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COAR 1989

Regional Dialogue Cafe Narrative Report

Activity Title	Two-day Regional Dialogue Cafe
Organization – Afghanistan Localization Lab Convener	Citizen Organization for Advocacy and Resilience (COAR)
Date	10 - 11 June 2026
Location	Eastern Zone (Nangarhar) - White House Hotel
Drafted by	Mohammad Saeed Sadat, Education Trainer
Finalized by	Baz Halim Shinwari, Dialogue Specialist

Participants

The Regional Dialogue Cafe brought together representatives from national and international organizations, government institutions, and local communities. A total of 47 participants attended the event, including:

S/NO	Organization/Institution Category	Number of Participants
1	INGO	4
2	NGO	25
3	UN Agencies	0
4	Government Officials	11
5	Formal/Informal CBO + CSO	7

Total number of participants: 47

Agenda of the Two-Day Regional Dialogue Cafe

Day 1

Time	Session Day One	Facilitator
08:30 – 09:00	Registration of Participants	COAR Team
09:00 – 09:10	Opening	Baz Halim Shinwari
09:10 – 09:15	Recitation of the Holy Quran	Participant
09:15 – 09:30	Welcome Remarks and Opening Speech	Dr. Afghan, Deputy Director, COAR
09:30 – 09:45	Participant Introductions and Expectations	Facilitator
09:45 – 10:00	Distribution of Stationery and Pre-Test Assessment	COAR Team
10:00 – 10:30	Tea Break	-
10:30 – 12:00	COAR Presentation: Introduction to Localization	COAR Program Director
12:00 – 01:00	Lunch Break	-
01:00 – 01:30	ACBAR Presentation: Localization Technical Working Group	ACBAR Localization Coordinator

Day 2

Time	Session	Facilitator
08:30 – 09:15	Recap of Day One and Introduction to Day Two	Facilitator
09:15 – 10:45	Group Work: Identifying Localization Challenges	Participants
10:45 – 11:00	Tea Break	-
11:00 – 12:30	Group Presentations and Discussion	Participant Groups
12:30 – 01:30	Lunch Break	-
01:30 – 02:15	Open Discussion: Community Participation, Donor Engagement	All Participants
02:15 – 03:15	Development of Strategic Priorities and Action Points	Facilitator and Participants
03:15 – 03:30	Tea Break	-

Executive Summary

COAR organization organized a two-day Regional Dialogue Cafe under the Localization Project in the Eastern Region, Jalalabad City, on 10-11 June 2026 to strengthen understanding and promote dialogue on localization among humanitarian and development stakeholders in Afghanistan. The Dialogue provided a platform for national NGOs, international NGOs, government representatives, and community leaders to discuss the concept of localization, review global and national experiences, identify barriers to localization in Afghanistan, and develop practical recommendations for advancing the localization agenda.

The Dialogue Cafe included presentations from COAR, ACBAR, and Save the Children, as well as group discussions, and open dialogue sessions. Participants emphasized the importance of transferring leadership, decision-making authority, resources, and responsibilities to local actors and communities. The Dialogue concluded with strategic recommendations for the next two years and demonstrated a significant increase in participants knowledge and understanding of localization concepts.

Background

Localization has become a central topic within the humanitarian and development sectors globally. Experiences from major crises such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2010 Pakistan Floods, the Syrian Civil War, and the 2015 Nepal Earthquake demonstrated that local actors are often the first responders during emergencies and play a critical role in ensuring effective and sustainable humanitarian action.

In Afghanistan, the need for stronger local leadership, ownership, and participation has become increasingly important due to ongoing humanitarian and development challenges. Recognizing this need, COAR organized a two-day Regional Dialogue Cafe to facilitate learning, experience sharing, and collaboration among key stakeholders working to advance localization in Afghanistan.

Objective

The objectives of the Dialogue Cafe were:

- To increase participants understanding of localization concepts and approaches.
- To share national and international experiences related to localization.

- To identify challenges and barriers affecting localization efforts in Afghanistan.
- To develop practical recommendations and future strategies for strengthening localization.
- To enhance coordination among local organizations, international organizations, government institutions, donors, and communities.

