NEAR

Network for
Empowered
Aid Response

Giving People Voice and Ownership

Strategic Plan 2018-2020

Overview and Background

A disconnect exists between the needs and aspirations of disaster-affected communities and the actions of those who define the terms of the humanitarian system, compromising the effectiveness of that system. Currently, global humanitarian policies and approaches take little account of the relationships of disaster affected populations with local actors and agencies, including local government, civil society, and Southern Non-Government Organisations, who are usually the first on the ground in the wake of humanitarian crises. These entities as well as local businesses and the national private sector play a vital role in responding to emergencies and post-crises rehabilitation.

A Global Network of 'Southern' local and National NGOs, has been discussed for some time, based on these discussions, Adeso commissioned a study in 2014 to develop a more systemic understanding of the current demand, feasibility and scope of such a network. The report findings revealed positive and widespread support for the creation of such a network.

A side-event at the Global Forum for Improving Humanitarian Action held in New York in June 2015, with over 20 leading organisations, working with local communities officially endorsed the network, reaffirming the need for a stronger local voice in the humanitarian and development eco-system. Additionally a consistent message, during the WHS consultations 'was frustration from governments and local organisations who struggle to be seen by the international community as the primary agents of response and to access resources, and feel their governance and coordination structures are pushed aside by international actors rather than respected and strengthened.' One Humanity: Shared Responsibility- Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit.

The WHS (2016) outcomes and 'Grand Bargain' commitments reinforced national and local systems, ensuring accountability to affected people, with 399 individual or joint commitments and an additional 88 commitments made to invest in local capacities, including by increasing the amount of funding channelled to local responders. WHS - Commitments to Action, September 2016

The NEAR Network was launched, at a side event of the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, which realised and celebrated the on-going consultations, with local and national organisations in Africa, Asia, Middle East and Latin America, which provided further evidence for the network, as well as a repository of voices from the communities in which they serve.

These voices and issues that reaffirm the vital need for NEAR Network and resultant shaping of the network's strategy and framework.

 As a membership network that brings together civil society organisations and NGOs primarily from the non-OECD countries (except Mexico, Chile, Turkey and Korea), its priorities and strategies have been developed through consultations with members and wider civil society from the 'south'. This is the first-ever strategic plan of NEAR, which has been developed in the course of 2016 and 2017 through several rounds of discussions with members and in the Leadership Council (LC). An initial draft strategy was developed in 2016, which examined evolving context of humanitarian aid and the NEAR Networks key priorities.

There will be a further process of engagement with existing and new members, with the final strategy presented, discussed and validated by members, at the first General Assembly in 2018.

This document outlines the NEAR Networks strategic themes and approaches over 2018 -2020. It is anticipated that the simplicity of this format will assist the NEAR Network to communicate its strategic ambition and engagement to its membership. The strategic plan will subsequently be translated into key languages and offers a flexible framework, which defines the core themes of engagement whilst providing room to further develop and operationalize specific priority areas until 2020.

Abbreviations

CSO   Civil Society Organisation

GA   General Assembly

IASC   Inter-Agency Standing Committee

INGO   International Non-Governmental Organisation

LC   Leadership Council

NEAR   Network for Empowered Aid Response

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD   Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

1. NEAR's Mandate – Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

A world where local communities have capacity, resources and agency to address the development and humanitarian challenges that impact them.

Mission

To work towards restructuring the global response to human, economic and environmental challenges so that actions to address these are locally driven and owned, and promote equitable, dignified and accountable partnerships.

Our values

• *Humanity beyond identity:* We bring "humanity back to humanitarianism" by focusing solely on people and making sure that humanitarian and development responses go directly to the people in need.

• *Inclusiveness:* We recognise the powerful role played by local communities in times of crisis and in development. We want to ensure that the muted voices are heard, resources are fairly shared and partnerships are equitable and dignified.

• *Dignity:* We believe local people can and should shape humanitarian and development responses with their own ideas, values, lifestyles, preferences, needs abilities and desires.

• *Credibility and mutual accountability:* We are determined to increase genuine accountability to donors, the public and affected communities by making the delivery of local and international humanitarian and development responses more transparent.

• *Independence:* While we depend on support of our partners and donors, we are independent of outside influences. Our leading light is the vision and mission of this network.

2. Our Identity

Who we are

NEAR is a membership network of local and national organisations that originate and are headquartered in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Our members are:

• Locally-rooted organisations based in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East;

• Committed to changing the humanitarian architecture that NEAR is advocating; and

• Committed to mission, vision and values of the Network.

Value we add for our members

• Broaden 'South-to-South' cooperation and provide a learning platform for members to improve the impact of their services

• Amplify the voice of 'Southern' NGOs and provide reach to the global international forum

• Harness resources from diversified sources

• Capacity to enhance the overall impact of members by providing direct linkage to finance infrastructure and evidence-based advocacy

3. Areas of Focus

Since its inception, NEAR has developed its core competency to establish a voice for local and national institutions in the global south, and has been able to develop a membership, which believe and inspire, the following areas of focus:

• We enhance policy-level and operational collaboration between local and national organisations. We aim to increase local influence on decision-making at international, regional and national policy level through advocacy, networking and communication.

• We believe that robust and resilient organisations are key to increasing local capacity to respond to crisis and development challenges. We offer a platform for collaboration, along with learning and resources to strengthen the organisational capacity of local actors in the global south, as well as their accountability and preparedness to respond to the needs of their communities.

