BEYOND BARRIERS

BANGLADESH CASE STUDY:
LOCAL COALITION ACCELERATOR (LCA) - SUNDARBAN COALITION

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The Local Coalition Accelerator (LCA) represents a collaborative initiative of the Share Trust Inc. and the Warande Advisory Centre (Kenya), aimed at bolstering and amplifying ongoing localization efforts in the development and humanitarian ecosystems, ushering in transformative shifts in power dynamics, processes, and funding mechanisms. By challenging the entrenched colonial structures and top-down approaches predominantly driven by the Global North, LCA works in tandem with coalitions comprised of Local and National Organizations (LNOs), alongside Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and analogous community-based models.

In broader contexts, local communities and those who are closest to them, facilitating their growth and development, have received scant financial backing and technical assistance. In order to foster inclusive decision-making processes, it is imperative that the voices of communities are not only heard but also actively engaged in shaping their own destinies. Regrettably, this opportunity has been severely limited for many. Hence, to confront this entrenched challenge, the Local Coalition Accelerator is a purpose-built platform designed to engage and help build coalitions of LNOs who can effectively co-design and implement locally-owned, holistic, evidence-based programs on a large scale and address systemic and cross-sectoral challenges. By enabling meaningful participation in larger-scale systems change, particularly by facilitating direct access to significant bilateral and philanthropic funding that is currently routed exclusively through UN or international NGO channels, these efforts empower communities to realize their collective power to bring changes they envision for themselves. LCA is also committed to inclusiveness, transparency, accountability along with community empowerment.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN DONORS AND LOCAL ACTORS TO FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGE THE WAY INTERNATIONAL AID IS DESIGNED AND DELIVERED

The first LCA coalition of local actors was established in Uganda amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, bringing together 14 local organizations to collectively respond to the humanitarian crisis and its repercussions on livelihoods, education, and health. Drawing upon the lessons learned in Uganda, LCA successfully expanded its reach to Bangladesh and Nigeria in 2022.

In the coastal regions of Bangladesh, the LCA Sundarban Coalition has emerged through the collaboration of 16 local organizations spanning four districts. Among these, four are seasoned local NGOs, while 12 are Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). UTTARAN, a prominent local NGO operating in the southwestern coastal area, serves as the host and custodian of grants for the Coalition. UTTARAN works in collaboration with three other well-established local NGOs, namely Association of Voluntary Actions for Society (AVAS), Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS), and Jago Nari.

All four organizations are responsible for providing mentoring support to the 12 (CBOs) of the respective areas. That means, in each of the four districts, there is a local NGO (technical lead) and three local CBOs (one with a primary focus on women's rights, one focused on Indigenous/socially excluded minorities, and one youth-led organization). The Start Network program in Bangladesh lends technical support to this initiative.

- **Coalition of the 16 local organization (4 NGOs and 12 Community Based Organization)**
- **16 members have equal participation in the Governance Council**
- **UTTARAN, a local NGO, serves as the host and custodian of grants for the Coalition**

DIRECT FUND TO THE LOCAL ACTOR AND EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIP:

LCA's shared vision is to "flip the system" by the end of the grant period and have the Sundarban Coalition be in a position to directly receive philanthropic and bilateral funding without the need for an INGO in the Global North acting as intermediary. Hence, this initiative adopts a non-stereotypical implementation model, particularly in terms of its financial approach. Unlike the conventional systems where donor funds are exclusively accessible through UN agencies or large-scale INGOs for specific, pre-determined projects, LCA's goal is to provide this coalition of local actors with the opportunity to operate as their own democratically governed coalition, to create and implement holistic, community centered collective action plans geared toward improving disaster resilience in the coastal region.

Share Trust directly transfers the grant to UTTARAN, who serves as the Coalition Grant Custodian operating at the service of the 16-member Sundarban coalition. This funding allocation was released to UTTARAN with a flexible partnership clause and easy reporting guidelines. Share Trust outlined a simple budget plan, stipulating that 80% should be allocated to program implementation (Joint Action Plan) and 20% could be used for coalition management, including staffing and key meetings. After a year, Share Trust proposed an amendment to allocate an additional 10% of the total funds for strengthening the organizational capacity of the CBOs, allowing them flexibility in how they utilize these funds according to their specific needs.