Methodology: Dialogue Cafe Approach

The Regional Dialogue Cafe followed the trust-building process outlined in the Localization Cafe Facilitation Guide. Rather than focusing on presentations, the event was structured around progressive dialogue that enabled participants to build relationships, exchange experiences, identify shared challenges, and jointly develop practical actions for advancing localization in Afghanistan.

Dialogue Journey

The Regional Dialogue Cafe followed the trust-building process outlined in the Localization Cafe Facilitation Guide. Rather than focusing on presentations, the event was structured around progressive dialogue that enabled participants to build relationships, exchange experiences, identify shared challenges, and jointly develop practical actions for advancing localization in Afghanistan.

The dialogue evolved through five interconnected stages:

1. Opening the Dialogue

Participants were welcomed to the Cafe and introduced to the objectives, guiding principles, and dialogue norms. Ground rules promoting respect, equal participation, confidentiality, and constructive discussion were jointly agreed. Participants introduced themselves, shared their organizational roles, and expressed their expectations for the dialogue.

2. Building Trust and Shared Understanding

Participants reflected on their experiences of working with communities and discussed how localization has influenced their organizations. These conversations helped reduce hierarchy among participants, encouraged mutual understanding, and created an atmosphere of trust that enabled open discussion throughout the Cafe.

3. Core Dialogue

Guided by open-ended questions, participants explored the barriers preventing effective localization, discussed practical approaches to strengthen local leadership, and identified priority actions for improving coordination, funding access, and community participation.

4. Reflection on Roles and Responsibilities

Participants reflected on the responsibilities of local NGOs, INGOs, government institutions, donors, communities, and coordination platforms in advancing localization. The discussion highlighted that achieving localization requires collective responsibility rather than action by any single stakeholder.

5. Action Planning

The dialogue concluded with participants agreeing on priority actions and recommendations that can strengthen localization efforts over the coming two years.

Dialogue Questions

The discussions throughout the Cafe were guided by a series of open-ended questions designed to stimulate reflection rather than presentations.

Participants discussed:

- What are the main barriers preventing effective localization in the Eastern Region?
- How can local leadership and decision-making be strengthened?
- What changes are required to improve direct and flexible funding for local organizations?
- What practical actions can stakeholders take over the next one to two years to advance localization?

These questions encouraged participants to move beyond identifying challenges and to collectively propose realistic solutions and shared responsibilities.

Reflection on Power and Partnerships

Participants reflected on how power is distributed within the humanitarian system and how this affects local organizations.

Several participants observed that while Afghan organizations often have the strongest understanding of community needs and are the first responders during crises, they remain underrepresented in strategic decision-making and continue to face limited access to direct funding.

The dialogue highlighted that localization requires not only transferring resources but also transferring trust, leadership, and decision-making authority to local actors.

1. Opening Session

The event commenced with welcoming remarks from the organizer, who highlighted the purpose of the Regional Dialogue Cafe as a platform for stakeholders to discuss localization, share experiences, identify challenges and opportunities, and explore practical ways to strengthen locally led humanitarian and development action. Participants were encouraged to actively contribute to the discussions. The session officially began with the recitation of verses from the Holy Quran, participant introductions, stationery distribution, and a pre-test assessment.

During the opening remarks, Dr. Afghan, Deputy Director of COAR, welcomed participants and expressed appreciation for their participation. He highlighted localization as both a national discussion and a national necessity. He shared COARs experiences and achievements in promoting localization and emphasized that localization should move beyond rhetoric and become a practical reality.

Dr. Afghan noted that Afghanistan continues to face significant challenges, particularly in the education and humanitarian sectors, and stressed the importance of collaboration among local organizations, international partners, government institutions, and communities to identify solutions. He further emphasized that localization is about strengthening local capacities, expertise, leadership, and ownership, and that all stakeholders have a responsibility to support this process.

He concluded by thanking organizations that have collaborated with COAR on localization initiatives and encouraged all institutions to work together and advocate with one voice for advancing localization in Afghanistan.

