LOCALISATION PILOT MODEL IN ROMANIA

Reflections from the Global Cash Trainer of Trainers

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COLLABORATIVE CASH DELIVERY (CCD) IS A NETWORK OF 14 OF THE LARGEST INTERNATIONAL NGOS WHO COLLECTIVELY DELIVER OVER $1BN IN LAST MILE CASH AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE EVERY YEAR.

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OVERVIEW

The aim of this document is to give an overview of the Localisation Model implemented in Romania along with the successes, challenges and reflections for recommendations for future localisation endeavours. However, it tends to focus on the Cash Capacity Strengthening and cash implementation components of the model as these are the areas I had most oversight of and insight into.
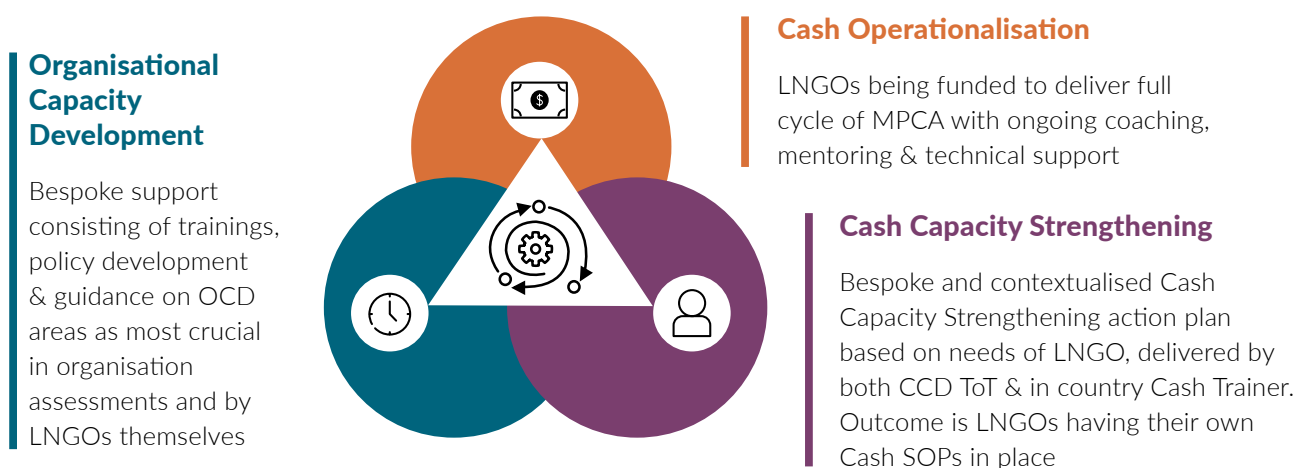
THE MODEL & INTENDED OUTCOME

The Localisation model in Romania was one of four localisation models designed and tested under the CCD project funded by DEC Collective Initiatives. These models intended to achieve the following outcome; Local humanitarian actors have the institutional and technical capacity and funding to effectively and efficiently respond to conflict related humanitarian needs in Ukraine, Poland and Romania through quality cash programming in line with international humanitarian standards. With two specific outputs:

1 **Local humanitarian actors** have strengthened institutional capacities to lead the humanitarian response with a focus on cash programming.

2 **Partners have the staff knowledge, skills and abilities** (KSAs) to deliver locally-led, quality cash programming.

