to meet the expectations and requirements of GN donors. Humanitarian research funding usually comes with predefined research agendas that tend to align with the donor's needs and priorities more than with those of the affected population. The

lack of local researcher participation in setting this agenda reflects the absence of a culture of mutual learning and often results in studies that are not perceived as useful by the affected population or local decision-makers.

Changing research funding structures to increase discussion of research priorities and methods and valuing the contribution of GS HRIs in these discussions are likely to not only allow GS HRIs to demonstrate their value but also increase the potential impact of humanitarian research.

There has been some shift toward more equitable participation, but it is ad hoc.

Recently, there has been a shift in many of the issues discussed, with some GS HRIs reporting an increase in both participation and voice. For example, there has been an attempt by GN actors to conduct more localized and participatory research with more GN–GS partnerships, though still rarely with GS-led research. This improvement may be due to increased alternative funding sources for humanitarian research, or it may be due to a growing number of educated and experienced GS researchers. Some interviewees also credit the Grand Bargain for having made the localization conversation more mainstream, thus often making it a donor requirement to involve local and national HRIs in humanitarian research.

However, this shift is slow and is not a structural or system-wide change but rather highly dependent on individual HRIs and PIs. Taking the GB as an example, while it may have triggered important conversations, it is still very far from reaching its original 2020 objective of providing national and local actors with 25% of the world's humanitarian funding. Additionally, there is generalized fatigue and frustration among GS researchers witnessing GN researchers continuing to be parachuted in to lead research in which the GS researchers are relegated to little more than data collectors and logisticians in their own countries.

Why equitable GS participation in humanitarian research is important.

GS research agendas, methods, and approaches often bring a perspective and voice missing from current humanitarian research, ones closer to that of the affected population. This gap in existing research weakens the overall understanding of humanitarian phenomena.

Currently, the GN-dominated humanitarian research body of evidence is incomplete and filtered because most of the priorities, methods, analysis, and voice remain with researchers who have less understanding of the contexts and perspectives of the study population. Ceding more voice and control of humanitarian research methods and research agendas to GS HRIs will increase the value of humanitarian research to donors, practitioners, governments, and populations affected by crises. The recommendations of this report are intended to guide GN actors in steps they can take in that process.

Recommendations

This report, commissioned by a GN donor (USAID/BHA), seeks to support equitable humanitarian research opportunities for GS HRIs by giving voice to the researchers most concerned.

Barriers to equitable GS HRI participation are structural and require structural adjustments to GN systems. Currently, to be credible research institutes, GS HRIs must become like GN HRIs in their research methods as well as their administrative system. In doing so, they may lose their value as providers of unique insights into humanitarian issues in a particular context and their ability to work in a way that affected populations find most appropriate and effective. In other words, increasing GS participation has too often meant trying to bring them more fully into the current system through increased funding or building their administrative capacity to meet GN donor expectations rather than adjusting the system, expectations, and assumptions to make it more accessible to GS HRIs (Robillard et al., 2021; USAID, 2022b).

The recommendations below are designed as actions GN donors, NGOs, and HRIs can take to increase the meaningful participation of the GS in humanitarian research, primarily by adjusting the GN actors' systems, expectations, and assumptions.

1. **Recognize the power differential between GN donors or research partners and GS HRIs, and how this power differential influences humanitarian research methods and results.** These power differentials, based on control of funding dating back to the colonial era, are unlikely to change, but there are ways to reduce the barriers this differential creates for GS HRIs:
   - **Engage GS HRI representatives as early as possible,** such as when donors are considering a research opportunity or a GN HRI is considering a research question. The power differential needs to be openly recognized in discussion, asking GS researchers how a particular research opportunity can be better structured to make it more accessible to GS HRIs and researchers, and best capitalize on their unique advantages.
   - When setting research agendas, **start the conversation with GS HRIs by asking, "What questions need to be researched?" instead of "Who can research our question?"** Then prioritize from there, moving on to discuss how best to research these questions in a particular context.
2. **Build flexibility into donor expectations to value research methods, designs, and uptake appropriate for different contexts, and consider capacity differences among GS HRIs.** Humanitarian implementors and GN HRIs are designed to fit into an international system and therefore have a certain uniformity that follows GN priorities and GN-designed approaches. GS HRIs have a wider variety of structures and capacities because they are designed to meet the requirements of a specific context. Potential ways to build flexibility and promote inclusion:
   - **Support access to research-specific infrastructure.** Quality research requires access to peer-reviewed journals, statisticians, specialized software, etc. Most GS HRIs are too small to sustainably support such infrastructure. Alternate avenues may be provided through donor-sponsored platforms shared by multiple GS HRIs or through affiliations with GN HRIs.
   - **Accommodate the many different languages used by GS HRIs.** Allow more discussion and work in the GS HRI's language, with the donor bearing the responsibility of translation to English. Ensure translation costs are incorporated into reporting and publication budgets.
   - **Adjust research reporting expectations.** In place of, or in addition to, typical technical research reports such as this one, allow (GN and GS) HRIs to deliver multiple bite-sized research outputs that use simple language

and less jargon to promote uptake among GS HRIs' local audiences and that are more easily transmitted through social media or other accessible platforms. In addition to a budget for the technical reports, budget allowances should be made for the appropriate adaptation of the dissemination.