2. Participants Expectations from Dialogue Cafe

At the beginning of the Dialogue Cafe, participants shared their expectations, including:

- Gaining a better understanding of localization procedures and concepts.
- Sharing experiences and perspectives on localization.
- Identifying ways to create positive change through localization.
- Learning how to engage donors and secure funding opportunities.
- Exploring mechanisms for increasing resources and capacities.
- Promoting local talent and meaningful participation in development programs.
- Identifying solutions to local challenges.
- Understanding barriers to localization in Afghanistan and exploring practical solutions.

3. COAR Presentation on Localization: Key Messages and Outcomes

COAR's Program Director, Mr. Rahmanwali Totakhail, delivered a presentation providing an overview of the global localization agenda, the evolution of localization within the humanitarian system, and the role of the Afghanistan Localization Lab (ALL) in advancing locally led humanitarian action in Afghanistan.

The presentation briefly highlighted major global humanitarian responses that shaped the localization discourse and emphasized the commitments made under the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain to increase the leadership, participation, and direct funding of local and national actors.

Particular attention was given to the Afghanistan Localization Lab (ALL), its strategic objectives, and progress achieved to date in promoting movement building, strengthening partnerships, facilitating local solutions, and enhancing learning and knowledge sharing.

Key Discussion Outcomes and Reflections

Following the presentation, participants acknowledged that although significant progress has been made in promoting localization in Afghanistan, substantial challenges remain in translating global commitments into practical changes at the country level. Participants emphasized the need for:

- Increasing direct and flexible funding opportunities for local and national organizations.
- Strengthening the leadership and decision-making role of Afghan civil society organizations within humanitarian coordination structures.
- Enhancing collaboration and trust between local and international actors.
- Investing in the institutional and technical capacities of local organizations to enable them to effectively lead humanitarian and development responses.
- Expanding awareness and understanding of localization principles among stakeholders at provincial and community levels.

Participants also recognized the Afghanistan Localization Lab as an important platform for advancing dialogue, collective action, and knowledge sharing among humanitarian stakeholders.

4. ACBAR Presentation: Key Messages and Outcomes

The ACBAR Localization Coordinator presented an overview of the role and achievements of the Localization Technical Working Group (LTWG) in supporting the implementation of localization commitments in Afghanistan. The presentation highlighted the group's ongoing efforts to strengthen coordination, advocacy, partnership building, and engagement of local actors in humanitarian decision-making processes.

The presentation also outlined the LTWG's strategic priorities for 2026, including increasing direct funding for local organizations, strengthening partnerships, enhancing technical capacities, and promoting policy dialogue on localization.

Key Discussion Outcomes and Reflections

Participants appreciated ACBAR's efforts in facilitating coordination and advocacy on localization and acknowledged the important role of the LTWG in bringing together diverse humanitarian stakeholders.

The discussion generated several important reflections and consensus points:

- There is a continued need to advocate for more equitable and transparent partnerships between international and national organizations.
- Local organizations should be more meaningfully represented in humanitarian coordination mechanisms and strategic decision-making forums.
- Capacity strengthening initiatives should move beyond short-term trainings and focus on long-term institutional development and sustainability of local organizations.
- Donors and international actors should simplify compliance requirements and increase access to direct funding opportunities for local organizations.
- Continued dialogue and collective advocacy are essential to ensure that localization commitments are translated into concrete actions and measurable progress.

Participants agreed that stronger collaboration among national NGOs, donors, humanitarian coordination bodies, and international partners will be critical for advancing the localization agenda in Afghanistan.

5. Save the Children International (SCI) Presentation

Save the Children presented its localization journey and commitment to strengthening local leadership. The organization has actively promoted localization since 2018 with the following objectives:

- Building the capacity of local staff and organizations.
- Transferring program leadership and responsibilities to local actors.
- Supporting locally driven solutions.
- Mobilizing financial resources for local initiatives.
- Strengthening monitoring, transparency, and accountability systems.