This model was developed by Action Against Hunger who proposed that they utilize their existing partnerships and use this opportunity to empower local actors as it became clear they would not maintain a long-term presence in Romania.
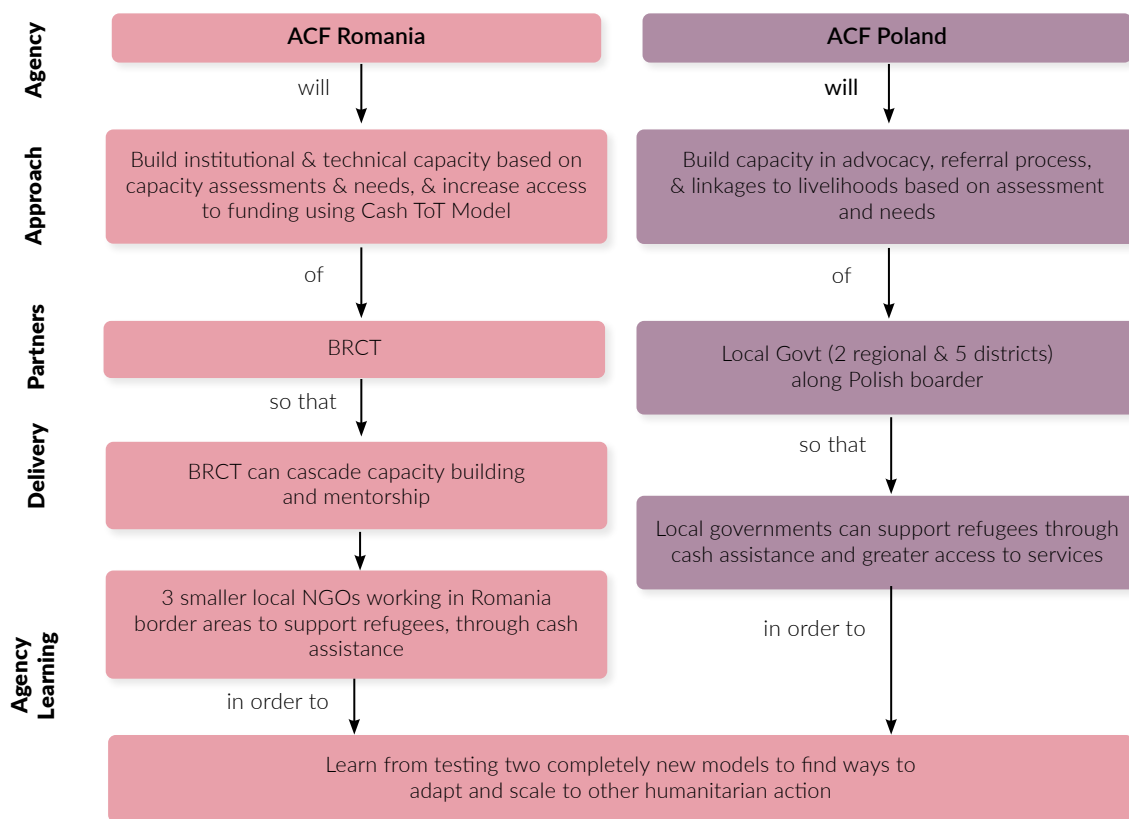
Similar to models implemented in Ukraine, this model comprised of Cash Technical Capacity Strengthening, Organisational Capacity Strengthening and funding to directly implement CVA. This cash capacity strengthening work was being delivered simultaneously with MPCA cash delivery and Organisational Capacity Development support, which particularly towards the end of the project resulted in competing demands being placed on LNGOs. Whilst all three components complement each other and support the overall outcome, timing and coordination across these is key. The figure below illustrates the three components of the Localisation Model.

Localisation in Action: Capacity building to achieve Locally Led Humanitarian Action

Organisational Capacity Development

Bespoke support consisting of trainings, policy development & guidance on OCD areas as most crucial in organisation assessments and by LNGOs themselves

Cash Operationalisation

LNGOs being funded to deliver full cycle of MPCA with ongoing coaching, mentoring & technical support

Cash Capacity Strengthening

Bespoke and contextualised Cash Capacity Strengthening action plan based on needs of LNGO, delivered by both CCD ToT & in country Cash Trainer. Outcome is LNGOs having their own Cash SOPs in place

In this model, the Cash Technical Capacity Strengthening was led by the CCD's Global Cash Trainer of Trainers and support by in country cash trainers recruited by Action Against Hunger and BRCT. Whilst the Organizational Capacity Strengthening and contracting and management of the CVA implementation components would be led by Action against hunger, with support from CCD where requested.

Action Against Hunger would build the institutional and cash technical capacity of BRCT, a large Romanian NGO, so that BRCT could cascade capacity building and mentorship to three local NGOs working in Romanian border areas. This was one of two models developed and implemented by Action Against Hunger under this project, hoping to learn from two distinct models what, where and why works in advancing localisation. Both models are shown in the diagram below.

	ACF Romania	ACF Poland
Agency	will	will
Approach	Build institutional & technical capacity based on capacity assessments & needs, & increase access to funding using Cash ToT Model	Build capacity in advocacy, referral process, & linkages to livelihoods based on assessment and needs
	of	of
Partners	BRCT	Local Govt (2 regional & 5 districts) along Polish boarder
	so that	so that
Delivery	BRCT can cascade capacity building and mentorship	Local governments can support refugees through cash assistance and greater access to services
	3 smaller local NGOs working in Romania border areas to support refugees, through cash assistance	in order to
Agency Learning	in order to	
	Learn from testing two completely new models to find ways to adapt and scale to other humanitarian action	

The collective learning of all four models also intended to inform how:

- INGOs and donors can support local leadership models for diverse local actors

- Cross-fertilisation of ideas from different agencies can support development of new partnership models

- INGOs can shift power and accountability to local actors

- To develop evidence-based localisation models that can be scaled through CCD.