LCA Budget Guidelines:
Agreed Budget Framework

70%
Program Implementation

10%
12 CBOs Organizational Capacity Strengthening

20%
Coalition Management + Secretariate

80% Resilience Programming
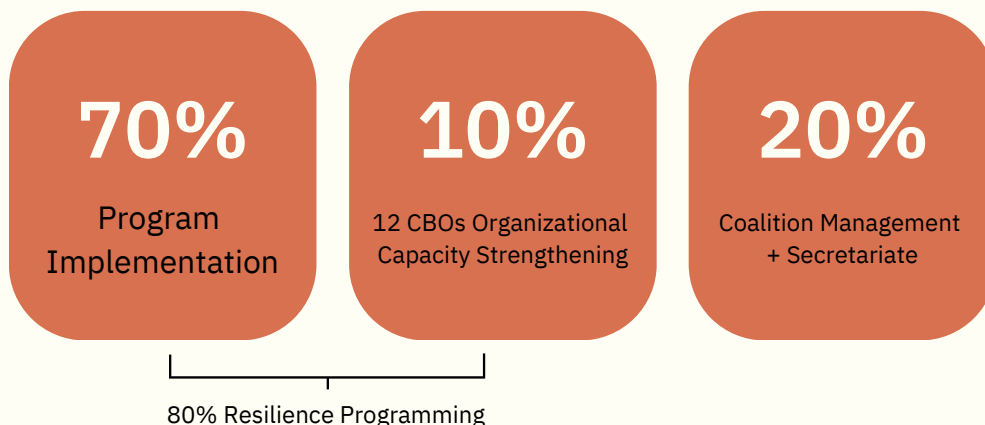
As Coalition Grant Custodian, Uttaran was responsible for managing and distributing funding to the other coalition members (three mentoring agencies and locally registered CBOs) based upon their democratically determined budget and joint action plan (JAP). Each mentoring agency — Uttaran, CNRS, AVAS, and Jago Nari — provides invaluable mentoring and coaching support, with a focus on enhancing organizational capacity in fiscal management and technical capabilities, to the 12 CBOs. These CBOs, in turn, operate within the four designated focal districts, delivering community-based assistance. Through this collaborative endeavor, the LCA coalition members are committed to ensuring that even the most marginalized segments of society are equipped with a sustainable platform to collectively steer the trajectory of their own and their communities' futures. Inspired by successful models like Self-Help Groups, the coalition members are actively cultivating empowerment collectives to realize this shared vision. The LCA model offers insights into how funding processes can be improved to redistribute power more equitably.

Moreover, the LCA approach emphasizes the importance of building diverse teams for funding, design, and decision-making throughout innovation processes. Experiences from Bangladesh, Uganda, Nigeria, and beyond demonstrate a shift from traditional mindsets of 'deficiency' to one of 'asset-building.' This involves cultivating strong trust among partners, both globally and locally, and fostering collaboration between various demographic groups, including men and women, older and younger individuals, and representatives from government and civil society.

Drive resources to underrepresented / marginalized groups:

Women-led CBOs, young people led, socially excluded other marginalized groups i.e., disability rights organizations, Indigenous people's organization.

In embracing localization, the Sundarban Coalition Members embody the spirit of grassroots empowerment, championing principles of equity, diversity, and community-led development. Together, they pave the way for a more just and sustainable future, rooted in the wisdom and agency of local voices. Through a democratic process, they have crafted their constitutions and operational modalities, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued. Regardless of differences in organizational size or experience, all members have equal footing in defining their roles within the coalition. Central to this ethos is the recognition that organizations led by marginalized and socially excluded groups hold equal power within the governing structure. By dismantling traditional hierarchies, the governing council operates on principles of equity, inclusivity, mutual accountability, and transparency where decision-making power is distributed horizontally among all members. This non-hierarchical structure not only fosters a culture of collaboration and mutual respect, but also serves as a platform for capacity sharing, collective learning and quality assurance of the development program. Through dialogue and exchange, local organizations seize opportunities to glean insights and best practices from one another, strengthening their collective impact and resilience.