- **Provide support for the publishing process** to raise the visibility of GS HRI research among international audiences. Support structuring articles, copy-editing language, and formatting according to GN journal expectations, not just a budget line. This is necessary to raise the credibility of GS HRIs and individual researchers.
- **Recognize that GS HRIs may need equal or larger budgets than GN HRIs.** Higher overhead is necessary to build their research capacity in the absence of national infrastructure or to cope with higher costs for basic infrastructure. They are drawing on a more limited pool of qualified researchers and must compete with highly resourced GN HRIs to retain their most skilled and experienced staff. Local researchers are often exposed to risks that their humanitarian or GN researcher counterparts are not and may need similar or greater mitigation measures.

3. **Continue to explore new paradigms for investing in GS HRI research:**
   - **Consider a noncompetitive or less-competitive funding process specifically for GS HRIs.** GS HRIs struggle to compete with better-resourced GN HRIs in open competition. When eligibility is limited to GS HRIs, this often pits them against each other, further limiting the ability to share resources and platforms.
   - **Use proposal evaluation criteria that do not favor GN methods, research designs, outputs, or audiences.** GS HRIs offer unique perspectives and local policy uptake opportunities that are not valued in the competition process. Instead of penalizing nonconforming contextualized research approaches and outputs, consider them to be added value.
   - **Fund GS HRIs to research humanitarian issues between crises.** They continue to operate in times when and places where GN HRIs are generally absent.
   - **Support GS platforms that can provide donor-compliant administrative services or infrastructure for smaller GS HRIs** rather than trying to build unsustainable capacity within each GS HRI.
4. **Promote GS-led research and GS–GS collaborations, potentially including subgrants to GN partners to provide research infrastructure or administrative reports, leaving control of the research with the GS partner.**
5. **Support long-term, colearning partnerships between GN and GS HRIs. Each partner can learn from the other, but this learning process requires trust that only evolves through long-term relationships and long-term funding.** These partnerships require the expressed intention that it is—or becomes—an equal partnership and the expressed objective that the research capacity of each is improved by the other.

Changing the system

There is tremendous variety among GS HRIs. Some have grown to cover large geographic areas with highly qualified staff who work as consultants for GN donors and INGOs, and even governments, but with the risk that they then lose that intimate "local" connection to a population that gives the GS HRIs their unique advantages. Some become indistinguishable from GN HRIs or embedded within GS NGOs that have grown to resemble GN NGOs. Others, the vast majority, remain focused on a particular population, with all the disadvantages that a small size in a low-resource setting brings, including being unable to build the infrastructure required to support their research or to retain their researchers in the face of higher wages the GN HRIs can offer them, but retaining the flexibility and innovative edge, and most importantly, that close connection to the population.

There are different general schools of thought on the localization of humanitarian response that parallel the discussions and thinking in the localization of humanitarian research. On the one end of the spectrum, some efforts have focused on investing in the GS HRIs and NGOs to help them compete and perform in the current system, with few to no changes to the system itself. At the other end of the spectrum, there is the idea that the whole system is so skewed and tainted in favor of the GN HRIs/NGOs that it should be scrapped, and a new, more equitable system should be intentionally constructed in a massive reform effort. **This report takes a somewhat pragmatic approach, skeptical that the power and will are there to scrap the current system, but it is clear that the current system needs radical change to engage GS HRIs in a new way, with new paradigms.** We advocate changing the current paradigms in which donors passively launch funding opportunities and still expect to get the best proposals, that open competition is always healthy and gives the best results when the players are so different, that each GS HRI should host and maintain all the research capacities internally and be structured on current GN norms, and that donors should not need funding systems that can accommodate a plethora of very different, small HRIs doing very different things and working at very different levels.

Simply put, in the current system, to be able to compete with GN HRIs and to produce high-quality research results, GS HRIs must become more like GN HRIs, but in doing so they risk losing their unique voice. The question then is how to make drastic changes to a system that often unconsciously assumes GN approaches are universal and the ideal.

Thinking outside the box, donors need a flexible, proactive system, possibly in parallel to the current system. The parallel system should be able to seek out and interact directly with GS HRIs, while not overwhelming the donors with the extra effort. It should allow the GS HRIs to retain their unique perspectives and approaches. One potential solution may be to support networks that actively seek out GS HRIs for inclusion and can provide administrative, financial, or statistical services and access to research infrastructure like a library system, access to and training on software, publishing support, an ethical review process, etc. Such networks may be either centrally or regionally structured. They might host accessible platforms to connect GS HRIs in a collaborative manner to encourage mutual support and shared learning in their own languages. These networks and platforms could capture and make visible GS HRIs' wide array of innovative methods, research designs, tools, and approaches that GN entities could learn from, which would raise the credibility of and respect for GS HRIs. Such networks can be useful to guide the donors in constructing funding opportunities and selection of HRIs to fulfill those opportunities in an equitable manner that benefits the quality of the research and therefore the donor's own objectives. In the end, it may be that this approach is actually better for all GN HRIs, with the old system becoming gradually less necessary.