THE CONTEXT

According to the World Bank, 'Romania has made impressive strides in enhancing its economic performance and prosperity over the past two decades, supporting convergence in living standards with the European Union (EU). However, several constraints, including weak institutions, shortages of skilled workforce, poor connectivity, low resilience to natural hazards, and the effects of climate change, hold Romania back from making growth more inclusive and more sustainable economically and environmentally'[1]. Romanian Civil Society played a key role in the COVID-19 pandemic, and is seemingly gaining strength and momentum. As explained by the OECD, there has been a noticeable increase in activism over the last decade, with the creation of many new CSOs. The sector has seen a shift from civic engagement based on personal or common interests (e.g. trade unions, interest groups) to broader issue-driven activism and civil society work on subjects such as corruption and the environment.'[2]

Prior to 2022 there were no humanitarian actors present as no humanitarian needs had been identified. In February 2022, as a result of the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine and Russia's full-scale invasion, a surge of Ukrainian refugees fled into Romania. This prompted an immediate humanitarian response from those already on the ground, both government and local civil society organisations. Those INGOs that were previously present focussed on scaling up and new actors, including Action Against Hunger setting up operations to respond to the emerging humanitarian needs. The Humanitarian Country Coordination structures were also established at this time including a national Cash Working Group. However, both funding and international focus soon fixated on humanitarian needs within Ukraine despite ongoing unmet needs of refugees, and new arrivals in Romania[3] resulting in reduced funding, support and presence of traditional humanitarian actors in Romania.

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1 https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/romania/overview#1
2 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/86f46697-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/86f46697-en
3 UKRAINE RESPONSE: Evolution of Refugees Needs Report | IOM Romania

HOW IT WAS IMPLEMENTED

From August 2023 to March 2024 Cash Capacity Strengthening and Organisational Capacity Development support were provided. The intention was that this work would begin in April 2023, but the Global Cash Trainer of Trainers was not in place until June 2023 and Action Against Hunger was running this project sequentially with another project which started as soon as they entered Romania in 2022, meaning that when consulted on best timing to begin this work Action Against Hunger agreed August 2023 would be preferred.

The Cash Capacity Strengthening began with conducting Cash Capacity Assessments for each LNGO to inform their cash capacity development plans, ensuring that assumptions were not made about level of knowledge and capacity and that the support offered was relevant to the needs of each organisation.

The initial design and intention for the Cash Capacity Strengthening was that materials would be developed by the Global Cash Trainer of Trainers which would then be cascaded to two in country cash trainers one recruited by Action Against Hunger and one recruited by BRCT. However, at the initial stages of the project it was unclear which staff were taking on this role and time shortages caused by delays meant that the Global Cash Trainer of Trainers delivered the training to the LNGOs staff directly this was to avoid delays in MPCA reaching affected communities, but could have impacted the overall model and its impact as this uncertainty and wider uncertainty around the project itself along with subsequent roles and responsibilities persisted.

Cash Capacity Strengthening Phases

| 01	02	03	04	05
In Country Cash Trainers	**Cash Capacity Assessments**	**Bespoke Cash Training**	**Ongoing Support**	**Cash Operationalisation**
Recruitment of & capacity development of in country Cash Trainers, along with tool creation	This information was used to inform Cash Capacity Strengthening Action Plans	Cash training materials are developed, being complemented by existing online CVA training and CCD online Data Class	Coaching, mentoring and ad hoc, continuous Cash Capacity Strengthening is provided	LNGOs being funded to deliver full cycle of MPCA with ongoing coaching, mentoring & technical support

Nonetheless, the Cash Capacity Strengthening involved in person training sessions on technical component of CVA, practical guidance, mentoring and coaching, as well as sharing of ready to use tools and ongoing troubleshooting support. The intention being that the Cash Technical Capacity strengthening begin before implementation, but continued alongside to enable real-time learning and support programme quality. A core part of the Cash technical capacity strengthening was the development of Multipurpose Cash Assistance Standard Operating Procedures, an initial template with guidance was shared with partners who were then given support to develop their own. After a few rounds of feedback and discussion each partner completed their own MPCA SoP that was reviewed by both the CCD Global Cash Trainer of Trainers and Action Against Hunger's Head of Cash.