• We advocate for increased access to direct funding for local and national organisations. As part of this we are exploring the design of innovative financing models including piloting independent, pooled funding mechanisms at country levels designed by the network. The

national funds would invest in the standing responsive capacity of organisations working with local communities and strengthen their ability to work with a wide range of partners, both for humanitarian aid, development and resilience building.

• We counteract the lack of visibility in the international space of organisations working with local communities by actively promoting their work through research and evidence-based publications.

4. Strategic Objectives & Outputs

To provide direction for the next three years, the following outputs have been identified for each of the four strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective 1; Advocacy: Increased policy-level and operational collaboration between local and national organisations. Strengthened local influence on decision-making at national, regional and international policy levels.

Output 1.1: Work with organisations at a national, regional and international level to advocate towards the grand bargain's commitment of 25% direct funding to local actors in the Global South by 2020.

Output 1.2: Work with various global stakeholders including policy appropriators to establish a harmonized (standardized) due diligence process to ensure a more democratic resource process amongst all actors.

Output 1.3: Advocate for humanitarian donors to provide long term programming for local actors inclusive of overhead costs.

Strategic Objective 2; Organisational Development: Robust and resilient local, national and regional member organisations accessing the NEAR collaboration platform, along with learning and resources for strengthened organisational capacity and improved accountability and preparedness to respond.

Output 2.1: Increase membership to 200 members by 2020 inclusive of all Global South geographical areas (Africa, Asia, Middle East, and Latin America/Caribbean).

Output 2.2: Develop affiliations with both national and regional humanitarian associations, at least one per geographical region.

Output 2.3: Develop a congregated online database (along with external stakeholders) with Organisation Development components for all humanitarian actors inclusive of a graduation structure based on the adapted harmonized due diligence process.

Output 2.4: Provide support to direct members via workshops, online trainings, and peer-to-peer networking.

Strategic Objective 3; Innovative Financing Models: Increased access to direct traditional and non-traditional funding and innovative financing models for local and national actors, including independent, pooled funding mechanisms, designed by the network.

Output 3.1: Establish a pooled financing strategy for local humanitarian actors in the Global South.

Develop innovative financing models for various contexts in the Global South.

Output 3.2: Design and develop 2 national pool funds by 2020, inclusive of Somalia, along with various stakeholders and partners.

Output 3.3: Increase local actors ability to apply for various funding resources, through the development of a harmonized due diligence process.

Output 3.4: Provide local actors access to both traditional and non-traditional funding sources through various communication channels, while influencing humanitarian donors to provide multi-year programming for local actors inclusive of overhead and unrestricted costs.

Strategic Objective 4: Evidence Based Communication: Increased public awareness of work of local and national organisations through effective communication, and through gathering and dissemination of systematic evidence.

Output 4.1: Undertake systematic data-collection and monitoring of implementation of commitments on localisation (Grand Bargain commitments) through key partners in different regions and disseminate results.

Output 4.2: Develop evidence-based research on the blockages of the current resource supply chain to influence regional and international actors on progress on localisation.

Output 4.3: Develop country-based research on the possible impacts of localisation to guide future policy of national, regional, and international actors.

Output 4.4: Develop global level indicators for measuring localisation after major disasters in different regions e.g. localisation score card.

5. Governance and Management

We aim to develop an inclusive governance structure that brings together small and large organisations from different regions of the global 'south'. Members will agree on the principles of operation and governance structure through a General Assembly process as outlined below (Figure 1).

The General Assembly (GA) is the highest body that elects a Leadership Council (LC) comprising no more than eight (8) elected members and three (3) nominated members (who are from amongst the founding members of NEAR). The LC is accountable to the General Assembly and to the legal and regulatory apparatus of the governments, and provides strategic guidance and assists the Secretariat in operationalizing the network. The LC will be the Board of Trustees and is responsible for governance of NEAR on behalf of the GA. In specific terms, the LC has the following responsibilities:

• Design the LC structure and governance process, including ensuring proper election/nomination and succession policy for the LC.

• Provide strategic leadership by determining the Network's values, services, vision, mission and strategic direction.

• Delegate management authority and responsibility to the Executive Director.

• Be accountable for strategic results and ensure that all individuals in it act within the parameters of policies and statutory requirements of the organisation.

The GA will meet every two years and the LC meets at least twice a year. The Secretariat will service the members and deliver on the strategies and directions laid down by the LC and as approved by the GA. *It is the intention of NEAR that many of the key functions outlined in the strategic plan namely, research, documentation, communication, advocacy, etc., will be led by some of the individual members/partners, with support from the Secretariat.* The Secretariat will therefore be kept lean with a core staff headed by an Executive Director. Where members are unable to take the lead on an issue, the Secretariat will add additional capacity as needed, but the Secretariat will not duplicate the work of members.