In the journey toward empowering local organizations and fostering localization, the ethos of trust lies at the heart of the LCA model. This recognizes that the transition from the individualistic 'I' to the collective 'We' is not merely a process, but a profound shift in mindset and approach. Over 12 to 18 months, members try to cultivate this transformation, nurturing a culture where community members feel empowered to lead and effect systemic change. The shift from short-term projects to long-term approaches enhances the agency and works toward systemic change.

LCAs are representative and embed trust as part of the implementation process. Despite this, the Sundarban Coalition has embraced a robust framework guided by its constitution, policies, and protocols, ensuring the active involvement and leadership of community members. Central to this approach are the five technical working groups, each tasked with providing essential guidance and expertise in various aspects of program implementation and management. These groups have been meticulously assembled, drawing upon the capacity, dedication, and existing roles of their members. For instance, the Safeguarding and Compliance Response Mechanism (CRM) Committee comprises five members, including representatives from four districts and one from the host organization. The selection criteria for these members encompass a broad spectrum of qualities, ranging from a deep understanding of safeguarding policies and human rights to interpersonal skills and integrity.

Beyond safeguarding, the technical working groups span critical areas such as program quality, monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL), and resource mobilization through fundraising campaigns, communication, and branding. The coalition is open to forming other technical working groups in the future to address pressing needs essential for transitioning funding to the coalition. Each group plays a pivotal role in driving the collective mission forward, leveraging the unique expertise and perspectives of its members. Every effort has been made to ensure inclusivity and diversity within these groups, with a keen eye on avoiding conflicts of interest. Notably, the host organization and grant custodians are deliberately excluded from the finance and audit team, allowing for impartial oversight of fiscal management and enhancing accountability. Their efforts indicate a shift from short-term approaches to long-term, and from 'Big Man' politics to ones that are representative.
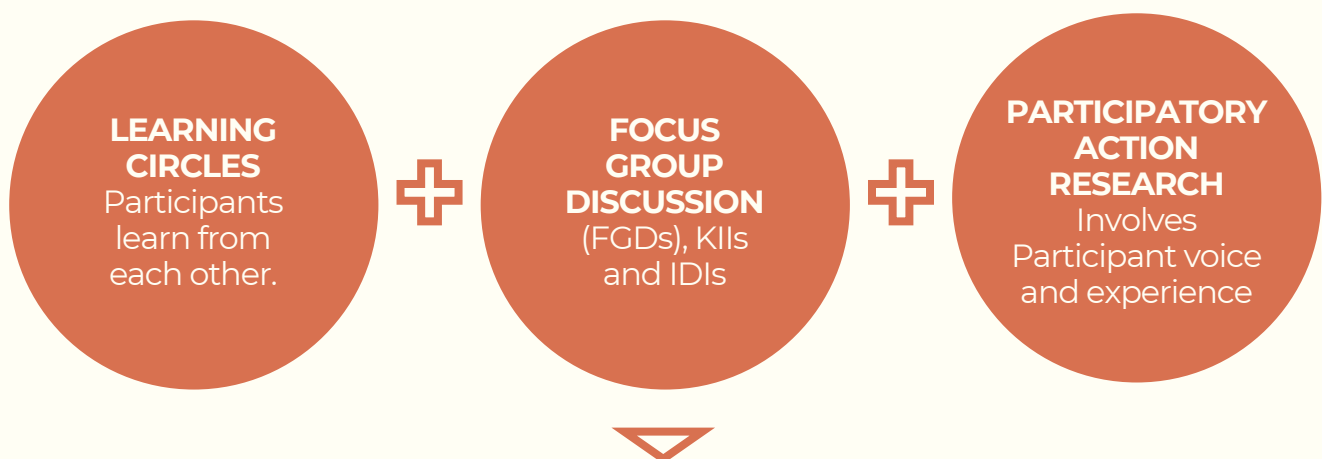
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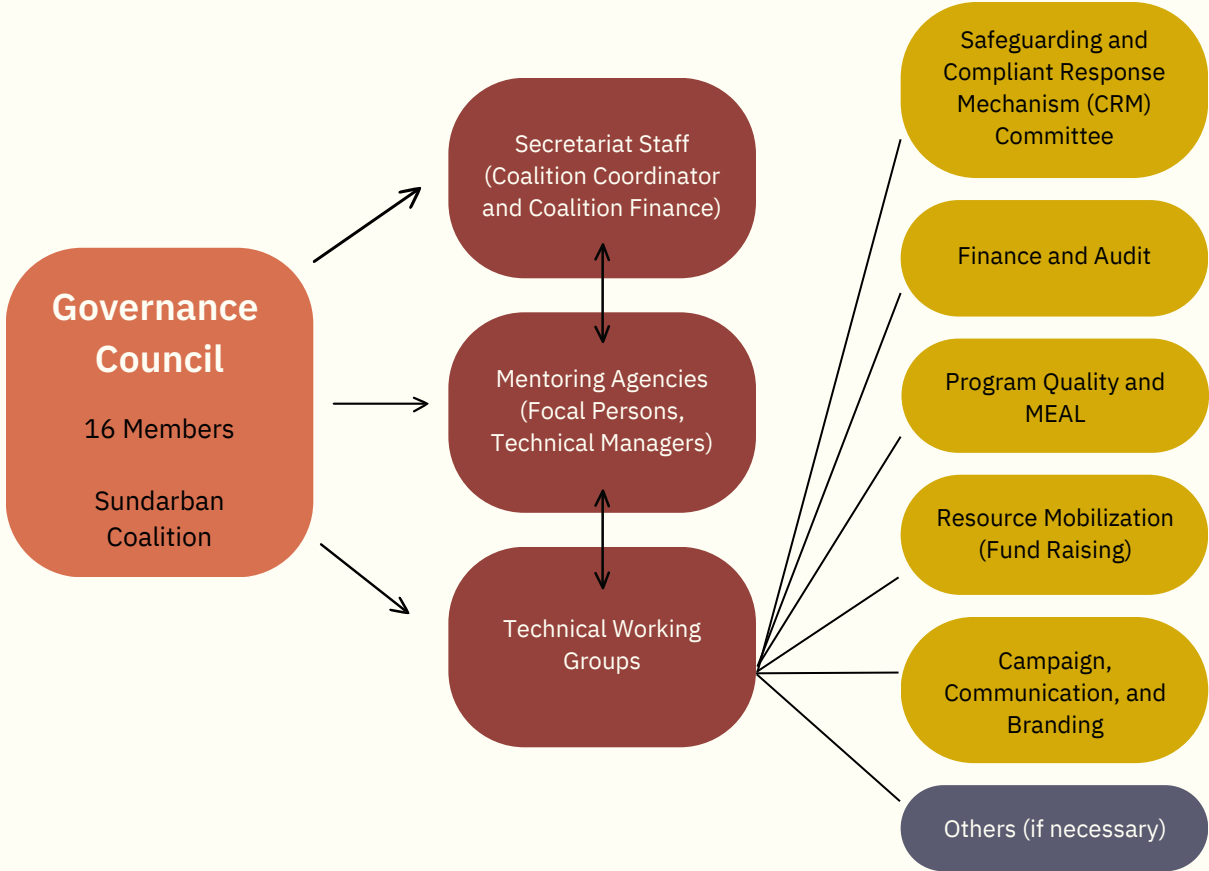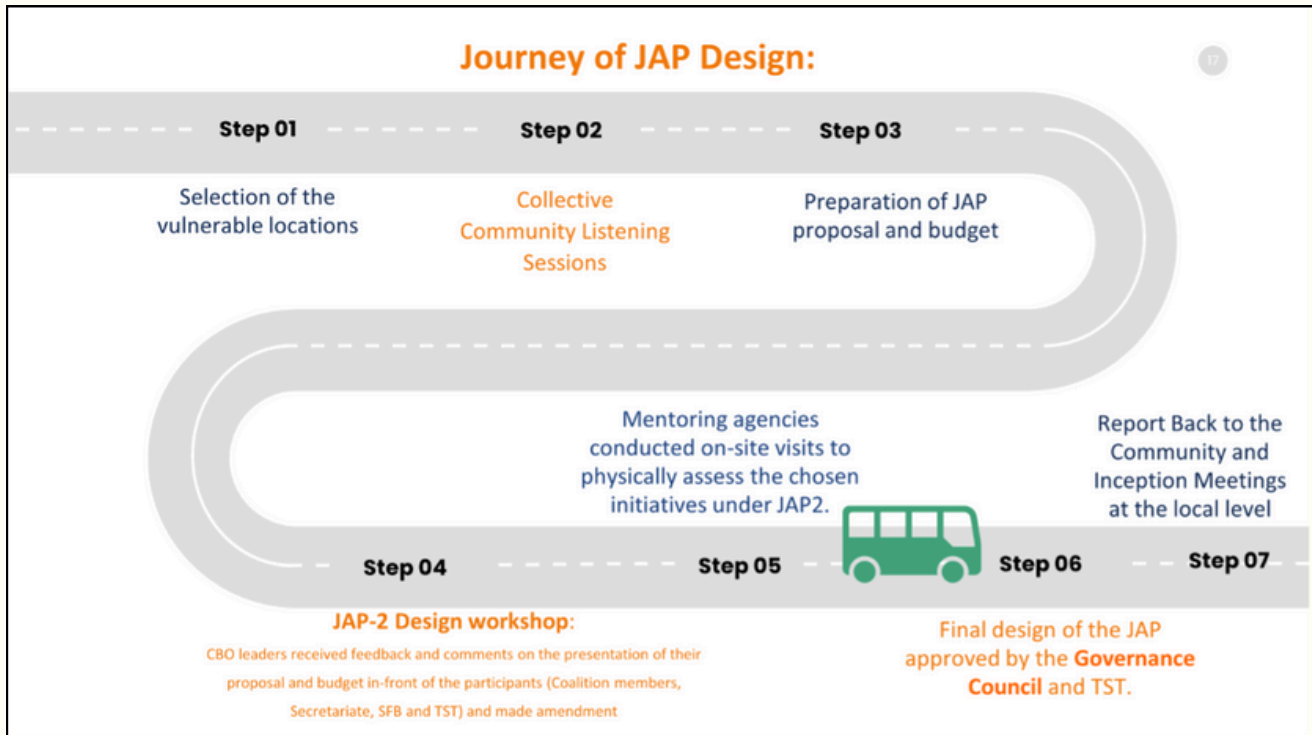
JOINT ACTION PLAN OF THE COALITION MEMBERS:

The Joint Action Plan (JAP) crafted by the Sundarban Coalition embodies a commitment to localized solutions, rooted in the voices and needs of the communities it serves. Firmly grounded in the principles of inclusiveness and participatory governance, the JAP emerges from a process of collective community listening sessions, ensuring that the aspirations and concerns of the people directly affected by climate-induced disasters are at the forefront of intervention efforts. Furthermore, it is envisaged that coalition constituents will base their collective decisions on the analyses stemming from community dialogues, rather than engaging in competitive pursuits for grant resources or succumbing to individualistic inclinations. This approach prioritizes a holistic perspective, transcending narrow geographical boundaries to address the comprehensive needs of the region.

Through a meticulous methodology of Collective Community Listening Sessions, the Sundarban Coalition engages community members across four Upazilas and districts, facilitating open dialogues through focus group discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and In-depth interviews (IDIs). These sessions serve as platforms for diverse voices to be heard, with participants representing various genders, ages, and occupations. By desegregating data and insights gathered from these sessions, the coalition gains a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by communities in the coastal region.

LEARNING CIRCLES
Participants learn from each other.

+

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
(FGDs), KIIs and IDIs

+

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH
Involves Participant voice and experience

Collective community listening sessions: Collaborative discussion and supportive atmosphere to center participant voice and experience coordinated with community partner and theoretically informed.

The JAP, therefore, emerges as a dynamic roadmap, collaboratively developed by coalition members. It encapsulates a comprehensive approach to resilience building, addressing not only the immediate impacts of climate-induced disaster, but also the underlying vulnerabilities within the community. By centering community perspectives, the JAP ensures that strategies are contextually relevant and responsive to the unique needs of the coastal region.

Journey of JAP Design:

Step 01
Selection of the vulnerable locations

Step 02
Collective Community Listening Sessions

Step 03
Preparation of JAP proposal and budget

Mentoring agencies conducted on-site visits to physically assess the chosen initiatives under JAP2.