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Annex A – Description of Participants and their Organizations

Gender Representation

14 Women, 28 Men

Countries/Regions Represented

Africa: Sudan, South Sudan, DRC, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda

Asia: Pakistan, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Turkey, India, Central Asia

MENA: Yemen, Iraq

Americas: El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Haiti, Latin America

GN: USA and France

Types of Organizations

11 Academic institutions

18 Research and practitioner institutions

8 Primarily practitioner NGO

4 Independent Consultant

Annex B – Interview Coding Structure

All interviews were coded using NVivo Version 12. The original coding structure was based on topics that were either missing from the literature but mentioned in initial interviews, or insufficiently covered in the literature. After eight interviews were coded by multiple reviewers to test the coding and the consistency among reviewers. The structure was then adjusted and newly emerging elements were added periodically. The information coded to each major node was then summarized and analyzed by at least three investigators. Below is the final coding structure.

Power

- **neocolonialism –** historic power dynamics that continue to affect GN-GS relationships in humanitarian research
- **localization –** on-the-ground elements of localization (leaving the higher level policy-related elements for the "Grand Bargain" node

Partnerships

- **benefits and negatives of GN-GS partnerships**
- **GS-GS partnerships**
- **relationships –** How do the partners relate to each other? Especially anecdotes of incidences that illustrate the true nature of a relationship. For example: the donor wouldn't listen to what we told them, or they brought in an international consultant to supervise us, or it was a learning experience for both of us…
- **roles of GN vs GS actors –** Allocation of roles between GN and GS actors when in partnership. And any side commentary about this.
- **topics of research –** Topics of research that different types of partners wanted. How the topic is decided and with what ultimate motive/assumptions.
- **types of partners –** How the key informants informally refer to partners (as donors, NGOs, universities, international researchers, colleagues, etc.)

GS led research

- **capacities –** capacity-related challenges, special capacities to offer
- **organizational challenges and innovations –** Challenges GS HRIs related to their organizational structure, resources, norms, etc. How these were addressed.
- **preferred topics –** topics the GS HRIs would choose to research

Ethics and norms – how HRIs adapt GN ethics to GS contexts, disconnects in applying GN ethics, the possibility of universal ethics vs local norms

Risks – risks incurred due to humanitarian research, especially in relation to GN partners, how they manage these or do not

- **expectations –** populations' expectations of them as 'local' or as providing services because they are associated with an INGO/Int'l university, etc.
- **government –** risks of government suspicion or displeasure with them because of the research
- **insecurity –** different risks related to insecurity as a GS vs GN researcher
- **logistical –** physical risks associated with working in a rough, undeveloped, or damaged environment that international researchers don't face or maybe don't understand
- **management and recognition of risk –** how/if GN researchers help to minimize risks local researchers face

Visibility and uptake – getting credit for their work, getting the word out on what they learn, getting target audiences to make use of their findings

- **audience –** who do the GS HRIs want to influence with their work? Who do they want to see their work to get credibility/esteem?
- **influencing int'l policy –** successes, failures, barriers
- **language of uptake –** choice of language used for communicating results
- **publication –** in both grey literature and peer reviewed
- **uptake in-country –** means, barriers and successes promoting audiences to make use of their findings

Funding – all aspects of funding

- **funding for GS research –** what opportunities and barriers to getting funding for their own research
- **funding in partnerships –** the ins and outs of funding from partners who are the prime
- **funding sources –** primary sources of funding and under what terms? Attitudes of donors toward GS HRIs
- **funding other**

Policy – policies that affect GS HRIs' ability to do research as they see fit

- **donor –** policies and attitudes from donors regarding GS researchers
- **Grand Bargain –** mentions about the implementation of the Grand Bargain – actions by donors to implement their commitments and the impact of that implementation or lack thereof

- **humanitarian community –** policies and attitudes from other actors in the humanitarian or humanitarian academic community
- **internal to HRI –**policies internal to their organizations which are helpful or harmful, or just a pain in doing research
- **local government –** local government policy that fosters, facilitates, impedes or neglects humanitarian research

Context – role of context in any aspect of humanitarian research they conduct

Local/GS university or HRI capacities – how do the capacities of local/GS universities/HRIs facilitate or impede their ability to conduct research

- **structural supports for research –** capacities specific to institutional support or services that help researchers to get funding and do quality research

Language

- **level of language** - technical, grammatical
- **operational language –** choice of language used in proposals, designing and implementing research
- **uptake language –** language used in reports and articles

Other

- **COVID-19 –** effects and opportunities afforded by the pandemic
- **networking –** connecting with other GS or GN research institutions, researchers, donors, etc. Includes aspects of attending conferences
- **research methods –** dominance of the GN models, efforts at different GS models, desire for opportunities to develop or use GS models

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

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