The LC through the agency of the Chairperson shall appoint the Executive Director (ED). Subject to the authority of LC, the ED shall be the chief staff officer of NEAR. The ED shall attend meetings of the General Assembly and the LC with the right to take part in the deliberations but without the right to vote. The ED shall appoint the staff of the Secretariat in accordance with the staff regulations established by the LC and in conformity with the legislation of the host country. Subject to authority of the Chairperson, the ED shall be responsible for the general program of NEAR and for the administration of its affairs within established policies.
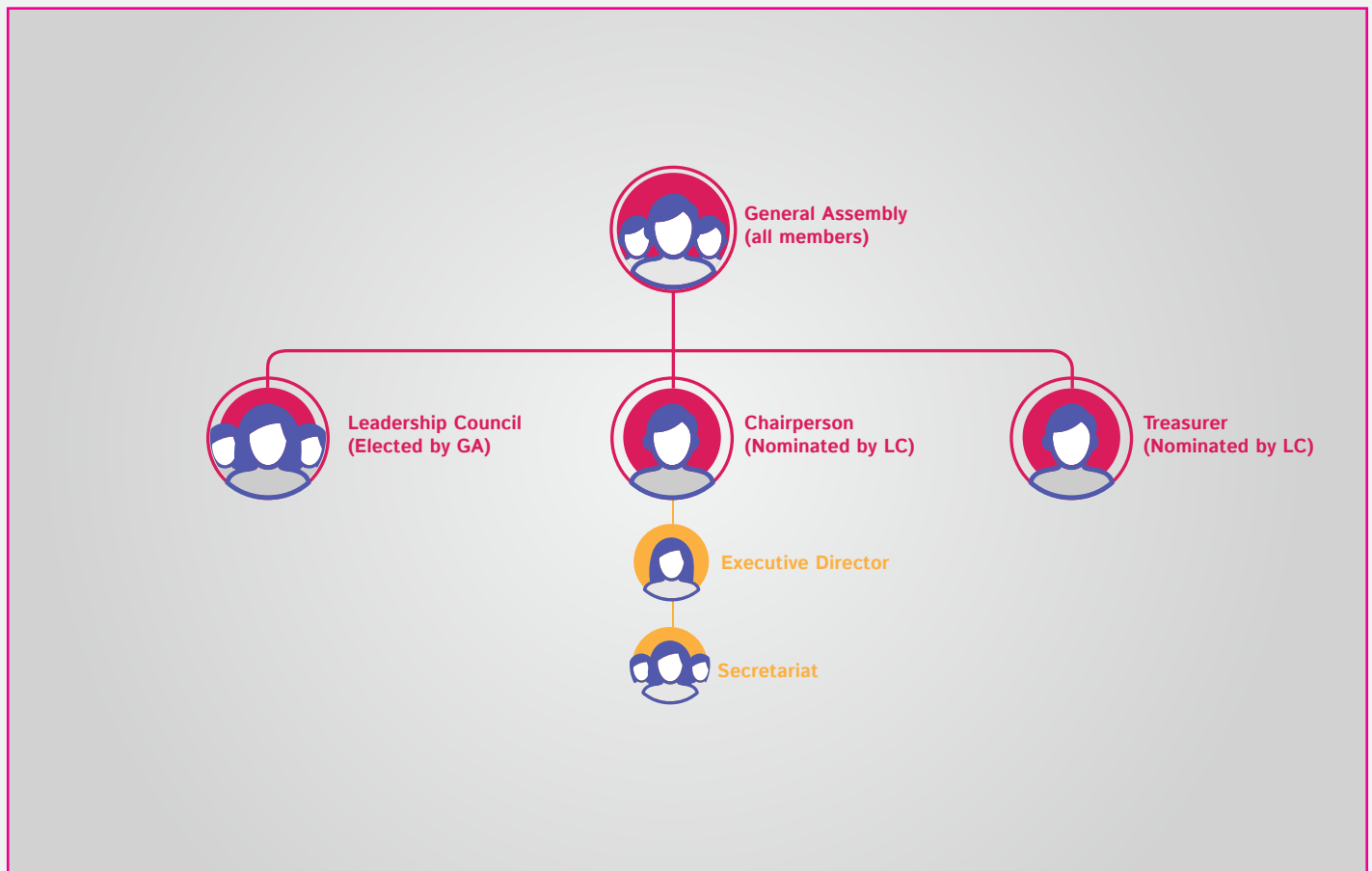

Figure 1: Governance and Management of NEAR

Appendix 1: NEAR SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Leadership Council/Founding members– 'Strong voice and influence for change within the Humanitarian Eco-System. - NEAR Network 'Brand' – Known quickly, reinforces and coordinates the ambition of local and National NGOs over a number of years. - A clear and recognized 'niche' of a Global Network of Local and National (NGOs), influencing the global humanitarian system. - Membership Network and a coordinated collective 'voice' for change based on contextual experience and practice. - A Network developed by Local and national organisations for Local and national organisations- Shared understanding of experience. 'Safe space' created for local and National voices to be heard and understood. - Success in influencing the 'Localisation' debate (Particularly WHS, GB and C4C). - Key 'voice' at localisation debates and meetings, consistently being asked to participate. - Capacity strengthening – Contextualized Humanitarian principles and standards 'position' and support.	- New staff within the Secretariat – still at stages of 'forming' team coordinated commitment and NEAR Ambition. - Team Cohesion and Complementarity – ensure not to 'silo' areas of NEAR engagement. - Membership - necessity for increased membership numbers, ownership and engagement of the ambition. 'Necessary to develop solution orientated 'think tanks' and/or initiatives that are propositional and generating ideas that are not 'out there. - Necessary to 'think out of the box' for a creative, global 'southern' network. - Strategy not currently region specific. - At times - reactive rather than proactive - Necessary to be intentional on change/impact and on positions currently being established within global humanitarian fora. - Need to increase 'Solutions' – Grounded in membership and local/national actors experience (Evidence and Research based influence). - Speed and investment on 'other' localisation initiatives – outside of the network. - Currently Humanitarian focus, needed to develop wider positions/engagement e.g. New WoW, SDGS etc