Report Back to the Community and Inception Meetings at the local level

Step 04
JAP-2 Design workshop:
CBO leaders received feedback and comments on the presentation of their proposal and budget in-front of the participants (Coalition members, Secretariate, SFB and TST) and made amendment

Step 05

Step 06
Final design of the JAP approved by the **Governance Council** and TST.

Step 07

With the JAP as their guide, CBOs within the Sundarban Coalition embark on a journey of coordinated action, pooling resources and expertise to implement initiatives that enhance community resilience. By fostering collaboration, capacity sharing, and shared responsibility, the JAP empowers CBOs to leverage their collective strength in the face of environmental adversity. This process also ensured community-led program monitoring and quality assurance.

Ultimately, the Sundarban Coalition's commitment to localization extends beyond the development of the JAP; it is a testament to the power of community-driven solutions in addressing the complex challenges of climate change and disasters. Through inclusive and participatory processes, the coalition seeks to build a future where the resilience of Sundarban communities is strengthened, ensuring sustainable development for generations to come.

HUMAN RESOURCES

From a localization perspective, the empowerment and integration of local human resources within the coalition have been pivotal. Collective decisions regarding staff numbers and their remuneration have been made by the coalition members, mindful of rectifying prevailing salary discrepancies within the aid sector. With authority over budgetary matters, they dictate the salary framework, aiming to address inequities and promote fair compensation. Recognizing the importance of fairness, inclusivity, and transparency, the coalition members embarked on a journey to ensure that the recruitment process upheld these principles.

During the recruitment of the Coalition staff, a comprehensive job description (JD) was meticulously crafted through collaborative efforts, drawing insights from coalition members. This clarity aimed to ensure that all involved parties had a nuanced understanding of their contributions and expectations. In the spirit of inclusivity, a recruitment panel was assembled, representing a diverse array of stakeholders. Consisting of members from the host organization, mentoring agencies, CBOs, Start Fund Bangladesh, and Share Trust Inc., the panel exemplified the commitment to diverse representation. Notably, the inclusion of two representatives from among the 12 CBO members underscored the coalition's commitment to amplifying grassroots voices, recognizing their invaluable contributions to the localization process. In essence, the approach to onboarding key staff members reflects a conscientious effort to uphold the principles of localization, ensuring that decisions are made collaboratively, and that the diversity of voices within the coalition is not only acknowledged but also actively embraced.

In addition, Share Trust Inc. has also embraced a collaborative approach with the four mentoring agencies of the Sundarban coalition, as well as Start Fund Bangladesh. Together, they assumed joint responsibility for the recruitment process of the Share Trust's Bangladesh country representative position. The four mentoring agencies of the Sundarban coalition and Start Fund Bangladesh took the lead in shortlisting the applicants and conducting the initial round of assessment interviews. Following this, senior leaders from Share Trust Inc. actively participated in the subsequent round of assessments to collectively finalize the selection process. This commitment to localizing human resource decisions not only empowers the local community, but also ensures that individuals with a deep understanding of the context and challenges in Bangladesh are at the forefront of driving positive change and resilience within the region.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Local Coalition Accelerator (LCA) is an example of how to challenge traditional "top – down" approaches to responses, by empowering communities from the beginning.

- The LCA started with a vision to "flip the system". By the end of the grant, the aim is to have the Local (Sundarban) Coalition in a position to access funding directly.

- The LCA has one Grant Custodian (Uttaran) responsible for managing the grant and distributing to other coalition members.

- There are four mentoring agencies providing support to 12 CBOs focused on organizational capacities and technical capabilities.

- The LCA governance structure ensures that decision-making power is distributed horizontally and disregards traditional hierarchies. The Governance Council is made up of 16 members, one member from each of the four mentoring agencies and 12 CBOs.

- The Joint Action Plan (JAP) guides the LCA's response methodology. It emerges from a process that includes collective community listening sessions, design workshops which are presented before participants and final design reported back to communities at inception meetings.

- Collective decisions regarding staff numbers and their remuneration are made by the LCA members, mindful of rectifying prevailing salary discrepancies within the aid sector.

- Recruitment panels aim to include a diverse array of LCA members, including two of the 12 CBO members.