IMPACT

Cash Capacity Assessments were completed at the beginning of the project by Action Against Hunger, and then at the end of the project by BRCT staff who were trained in a new Harmonized Cash Capacity Assessment tool by the CCD Global Cash Trainer of Trainers. These assessments, along with feedback from partners and observations of the Global Cash Trainer of Trainers regarding the Cash Capacity of the local partners are outlined below showing the impact of this project on local partners' Technical Cash Capacity and our understanding of whether partner staff now have the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to deliver locally-led, quality cash programming.

The below graph shows the Cash Capacity Assessment scores conducted on each partner at the beginning and end of the project. Whilst it is important to note two different Cash Capacity tools were used at the beginning and end so not directly comparable, the score difference is still indicative of the progress made.
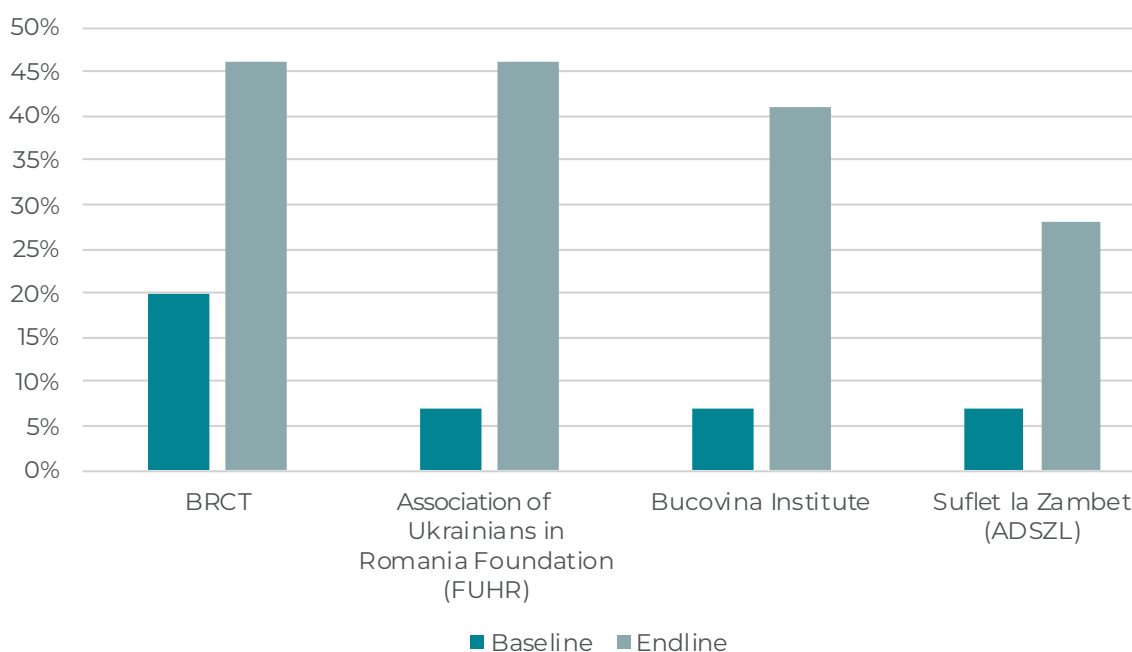
At the outset, all four partners had limited technical expertise in Humanitarian cash programming. However, all had some involvement with MPCA projects in partnership with INGOs and UN agencies, with their main role being limited to conducting registrations since 2022, with BRCT having partnered with Action Against Hunger since 2022 working on some aspects of MPCA projects.

Despite not being appropriate to directly compare baseline and endline scores, it is significant that all partners scored noticeably higher in the second or endline assessment, this is complimented by feedback from participants of trainings as well as senior management from the LNGOs sharing that in their view this project has made significant impact and led to their organisation's increased capacity.

'I enjoyed the last two days more because [they] were more interactive due to [the] discussion related to social work and the explanation of every step from targeting to monitoring! Also, I understand better the whole process, why we do what we do, and how we can improve as a team in future projects!'
– MPCA training participant from LNGO partner organisation.