Opportunities	Threats
- Localisation becoming the 'mainstream' with current international commitments – NEAR niche in enabling propositions for action, engagement and solutions based on voices and experience from the 'South'. - Define clearly collaboration with International Networks on 'Localisation', with 'like minded' international organisations and Networks to bring about change. - WHS, Grand Bargain and Charter 4 Change consultations and commitments - financial and engagement expectations, with representation of NEAR. - National/Regional Government engagement in the 'South'. - New WOW (UN, WB, ADB, ADB, etc.) - Voice and Capacity of Local and National organisations, wanting. change. - SDG and climate change engagement potential. - Innovate on niche/new ways of working and partnerships.	- WHS and Grand Bargain Commitments – necessity for fast and clear propositions on solutions and action. - NEAR Network created when external environment questioning its own' raison d'être' – post- WHS consultations is the new environment the same (facing challenges of realizing commitments). - Humanitarian Eco-System – Power Dynamics, could lead to 'tweaks' rather than fundamental change. - International fora currently leading process - 'Competition' from International Networks on localisation. - The historical and current investment of international actors, results in subsequent investment in the localisation narrative. - Necessary for National and regional positions.

# Appendix 2: NEAR Membership Strategy

Introduction

The NEAR Network actively seeks the membership and engagement of southern based local, national, and regional Networks to present a collective voice on humanitarian and development issues for local actors and action.

The Network provides regular and predictable fora for consultation, cooperation and collective action amongst members on issues of common interest and increase opportunities to amplify NGO influence and leadership. It continues to raise issues and propose solutions in proactive, propositional and effective ways to ensure the 'voice' of local and National NGOs are heard in national, regional and global fora.

As a Global Network it recognises that the Leadership Council, directly elected by the membership, represents the membership and that building and encouraging membership involvement provides a real opportunity for members to influence the work of the Network and the wider external eco-system and landscape.

This membership development strategy outlines the membership development objectives for the NEAR Network, to continue to maintain, grow and engage its membership. It also describes how the Network will evaluate the delivery of the strategy.

The membership development strategy will be delivered within the wider framework of the NEAR Networks Strategic plan, 2018-2020 and is an ongoing initiative. This takes consistent prioritisation and effort on the part of the NEAR Network to deliver ongoing value to members while making adjustments to the plan.
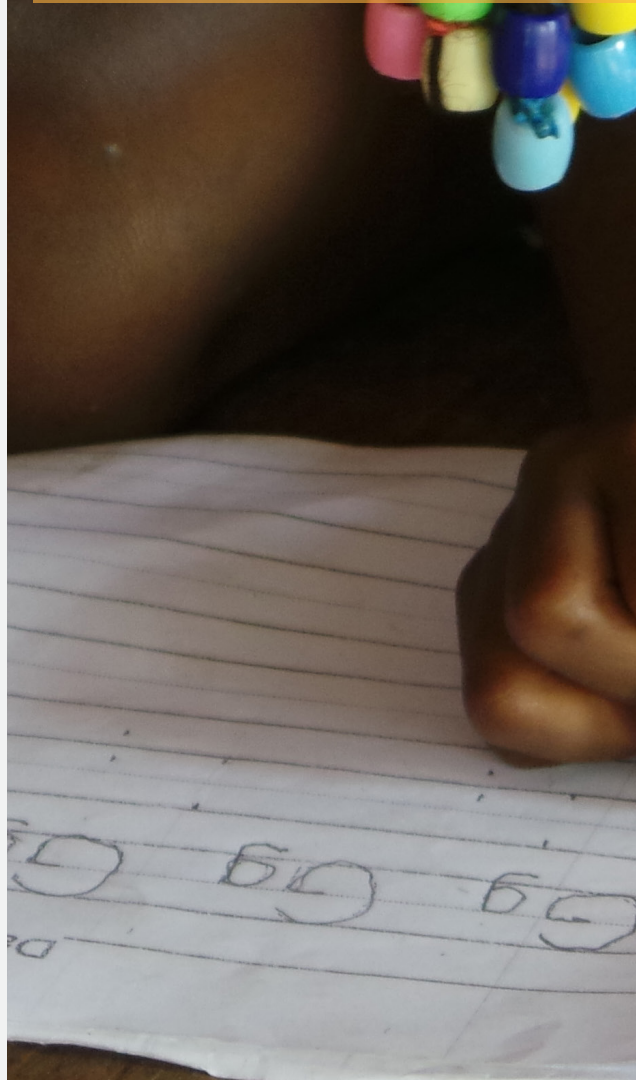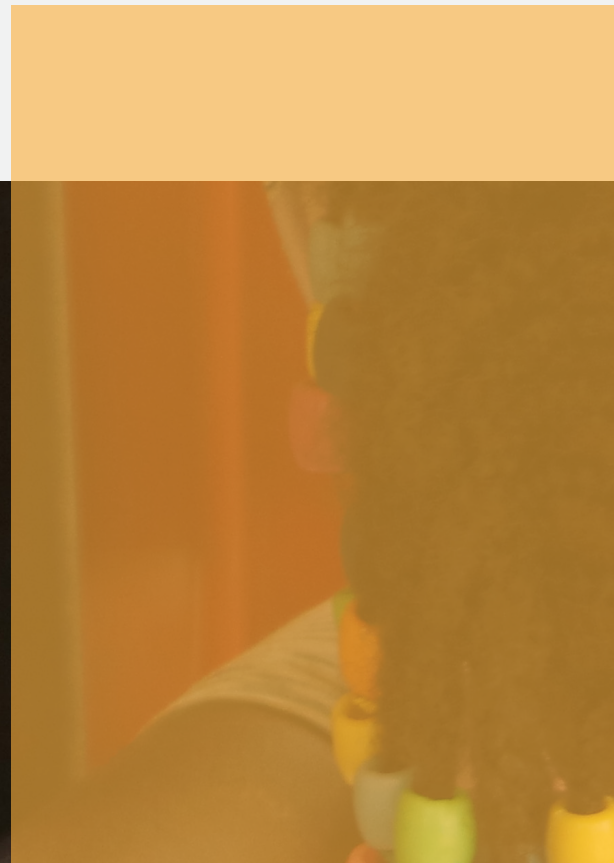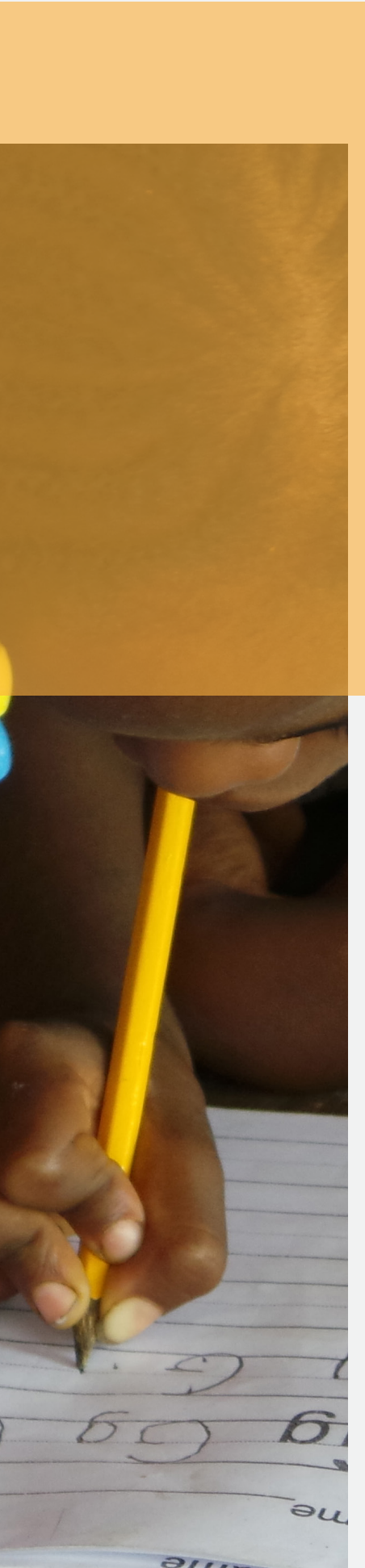
The current categories of NEAR Network members, include full, associate, observer and will be updated and reviewed, and agreed at the 2018 General Meeting.