Save the Children's Vision for Localization:

The organization's localization vision focuses on:

- Direct Service Delivery
- Advocacy
- Technical Assistance
- Research and Innovation
- Capacity Development Initiatives

Key localization activities include strengthening local institutional capacity, transferring leadership responsibilities, supporting resource mobilization, and ensuring accountability mechanisms are effectively implemented.

6. Dialogue Cafe Approach: Group Work and Open Discussion

Group Work:

Participants were divided into groups to identify challenges affecting localization in the Eastern Region and propose practical solutions.

The groups recommended:

- Providing local organizations with greater opportunities, authority, and participation in project design.
- Strengthening local leadership and decision-making roles.
- Improving coordination and continuous engagement among stakeholders.
- Investing in staff capacity building within local organizations.
- Conducting regular training programs and workshops.
- Enhancing coordination between national and international organizations.
- Conducting joint monitoring visits.
- Sharing lessons learned and best practices among organizations.
- Increasing community participation in program planning and implementation.
- Establishing community-based mechanisms for solving local challenges.
- Facilitating donor engagement opportunities for local organizations.
- Recruiting qualified professional staff within local NGOs.

Open Discussion:

During the open discussion session, participants highlighted several important issues:

- Greater attention should be given to remote and underserved areas where humanitarian needs are often higher.
- Project proposals should be based on community consultations and needs assessments.
- Localization has received insufficient attention in the past and should become a priority moving forward.
- Communities should play an active role in project implementation.
- International organizations should work closely with local organizations and government institutions while gradually transferring authority and leadership.
- Local organizations should become more independent in proposal development and project management.
- Sector coordination meetings should guide geographical targeting and project planning.
- Government institutions, particularly the Ministry of Economy and relevant sector authorities, should support coordination and facilitate partnership agreements.

Participation and Inclusion

The Dialogue Cafe aimed to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, regardless of organizational affiliation or position. Participants from national NGOs, government institutions, and community-based organizations were provided equal opportunities to share their experiences, perspectives, and recommendations during presentations, group discussions, and open dialogue sessions. The facilitators encouraged active engagement from all participants, which contributed to a rich and constructive exchange of ideas on localization.

However, despite the projects commitment to promoting inclusive localization and the participation of Women-Led Organizations (WLOs), female representatives were unable to participate in the Dialogue Cafe due to restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities on women participation in such gatherings. This represented a significant gap in the dialogue, as the perspectives and experiences of women-led organizations and female humanitarian actors could not be adequately reflected in the discussions.

Despite these limitations, participants repeatedly emphasized that meaningful localization cannot be achieved without the voices and leadership of women and Women-Led Organizations (WLOs). Participants recommended exploring alternative consultation modalities, including separate dialogue sessions, remote consultations, partner-facilitated engagement, and structured feedback mechanisms, to ensure that women perspectives continue to inform localization policy and practice despite existing contextual constraints.

Participants Voices

During the Dialogue Cafe, participants shared valuable reflections and perspectives on localization:

"Localization is not only about transferring funds; it is about transferring trust, leadership, and decision-making power to local actors." Representative of a National NGO

"Local organizations are the first responders during emergencies. Strengthening their capacities and increasing direct funding opportunities will make humanitarian responses more effective and sustainable." Government Representative

"Meaningful community participation should be at the center of all humanitarian and development interventions. Communities know their needs better than anyone else." Community-Based Organization Representative

"International organizations should gradually transfer responsibilities and leadership roles to Afghan organizations while maintaining technical support and partnership." Participant from an International NGO

"The Regional Dialogue Cafe provided an excellent opportunity for different stakeholders to come together, exchange experiences, and collectively identify solutions for advancing localization in Afghanistan." Participant from a National NGO

"Regular dialogue among NGOs, donors, government institutions, and communities is essential to building trust and strengthening locally led responses." Civil Society Representative

Strengthening Trust and Mutual Understanding

The Regional Dialogue Cafe served as an important platform for strengthening trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding among national NGOs, international NGOs, government institutions, and community representatives. Through open discussions, group work, and experience-sharing sessions, participants gained a better understanding of each other roles, challenges, and expectations. The dialogue fostered more constructive relationships, encouraged transparent communication, and helped bridge gaps between stakeholders, thereby laying the foundation for stronger partnerships and more coordinated, locally led humanitarian and development responses in the Eastern Region.

