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# BEYOND BARRIERS

**MALAWI CASE STUDY:**  
SAVE THE CHILDREN MALAWI

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# TRANSFORMING DISASTER RESPONSE THROUGH LOCALIZATION EFFORTS IN NENO, MALAWI

This case study features a Localization Pilot Project in Neno, a district traditionally faced with constant disasters. The communities there have found new strength through localization efforts between the INGO Save the Children and local NGO Beyond Our Hearts Foundation (BOHF), based in Neno. The project demonstrates how focusing on local solutions and empowering communities provide the best outcomes when responding to disasters.

It also provides a great example of how an INGO can have a positive impact on localization, beyond sub-contracting to a L/NNGO. The 'Localization Journey' between Save the Children and BOHF demonstrates what can be achieved by being intentional with efforts on localization.

The project set out with a clear mission: to empower local communities and organizations to take charge of disaster response and resilience-building efforts in Zomba and Neno. The project had three strategic outcomes:

- Strengthening of the emergency preparedness, prevention, and response capacity for Zomba and Neno district councils and four local NGOs
- Local Authorities and Civil Society play a more active role in the Malawian humanitarian coordination structure.
- Local Authorities and Civil Society access more funding directly from donors

The project aimed to promote inclusivity and diversity within communities, ensuring that marginalized voices are heard and respected in disaster management efforts. By prioritizing local leadership and empowerment, the project aimed to strengthen disaster preparedness, prevention, and response mechanisms. The Localization Pilot Project was launched in December 2021, with an initial phase ending in 2023. Currently, the project is in the second phase which is set to end in 2025.

## IMPROVED HUMANITARIAN OUTCOMES

For years, Neno district faced major challenges in responding to disasters when they occurred. Inadequate capacity, resources, and poor road connectivity made it challenging for communities to be resilient or access critical support timely during emergencies. Aid faced logistical hurdles, leaving affected communities to suffer the consequences of disasters for days.

The approach taken by this localization project has provided these communities with the means and capacity to increase resilience to disasters and respond within 72 hours, when previously communities would have had to wait for over week before any formalized response could begin. The poor road conditions meant that certain communities would not be reachable after heavy flooding.

The key aspect of this initiative is the collaboration of local communities, local NGOs (based in Neno) and local district councils. By strengthening the capacities of community-based organizations, enabling them to access funding and by pre-positioning funds, the local actors coordinated a rapid response based on the community's needs. This project enabled the local actors to activate a crisis modifier, conduct a needs assessment, hold an emergency meeting at the District Executive Committee, and bring the required items for affected communities within 24 hours during Cyclone Freddy in 2023.

Demonstrating increased capacity, BOHF successfully lobbied Save the Children to provide funding to the District Council from the project budget to reduce dependence of the Council on BOHF and hence ease collaboration with the council. Building on this effort, BOHF is working towards ensuring that Village Civil Protection Committees should also have funds so that humanitarian activities should be more locally led.

## IMPACT ON BEYOND OUR HEARTS FOUNDATION (BOHF)

In delivering the localization project in Neno District, Save the Children Malawi works with Beyond Our Hearts Foundation (BOHF), a local organization based in the district. The project's objectives went beyond providing funding for upcoming humanitarian responses by maintaining a focus on ensuring that the local NGOs would develop organizationally and become ready to access funding independently.

### *Resource Mobilization*

Before the localization project, BOHF had only one donor. As a result of the strategic investments in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of resource mobilization through the localization project, BOHF managed to generate resources from six more donors between 2019 and 2023.

In addition, Save the Children Malawi connected BOHF to other international organizations which has opened more opportunities for resource mobilization: "Right now, we are submitting an application together with Red Cross, MUST and other organizations for a significant grant. This has been possible because we have been exposed and trusted by Save the Children Malawi," said the Executive Director.

### *Organizational Capacity Strengthening*

The localization project started when BOHF was in its formative stages. At that point, the organization did not have proper organizational systems. The localization project supported the organization to conduct a capacity assessment. This was followed by training and development of policies and systems to address the existing capacity gaps. The policies include finance management, procurement safeguarding, gender, communication (including social media) and others. The organization was also equipped with skills in Emergency Preparedness and Response. In addition, the organization developed a strategic plan to guide its operations. They were further assisted in areas such as talent recruitment and retention.

BOHF reported that training is normally demand driven, meaning they receive capacity support based on their needs. For example, they requested training of the organization's board members. The necessary training was offered through the localization project, despite this not being included in the original project activities. This flexibility is key for demand driven capacity strengthening.

## *Sustainability*

The first phase of the localization project was developed by Save the Children. However, as the project entered the second phase, BOHF participated in defining its scope and content. This is a reflection of trust in BOHF which has been earned over the time of the localization project and demonstrates the organizational progress made.

BOHF is optimistic about continuity beyond the Save the Children supported localization project. This is because of the systems that the organization has put in place and the increased capacity in resource mobilization that the organization has gained. According to the Executive Director: the organization has learned that resource mobilization is not just about writing proposals, but also requires meeting strategic partners for potential support. The organization's presence on social media is also helping in resource mobilization, as well wishers can see the good work of BOHF and hence trust the organization with more resources. In addition, BOHF has begun a farming business to generate income for sustaining the organization's operations.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Effective Localization of Disaster Response:** The Localization Pilot Project highlights the effectiveness of localizing disaster response efforts. By empowering local communities and organizations, the project improved disaster preparedness and response times. Communities can now respond within 72 hours, a significant improvement from the previous wait of over a week.
- **Strengthening Local Capacity:** The project successfully enhanced the capacity of local NGOs and district councils. Beyond Our Hearts Foundation (BOHF) saw a substantial increase in its donor base and resource mobilization capabilities. This was achieved through targeted support, including training in organizational management and resource mobilization, which enabled BOHF to secure additional funding and improve its operational effectiveness.
- **Collaboration and Inclusivity:** The project underscored the importance of collaboration among local actors, including NGOs and district councils. By working together and pre-positioning funds, the local actors could effectively coordinate disaster responses. The project also emphasized inclusivity by ensuring marginalized voices were considered in disaster management efforts.
- **Sustainability and Long-Term Impact:** The Localization Pilot Project has laid the groundwork for long-term sustainability. BOHF's increased capacity for resource mobilization and organizational development, coupled with its involvement in defining the project's second phase, positions it for continued success beyond the Save the Children-supported initiative.