It is noted, that not all members would want to be actively involved and that the NEAR Network would need to keep all members up-to-date, on Network progress, relevant to the diversity of members needs and demonstrate how being involved could make a difference.

It is also agreed that representing the interests of members and stakeholders and engaging with members is a key responsibility of the Leadership Council and Executive Director.

Strategic objectives

This strategy sets out objectives that will be achieved to develop an engaged membership. There are three strands to the strategy these are;

• Build and maintain membership geographical spread and numbers to meet /exceed annual plan targets, set by the Leadership Council. Ensuring the membership is representative of the geographical focus and categories of membership the Network serves,

• Communicate effectively with members,

• Engage with members and encourage involvement.

The Leadership Council and Secretariat, will review the ongoing delivery of these objectives at least bi- annually.

Delivering the Strategy

The Leadership Council with the Executive Director of the NEAR Network will have responsibility for ensuring the objectives and actions of this strategy are carried out. The Membership Coordinator will lead implementation and will ensure that specific projects, which focus on issues of recruitment or membership engagement, are incorporated in a specific operational plan.

The Leadership Council may establish a group, which, if required, will oversee implementation of the Strategy.

Objective 1: Build and maintain membership numbers to meet / exceed annual plan targets ensuring the membership is representative of the geographical spread and categories of membership the NEAR Network serves.

The quality and quantity of connectivity the NEAR Network has between its existing members, and potential members is crucial in establishing, maintaining, and growing a membership base that will not only ensure the relevance of the Network, but sustain its future existence.

The Near Network aims to recruit and increase geographical and categories of representative membership.

Key objectives include:

• To meet the annual targets (numbers, categories and geographical spread) as set out by the Leadership Council, each year.

• To maintain an accurate membership database, including categories of membership and geographical spread, which can aid specific areas of membership development.

• To encourage membership across the different categories.

• To customize the 'member experience' in an effort to improve the member relationship with the Network.

• To take steps to ensure the membership reflects the diversity of the categories and geographic priorities the Network serves.

• To review and develop a simple and accessible process for becoming a member, based on differing categories, language and inclusivity.

Actions to achieve this include:

• Measure the Networks current levels of engagement with members (and categories of members), and reasons for joining, to determine areas that have attracted current members and that of membership that need attention.

• Development of a 'services package` of NEAR members - including the benefits of joining NEAR, aligned to values, and work, which instils a 'pride to be part' of the Network.