7. Key Messages and Collective Outcomes from the Dialogue Sessions

Presentations delivered by COAR, ACBAR, and Save the Children International provided participants with an overview of the global and national localization agenda, existing coordination mechanisms, and practical experiences in advancing locally led humanitarian action in Afghanistan. The presentations highlighted international commitments under the Grand Bargain, the role of the Afghanistan Localization Lab (ALL), the work of the Localization Technical Working Group (LTWG), and organizational efforts to strengthen local leadership, capacity, and accountability. These sessions served as a basis for deeper reflection and discussion among participants on the current status of localization in Afghanistan.

Key Collective Outcomes and Consensus Points:

Throughout the Dialogue Cafe, participants reached consensus on several critical issues affecting the localization agenda:

Increased Local Leadership and Decision-Making

Participants emphasized that localization should go beyond rhetoric and translate into practical changes whereby Afghan organizations assume greater leadership, decision-making authority, and ownership of humanitarian and development interventions.

Direct and Flexible Funding for Local Organizations

A major concern raised during the discussions was the limited access of national organizations to direct donor funding. Participants strongly recommended increasing direct and flexible funding opportunities and simplifying donor compliance requirements to enable local organizations to effectively lead responses.

Equitable Partnerships Between National and International Actors

Participants stressed the importance of establishing more transparent, equitable, and trust-based partnerships between national and international organizations. International actors were encouraged to gradually transfer responsibilities, leadership roles, and resources while maintaining technical support and mentorship.

Long-Term Institutional Capacity Strengthening

Participants agreed that short-term training initiatives alone are insufficient. Instead, long-term institutional strengthening, mentoring, organizational development, and investment in systems and human resources are required to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of local organizations.

Community-Centered and Locally Driven Responses

The Dialogue reaffirmed that communities should remain at the center of all humanitarian and development interventions. Participants highlighted the importance of participatory needs assessments, community consultations, and the establishment of community-based mechanisms to ensure interventions respond to local priorities and realities.

Strengthened Coordination and Collective Advocacy

Participants recognized the need for stronger coordination among NGOs, INGOs, government institutions, donors, and communities. Regular dialogue, joint monitoring, information sharing, and collective advocacy were identified as essential mechanisms for advancing the localization agenda and avoiding duplication of efforts.

Stakeholder Responsibilities Identified

Participants recognized that advancing localization requires shared responsibility among all stakeholders.

The Dialogue identified the following responsibilities:

Local Organizations:

- Lead community engagement and represent local priorities.
- Strengthen accountability to affected communities.
- Continue investing in institutional development.

International NGOs:

- Promote equitable partnerships.
- Increase opportunities for local leadership.
- Support organizational strengthening while gradually transferring responsibilities.

Government Institutions:

- Facilitate coordination.
- Strengthen enabling policies.
- Support locally led development initiatives.

Communities:

- Identify priorities.
- Participate in planning, implementation, monitoring, and accountability processes.

8. Participant Reflections and Emerging Priorities

Participants reflected that although significant progress has been made in promoting localization in Afghanistan, important challenges continue to hinder its effective implementation. These include limited direct funding to local actors, unequal partnerships, inadequate institutional capacities, insufficient representation of local actors in decision-making forums, and weak coordination mechanisms.

Participants identified the following emerging priorities for the next two years:

- Development and implementation of a national localization policy.

- Increased transfer of responsibilities and leadership from international organizations to local organizations.
- Enhanced community participation in project planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- Expansion of donor engagement opportunities for local organizations.
- Establishment of stronger accountability and feedback mechanisms.
- Strengthening joint monitoring, learning, and evidence generation systems.
- Institutional capacity development initiatives aimed at increasing donor confidence in local organizations.