In addition to the scores and feedback, all partners have now completed a MPCA project which they had involvement of each step of the project implementation, and with cash technical support, have developed MPCA SOPs to ensure they are able to build organisation cash capacity as well as individual staff knowledge and enable them to build in learning from this project and them ready to implement future MPCA projects.

'This project showed that if you are brave enough to take on a challenge, it can be a win-win situation.'
– Director at BRCT.

However, the final CCA's did consistently highlight across all partners that not enough practical involvement took place at the MPCA project design phase. Whilst topics like transfer value calculation, cash feasibility and FSP selection were covered at a theoretical level in trainings and discussions, this project continued partnerships from a previous project that was first phase emergency response without the focus on capacity building meaning that many of these decisions were made in the previous phase and without LNGO partner involvement resulting in lower progress in capacity of these areas compared to others where partners received both theoretical training and direct implementation experience. This is highlighted in the graph below showing the average scores in the final Cash Capacity Assessments broken down across competency areas. This shows that the lowest score was consistently received in Project Design (average score 25%) and highest score was in staff development (average score 75%).

Average Final Cash Capacity Assessment Scores - Compentacy Breakdown
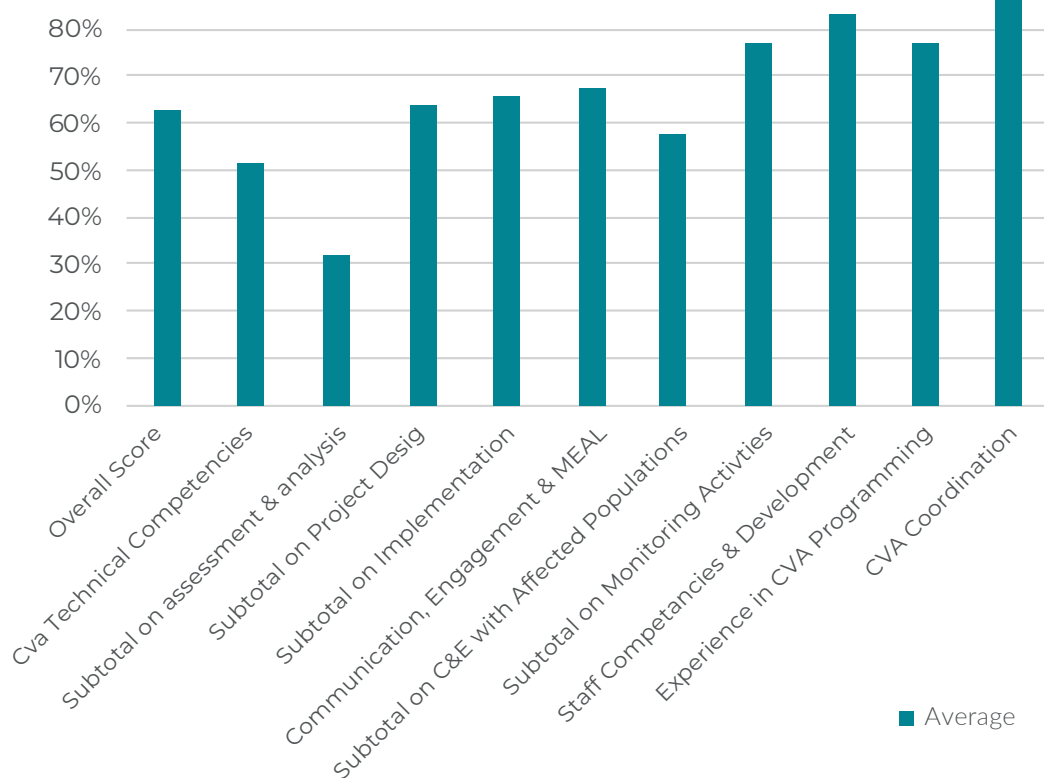
One of the clearest examples of impact at this stage was highlighted in the final PDM report where the results from the the two phases of the project were compared, in which it shows a significant increase in the percentage of beneficiaries who reported being aware of the project FCRM system, **increasing from 62% of respondents saying they were unaware of it to 70% of respondents reporting that they were aware of it** in the later stage of the project. Showing a direct improvement in a key project quality indicator as a result of the localisation model.