• Segment potential and existing member communications – Separating communications for active vs. non-active members, breaking these communications down by target audience (categories of members, locations, interests/gender groups), and activity (event attendance history).

• Customize the 'member experience' by category (Local, National, Regional – Individual and Network) and geographical locations (language, specific context references), in an effort to improve the member relationship.

• Targeted and regular recruitment drives at NEAR Network launch events, other events that NEAR are co/hosting and/or attending. (including ensuring a membership stand within events).

• Ensure membership fees, do not provide a barrier to membership and consider offering 'member prizes' at events and discounts for networks/group membership, to create or improve upon their engagement.

• Create/expand the Networks membership orientation/on-boarding plan – Using a 'personal touch' (call/visit) alongside a customized strategic approach when welcoming potential new members.

• Hold a minimum of 2 geographic member under-represented events annually.

• Use of membership recruitment materials e.g. letter from the LC Chairman and Executive Director sent to all Regional and National, starting in 2018.

• Review online and printed recruitment materials at least bi-annually to ensure it remains relevant and design specific posters and banners for events and for member offices (including in 'welcome pack').

• In 2018, ensure the recruitment of the Leadership Council (LC), covers key regional representation, to ensure 'LC membership champions' to recruit members and represent NEAR Network at key regional events.

• LC Membership Champions – can create an environment where peer to peer respect and motivation is built. Champions within the Leadership Council can reach out to existing and new members.

• Identify initiatives to raise the profile of NEAR membership within each of the regions, bi-annually, led by the 'LC Membership Champions'.

• Develop strategies to identify and address under-representation, working with 'membership champions' from the Leadership Council and specific regional/national fora.

• Ensure, within specific launches and events, pre-meetings are arranged with Regional and National Networks/Fora, to attract new members and are also an opportunity for engagement, with existing members and networks.

• Develop strategies to encourage specific members e.g. women's agencies and networks to join the membership.

• Ensure the members webpage is one of the first pages to be seen within the website.

• Organise a series of visits to key events to recruit new members (also an opportunity for engagement).

Objective 2: Communicate effectively with members

The NEAR Network is committed to maintaining a two-way dialogue with its membership. Through this it will encourage members to help influence developments within the Network.

Key objectives include:

• To promote the work of the NEAR Network and its Leadership Council

• To identify opportunities for two-way communication between members and Executive Director/ Leadership Council

• To ensure communications encourage the engagement with members

Actions to achieve this include:

• Promote and 'showcase' the work of the Network and its members on the Network website, through 'Members Quarterly Newsletters'.

• Membership engagement to be included in each NEAR personnel's job description and objectives and in 2018 a Membership Coordinator to be recruited within the NEAR Secretariat structure.

• Regular communication with members (at least one telephone/face-face contact per month with each member) by the Secretariat or Leadership Council, which should result in a more engaged membership.

• Effective and timely communications to members on email informing them of upcoming position papers, forthcoming events and/or response to queries.

• Ensure Bi-Annual membership surveys and provide feedback on the responses on the NEAR website (linked to below satisfaction survey).

• Identify opportunities (quarterly) for members to attend 'virtual meetings' /Webinars with the Executive Director and secretariat personnel e.g. Members quarterly on-line events on key topics of interest.

• Provide all new members with relevant information about the Network, the benefits of membership and the role of members.

• Provide regular opportunities for members to give their views on a range of issues e.g. key advocacy messages, membership issues, and upcoming meetings.

• Make NEAR Network news and other membership publicity material available in other languages and formats as required through the Networks membership engagement work.

The Network will consider the needs of its diverse membership when assessing its methods of communication and will aim to provide material in appropriate and accessible formats.

Objective 3: Engage with members and encourage involvement

Members will invest their time in what interests them and coincides most closely with their values and mandate. Their involvement is due to their belief in the organisation's mission and purpose, their satisfaction with member benefits, and their experience-based relationship with the NEAR Network.

The NEAR Network's aim is to ensure that its membership have an opportunity to get involved with the Network and through this engagement help shape the mission and purpose, advocacy positions and services the Network provides.

Key objectives include:

• To ensure the views of members are understood and influence the direction of the Network.

• To ensure quality and relevant strategic content, connections with NEAR Network secretariat and member networking opportunities, which provide members reasons to stay engaged.

• To identify opportunities for members and Leadership Council to get involved in the Network.

• To encourage a diversity of members (categories and geographical) to engage and stand for election to the Leadership Council.

Actions to achieve this include:

• All strategic plans developed by the Network, will ensure membership involvement, engagement and sign off.

• Conduct a member satisfaction survey (bi-annual) – Ensure it encompasses the opportunity to indicate overall membership satisfaction, areas of interest and broken down into more detailed segments.

• Review social media comments and review recent results from surveys conducted after meetings and launch events for analysis on areas of engagement interest and improvements.

• Increase opportunities for members to engage in NEAR Networks work e.g. engagement and involvement on NEAR Thematic Sub Committees and advisory groups.

• Link members with the NEAR Networks existing strategies, for example 'Innovative Financing' and Grand Bargain Work Streams meetings.

• Review and maintain the membership 'online community group', identifying specific membership platforms of interest.

• Highlight member achievements through recognition – 'Shine a spotlight' on members for their accomplishments with; involvement in members newsletters, award and recognition programs such as 'member of the year'. This can be recognized in newsletters, on social media, and at events.