Additional Dialogue Outcomes

The Dialogue Cafe resulted in several immediate outcomes beyond increased understanding of localization:

- Participants established stronger working relationships across organizations.
- National and international actors gained better understanding of each other operational constraints and expectations.
- Participants jointly identified practical actions that can realistically be implemented over the next two years.
- Greater appreciation emerged for community-led planning and participatory decision-making.
- Stakeholders expressed willingness to continue regional dialogue and collective advocacy through existing coordination mechanisms.

Next Steps

Participants agreed that maintaining momentum beyond the Dialogue Cafe is essential.

The following follow-up actions were identified:

- Continue regional Dialogue Cafes on a regular basis.
- Share dialogue findings with localization coordination platforms.
- Promote joint advocacy on direct funding for local organizations.
- Encourage stronger participation of local actors in coordination forums.
- Explore context-appropriate approaches to engage women-led organizations.
- Monitor progress against the agreed priority actions over the coming two years.

9. Strategic Priorities, Responsible Actors, and Follow-up Actions (2026-2027)

Priority Area	Responsible Actors	Suggested Follow-up Actions
Development and implementation of a national localization policy	Government institutions, ACBAR, LTWG, NGOs and INGOs	Establish a technical working group, conduct consultations, draft and validate the policy, advocate for formal endorsement.
Increased transfer of responsibilities from international to local organizations	INGOs, Donors, National NGOs	Develop transition plans, increase co-leadership arrangements, progressively transfer leadership and resources.
Establishment of regular coordination mechanisms	Government institutions, ACBAR, NGOs, INGOs,	Organize quarterly coordination meetings, establish information-

	Donors	sharing platforms, develop joint action plans.
Strengthening community participation	NGOs, Government institutions, Community Leaders	Establish and strengthen community engagement platforms, ensure regular consultation.
Capacity development initiatives	NGOs, INGOs, Donors, Capacity Building Providers	Conduct organizational capacity assessments, provide targeted training and mentoring.
Providing donors with evidence-based information	NGOs, INGOs, Government institutions	Strengthen M&E systems, document results and lessons learned, share evidence with donors.
Ensuring project design is led by Afghan actors	National NGOs, Communities, INGOs, Donors	Conduct participatory needs assessments, involve communities in project design.
Establishing community councils and committees	Communities, NGOs, Government institutions	Facilitate formation/strengthening of community committees, define clear roles.
Developing balanced service-delivery plans	Government institutions, NGOs, INGOs, Donors	Use needs-based assessments, ensure equitable geographical coverage.
Strengthening joint monitoring	NGOs, INGOs, Donors	Conduct regular joint monitoring visits, share findings, develop corrective action plans.
Establishing accountability mechanisms	NGOs, INGOs, Government, Communities	Develop complaints and feedback mechanisms, ensure transparency.

The implementation of these priorities will require sustained collaboration, regular follow-up, and commitment from all stakeholders to advance the localization agenda in Afghanistan.

10. Workshop Evaluation

Participants from national NGOs, international NGOs, government institutions, and community-based organizations evaluated the Dialogue Cafe positively and acknowledged the relevance and timeliness of the discussions. Participants recognized the Dialogue Cafe as an important platform for promoting dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collective reflection on the progress, challenges, and future priorities of the localization agenda in Afghanistan.

The Dialogue Cafe witnessed active and constructive engagement from participants throughout the sessions. The presentations delivered by COAR, ACBAR, and SCI were considered informative, practical, and highly relevant, stimulating meaningful discussions and generating valuable recommendations for advancing locally led humanitarian action.

At the same time, participants noted that the absence of women-led organizations and female representatives constituted a significant gap in the dialogue. While this limitation resulted from prevailing contextual restrictions on women participation, participants emphasized that inclusive localization requires the meaningful participation and representation of women and women-led organizations. Participants recommended that future dialogue initiatives explore context-appropriate mechanisms to ensure that women voices and perspectives are effectively reflected in localization discussions and decision-making processes.

Overall, participants expressed appreciation for the initiative and underscored the importance of continuing such dialogue platforms to strengthen partnerships, enhance mutual learning, and advance the localization agenda in Afghanistan.

11. Knowledge Pre and Post Test Assessment

A pre-test and post-test assessment was conducted to measure learning outcomes.