During the Lessons Learned workshop facilitated by Action Against Hunger, LNGO Partner staff acknowledged the challenges they faced in terms of getting to grips with new tools and taking on additional workloads and responsibilities, but also stressed that **'this enabled them to gain a more global view of the project, moving from a service provider approach to that of a project owner in line with the increase in responsibility, alongside the coaching, mentoring, and training.'** [4]

During this workshop partners also highlighted a lack of clear processes a lack of time to implement both the MPCA project and conduct the capacity strengthening activities. However, a clear improvement during Stage B of the project was noted by partners and attributed to the development of their MPCA SOPs.

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4 Action Against Hungers' Lessons Learned Report May 2024

SUCCESSES

- MPCA project was completed, and a total of 1,288 individuals in 388 households received MPCA from as a result of this project.

- All 4 LNGOs involved in the project developed high quality MPCA SOPs ready to be used in future projects to enable continued quality implementation, building organisational cash capacity not just staff technical knowledge

- Positive feedback received from LNGOs on overall project, approach and specific cash trainings and cash capacity strengthening activities

- All four LNGOs reported and demonstrated increased Cash Technical Capacity

- The Cash ToT Model was able to keep focus and refocus on CVA technical quality during implementation

- The Cash ToT Model and Localisation pilot model was able to mitigate the risk of defaulting back to business-as-usual programming and prioritizing getting cash at the door as quickly as possible to the detriment of the localisation outcome which aimed to build partner capacities over time to the point of handing over the ownership of implementing a cash cycle. This approach enabled intervention when needed to ensure outcomes were not compromised by overly focusing on outputs

- All partners confirmed significant shift in ways of working resulting in LNGOs taking on more elements of the project and embedding capacity building into each step of the project

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- Not enough detail put into the model at the design stage, when it came to implementation those involved in the design had left, leaving staffing gaps and then new staff did not have the background or time to develop the models further

- Staff turnover, delays in recruitment and lack of clarity in understanding the project and model, as staff were recruited across a long timeframe it was not possible to have a detailed project kick off where everyone involved in the project could get on the same page and into the details of how to do it

- Prioritizing implementation of CVA and not delaying that over building capacity and achieving localisation objectives

- Initial focus on outputs rather than outcomes and natural tendencies to default to business as usual

- Trying to do something different when systems, mindsets and assumptions are set on business as usual

- Time and availability of LNGO staff, including time and availability of in country cash trainers

- Lack of involvement of LNGOs in designing the project and in their inclusion in the project, not sure the project was fully explained or understood at the outset

- Recruitment delays meant that time initially intended to build the capacity of and train in country cash trainers was lost

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 **Provide ongoing and practical support**
Ongoing and practical capacity strengthening support through technical trainings, coaching and mentoring works, but is time intensive allow more time for these activities before, after and during the Cash operationalization to have more impact and not put unmanageable demands on LNGOs and their staff

2 **Build in a longer inception phase to ensure different elements of the project are coordinated and not disconnected or competing**
The approach of combining Cash technical capacity strengthening, Organizational capacity development and cash operationalization is effective, but would be more effective if these three components were better coordinated, planned, and synchronized. Recommend ensuring key staff are in place at project onset and that a detailed project implementation and planning meeting is held to ensure the details and logistics can be worked through together, build in a longer inception period at the onset of the project to make sure this is feasible

3 **Focus on areas of most impact for OCD**
Organizational Capacity Development is a vast area, being led by LNGO priorities and needs is important, but we need to acknowledge what we can reasonably deliver on, for most impact on ability to deliver quality Cash assistance, focus on areas that directly connect to that such as ensuring knowledge of and put in place policies and procedures for accountability to affected populations including feedback and response hotlines, financial management, HR, MEAL, safeguarding and Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

4 **Find a balance between regimented pre-exiting materials and being completely ad hoc and responsive, build this into the Cash Capacity Strengthening Planning process**
This project was intended to be flexible and responsive to needs to LNGOs in terms of Cash Capacity Strengthening, there are positives to this as it meant support was given based on what was needed, but the downside is that participants and LNGOs did not know the time commitment required from them at the outset.

5 **Ensure that all involved, INGOs and LNGOs know, understand, and sign up to in tangible terms the aims, commitment, and objectives of this project.**
At times it was not clear that LNGOs knew about the additional workload involved until after the project was being implemented meaning they could not plan for and allocate adequate resources.

6 **Ensure dedicated human resources for cash capacity strengthening activities to be based in country**
Recommendation is at least one full time cash trainer, being trained and supported by Global Cash Trainer of Trainers. If this role is not fully resourced and staff have to double hat it creates challenges and reduces overall capacity to build capacity effectively.

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