• Ensure tracking of website and social media access and NEAR resources downloads, to provide bi-annual statistics of members' engagement and gaps within the bi-annual reviews.

• Identify initiatives where members can be utilised as a source of feedback and development of case studies on specific policy areas.

• Encourage a high number of members to stand for election in the general meetings.

• Establish a link with regional Government (of geographical concern) for stronger understanding of members experience and engagement.

Evaluating the strategy

The overriding objective will be to ensure the strategy is delivered.

The Leadership Council, with the Executive Director, will monitor delivery of the objectives set out in the strategy through an operational plan which will set out what steps will be taken to meet these objectives. In monitoring the effectiveness of the strategy, the Leadership Council and the Executive Director will ensure that it remains meaningful and relevant.

A progress report will be submitted (at a minimum) bi- annually to the Leadership Council by the Executive Director, starting in June 2018 and will continue to be presented at least 6 monthly intervals thereafter.

Appendix 3: Fundraising Overview

The NEAR Network, will adopt a range of fund-raising strategies, which will include raising the NEAR profile, increasing and maximizing its membership and their contributions, including through the fees structure.

• Levels of membership fees developed and implemented for different types of organisations by April 2018, with consultation and agreement at the 2018 General Assembly.

• Continue to engage with existing and new donors who are funding Localisation commitments and appreciate the value of Southern coordination, collective action and whose objectives are in congruence with the NEAR mission.

• The NEAR Network will identify opportunities of strategic profiling of its work, through exploration of partnerships with diaspora networks, businesses, individuals and NGOs.

• At least 30 per cent of our resources come from non-traditional sources.

Appendix 4:

NEAR Financing/Pool-Funding Strategy

Over the past six months, through funding from ECHO and OFDA, NEAR has been in the process of developing its financing strategy, which includes the development of a pool-funding mechanism. Currently, this process is in its concluding stage of consolidating information and final inputs from stake-holders, including NEAR members, via national and regional consultations. We look forward to sharing a more detailed document upon submission of the final narrative report, in the meantime, we are annexing a summary to provide a brief insight of the work that lies ahead.

Transforming the humanitarian financing landscape

NEAR Network Strategy Paper

Executive summary

The international humanitarian response system faces multiple calls for reform and change, both from within and outside the system. Financing is the target of much of this criticism and it is clear that the current humanitarian funding and partnership models are not working. Local and national voices are marginalised, organisations are treated unequally, and current approaches do little to invest in the responsive capacity and sustainability of civil society for the long-term. Although an agenda and commitments to change have bubbled up to the global policy level, local and national actors themselves are often absent or timid in these discussions. The 'localisation agenda' is being driven by international actors, sometimes well-meaning, but often keen to preserve the status quo. What is missing is a *vision and agenda for change from local and national actors* themselves, the confidence and tools to assert themselves and to demand something different. Financing solutions can be designed to inspire and incentivise change models and alliances, which in turn may be catalytic in changing global financing practices, yet there is a dearth ideas and *proposals for practical alternatives to the current financing model*.

In this context, the NEAR Network seeks to provide practical, progressive and authentic solutions, driven and designed by local and national actors. NEAR therefore undertook a programme of research during 2017, which has culminated in the proposals set out in this strategy document. The research was designed to explore alternative approaches to meeting the financing needs of civil society actors at the country-level. The research included looking at both traditional and alternative domestic and international financing sources, alternative financing models and approaches, and a wealth of experience from outside the humanitarian sector, in approaches to investing in the resilience and sustainability of civil society.

NEAR's programme of research identifies the following priority areas in transforming the funding model:

1. Elevating the level of ambition and amplifying the voice of civil
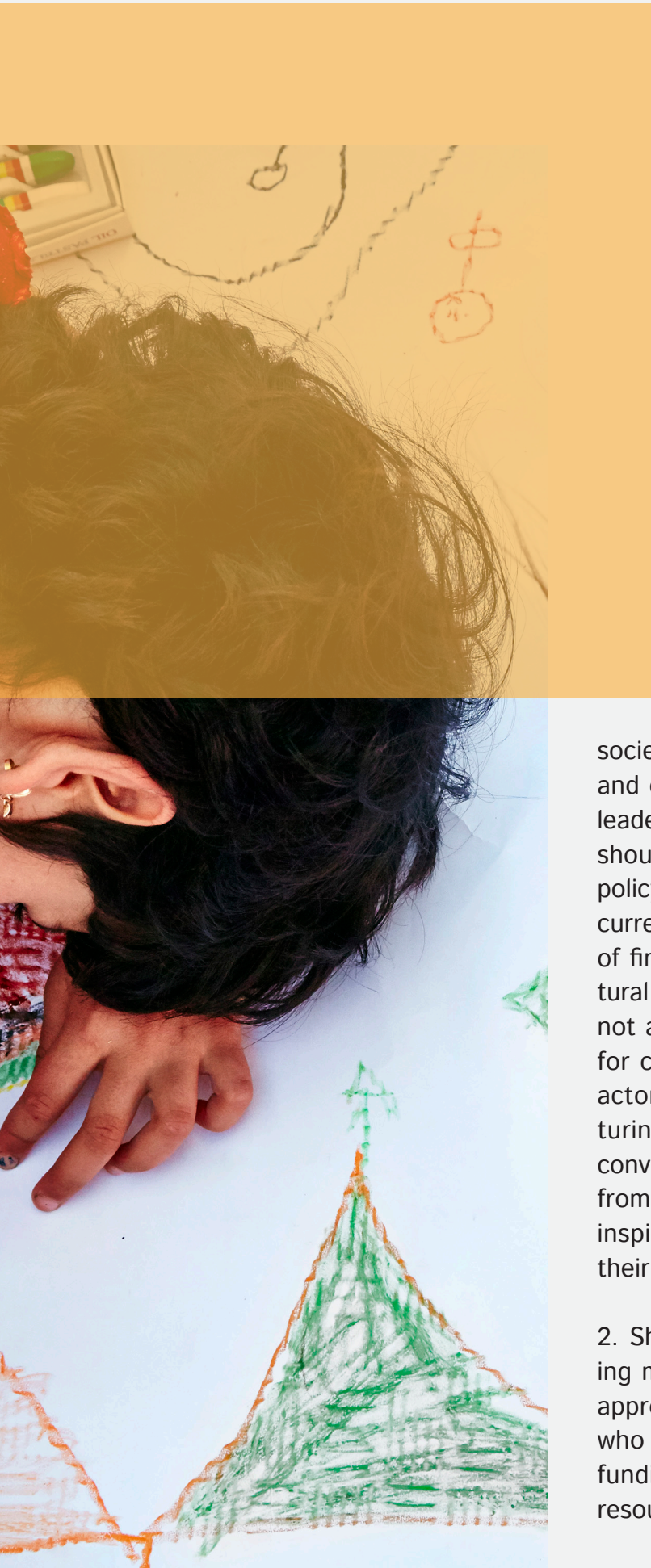
society. The 'localisation agenda' lacks a clear purpose and end-point. Currently there is a lack of vision and leadership from among local and national actors, which should provide the intellectual framework for a set of policy and advocacy demands. The agenda is therefore currently focused on renegotiating the technical terms of financing. But financing is symptomatic of a structural power imbalance, and adjusting the dials alone will not alter the status quo much. Ultimately, an agenda for change should be authored by local and national actors. The NEAR Network has a role to play in nurturing this movement for change, including using its convening power and networks to bring together actors from inside and outside of the sector to mobilise and inspire civil society actors, to elevate and crystallise their ambitions and to negotiate and create change.

2. Shifting to an investment culture. Changing the funding model begins with a change of mind-set. Current approaches are primarily transactional. Organisations who rely heavily or exclusively on these transactional funding relationships have little scope to accrue the resources necessary to invest for the future. Investing

in civil society has a number of possible 'profitable returns', in the form of social and economic goods. In the case of crisis response, investments in the standing responsive capacity of civil society actors has the potential to deliver more efficient and effective crisis-response in the short and medium-term and in the long-term, could provide international actors an 'exit strategy': the humanitarian responders of today, are likely to become the service provision, resilience, accountability and change agents of the future. From the perspective of international humanitarian and development funding actors therefore, there are a range of compelling 'returns' to be derived from investing in civil society and there is a strong justification for investing in civil society as an end or good in itself. From the perspective of civil society actors, shifting to an investment culture is essential to ensure organisations and networks survive, thrive and adapt to the changing needs and priorities of their communities.

3. Up-ending approaches to dealing with risk. Approaches to risk management are acting as a brake on the effective functioning of the humanitarian response enterprise, with local and national actors and ultimately, affected communities paying a disproportionately high price. A growing emphasis on risk avoidance and risk transfer has reached a point of diminishing returns and is undermining the ability of the system to direct resources to enable those best placed to respond. A shift in mind-set and a new tool-kit and approach is needed to find better, more enabling solutions to managing risk. 'Positive' capacity assessments which focus on identifying strengths and areas requiring investment can be used to calibrate enabling risk management strategies and provide a blueprint for further targeted investment and support. Commitments to high-levels of transparency, traceability and accountability are also important confidence-building strategies which should be invested in and incorporated into routine operational behaviour among local and national actors who have an opportunity to set the standard. Low levels of risk tolerance seen among humanitarian donors are not inevitable and alternatives are possible with the right motivation and approaches. It is possible to design and build coalitions of support for alternative financing solutions which permit taking and sharing calculated risks, weighed against clearly defined objectives and expected outcomes.

4. Designing user-centred and outcome-focused financing solutions. The design of financing tools and instruments can be used strategically to empower and incentivize behaviours and priorities. Financing mechanisms therefore can be designed to support the delivery of objectives which go beyond the activities and results of projects. NEAR's research and approach aims to support the design of funding solutions that are user-centred and outcome-focused. These are expected to vary considerably according to the needs and priorities of their users, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders, and will use a transparent and inclusive design process to build trust and support. The process is conceptually divided into 'pre-design' and 'design, build and implement' stages, which can be adapted and tailored to context.

The **purpose** of NEAR's work in this area is to inspire and ignite a global movement of local civil society actors to author, own and drive the 'localisation agenda' to transform the crisis-response financing model for local and national responders. The **role of NEAR** in this process is to act as a facilitator, convenor, broker, incubator and amplifier of this movement. There are five recommended integrated thematic tracks for the NEAR Network to take forward this agenda:

- Invest in NEAR as a global change agent.

- Inspire, convene and connect global networks and movements for change.

- Foster the long-term vision, investment strategies, ownership and sustainability of civil society at the country-level across the humanitarian/ development nexus.

- Support civil society actors through processes to design alternative user-centred and outcome focused financing mechanisms and solutions.

- Generate evidence and learn from change processes to drive adaptation and enable external communication and confidence building.

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