Results indicated a substantial increase in participants understanding of localization concepts:

- Average Pre-Test Score: 20%
- Average Post-Test Score: 85%

The results demonstrate a significant improvement in participants knowledge and understanding following the workshop.

12. Key Outcomes

The Dialogue Cafe achieved the following outcomes:

- Increased awareness and understanding of localization among 39 participants.
- Strengthened networking and collaboration among local organizations, international organizations, government representatives, and community leaders.
- Improved understanding of global localization frameworks and commitments.
- Identification of key barriers and practical solutions for advancing localization in Afghanistan.
- Development of strategic recommendations and priorities for the next two years.
- Enhanced stakeholder commitment to promoting local leadership, ownership, and accountability.
- Participants established stronger working relationships across organizations.
- National and international actors gained better understanding of each other operational constraints and expectations.
- Greater appreciation emerged for community-led planning and participatory decision-making.
- Stakeholders expressed willingness to continue regional dialogue and collective advocacy through existing coordination mechanisms.

13. Challenges Faced During the Workshop

Despite the successful implementation of the Regional Dialogue Cafe, the following challenges were encountered:

Limited Female Participation:

Due to restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities, female participants were unable to attend the Regional Dialogue Cafe. This limited the diversity of perspectives and constrained efforts to ensure inclusive participation and representation during the dialogue.

Absence of UN Agencies:

Although UN agencies were formally invited and informed about the event, no representatives from UN agencies participated in the Regional Dialogue Cafe. Their absence limited opportunities for broader discussion, coordination, and engagement on localization priorities and commitments.

These challenges highlight the importance of continued advocacy for inclusive participation and stronger engagement of all humanitarian and development stakeholders in future localization dialogues.

14. Lessons Learned

The Dialogue Cafe demonstrated that informal, trust-based dialogue creates stronger participation than traditional workshop formats.

Participants appreciated opportunities for honest discussion across organizational boundaries.

Future Dialogue Cafes would benefit from:

- Longer discussion sessions.
- Greater participation of donors and UN agencies.
- Context-appropriate participation mechanisms for women-led organizations.
- Follow-up meetings to monitor implementation of agreed actions.

15. Conclusion

The two-day Regional Dialogue Cafe in Nangarhar successfully brought together a diverse range of humanitarian and development stakeholders, including national and international NGOs, government representatives, and community actors, to engage in meaningful dialogue on the localization agenda in Afghanistan. The event provided an important platform for sharing experiences, strengthening partnerships, and collectively reflecting on the opportunities and challenges associated with advancing locally led humanitarian and development action in the Eastern Region.

The Dialogue Cafe contributed significantly to enhancing participants understanding of localization concepts, global commitments, and practical approaches for strengthening local leadership, ownership, and decision-making. Through presentations, group discussions, and open dialogue sessions, participants identified key barriers to localization and developed practical recommendations and strategic priorities for the coming years. The substantial improvement in participants knowledge, as reflected in the pre- and post-test results, further demonstrates the effectiveness of the initiative in promoting learning and awareness.

Participants reaffirmed that meaningful localization requires increased direct funding to local actors, stronger and more equitable partnerships, enhanced institutional capacities of local organizations, and greater participation of communities in humanitarian and development processes. The Dialogue also underscored the importance of sustained coordination, trust-building, and collective advocacy among all stakeholders to ensure that localization commitments are translated into practical and measurable actions.

At the same time, the Dialogue Cafe highlighted important gaps and challenges, particularly the absence of women-led organizations and female representatives due to prevailing contextual restrictions, as well as the non-participation of UN agencies. Participants emphasized that future localization efforts should continue advocating for inclusive participation and explore context-appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the voices of women and other underrepresented groups are meaningfully reflected in localization discussions and decision-making processes.

The Dialogue Cafe demonstrated that localization is fundamentally a process of strengthening trust, shifting leadership, and building equitable partnerships. While challenges remain, particularly regarding women participation, funding access, and shared decision-making, participants agreed that continued dialogue,

collective advocacy, and sustained collaboration are essential to advancing a more inclusive and locally led humanitarian system in Afghanistan.







