

LOCALISATION MATURITY MODEL

FOR HUMANITARIAN AND
DEVELOPMENT ACTORS



HUMANITARIAN
IMPACT INSTITUTE
Inclusive Learning



Purpose

This Localisation Maturity Model (LMM) has been developed based on the Humanitarian Impact Institute's (HII's) extensive work with more than a dozen INGO localisation and partner-led programs. It is designed to provide a baseline for actors pursuing localisation and to pinpoint the areas where it can make progress.

The LMM is a tool for both headquarters (Boards, CEOs, executive teams) and program/regional/country teams and can be used by any actor at any level.

Remember that localisation is a journey. The LMM maps out what the internal journey looks like.

Assessments, Briefings and Feedback

© Humanitarian Impact Institute, reference:

Nathaniel Logan & Siobhan Foran, Humanitarian Impact Institute, *Localisation Maturity Model for Humanitarian and Development Actors*, Dublin, 2025

Facilitated LMM assessments or briefings on the LMM can be requested by email: info@hi-institute.org

HII would value your feedback and thoughts on the LMM. You can provide this in your preferred language at <https://hi-institute.org/feedback>



Introduction: The Localisation Maturity Model

The Localisation Maturity Model (LMM) for humanitarian and development actors identifies 10 key areas in which INGOs and UN agencies need to make progress in order to achieve an equitable approach to programming with local/national (L/N) partners.

The LMM provides a scale on which an INGO or UN agency can assess its progress on localisation. The LMM can be a self-assessment or the Humanitarian Impact Institute (HII) can conduct a confidential facilitated assessment of your organisation or program.

Localisation Maturity Model Baseline



Localisation
Ambition



Leadership &
Cultural Orientation



Promoting Local
Leadership



Capacity Building



Equitable Decision
Making



INGO Systems &
Processes



Risk and
Compliance



Equitable Funding



Partner Selection



Learning &
Accountability

Baseline and Sector Average

HII can provide you with the anonymised sector average ratings on request. In the example shown to the left, the teal arrow represents the sector average and the purple represents your own score. This representation enables your organisation to confidentially and anonymously contextualise its progress against other peer organisations.



The LMM also provides a baseline upon which localisation progress can be tracked over time, as well as providing guidance on how to achieve a higher score (i.e., more progress) in each of the 10 areas.

LMM facilitated assessments can be booked and requests for the peer average can be sent by emailing info@hi-institute.org.





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Introduction

Why Localisation?

The momentum towards localisation and partner-led programming¹ is partly premised on sustainable impact being driven by community ownership through L/N actors.² It is also based on the growing consensus that effective programs are designed and implemented by, and/or collaboratively (in the most meaningful sense) with, those who best understand the needs and context – the affected communities and those from it.

Localisation is essentially a shift from existing decision-making-and-power-structures to more equitable decision making, risk and resource sharing between international and L/N actors.

There is a role for international actors in most circumstances – albeit one that is humble, more equal and balances relative strengths.

Why a Maturity Scale?

Localisation is journey for most INGOs and UN agencies. Processes, people, culture, resourcing and ways of working all need to transform to achieve a meaningful shift to equitable partnerships with L/N actors. This all takes time and learning.

By providing a 0-5 scale on each of the 10 areas of progress, organisations can visualize where they are on that journey in each of the areas. Maturity also implies learning and growth – it is not static. As your organisation has more localisation experiences and makes more adaptations, the organisation should mature in those areas.

Also, progress is unlikely to be linear in each area, with some maturing faster than others. Some areas require investments (such as system changes) while others require systemic cultural change guided by informed, clear and strong leadership.

How to Conduct a Self Assessment

Self assessments can be conducted by comparing your organisation against the description of the immature and fully mature states – explanations for both of which are provided in this guide. Expertise, evidence and diverse viewpoints are needed to ensure ratings are not inflated – HII can help with this if needed. Remember the goal is to create a realistic baseline upon which future improvements can be compared.

¹ While these two concepts are different, this playbook uses them interchangeably.

² DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development: Australian Government: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, page 1. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/dfat-guidance-note-locally-led-development.pdf>



A large baobab tree stands prominently in the foreground, its thick, textured trunk and sprawling, bare branches reaching across the frame. The tree is set against a backdrop of a lush green savanna with other smaller baobab trees scattered in the distance. The sky is a clear, light blue, and a semi-transparent blue shape is overlaid on the top right corner of the image. A dark purple horizontal bar is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the text.

The Localisation Maturity Model

One: The Localisation Ambition

The Localisation Ambition is a strategic goal of an organisation that sets the agreed standard on what type of localisation will be achieved and in what ways.

Your staff need to know what your organization means by localisation and the specific goals it has set for localisation. Together this forms the Localisation Ambition. The Localisation Ambition needs to be specific so that staff know what the organisation wants to achieve and how they should go about achieving it.

1. The Localisation Ambition is...



In order to achieve best practice, the Localisation Ambition should cover:

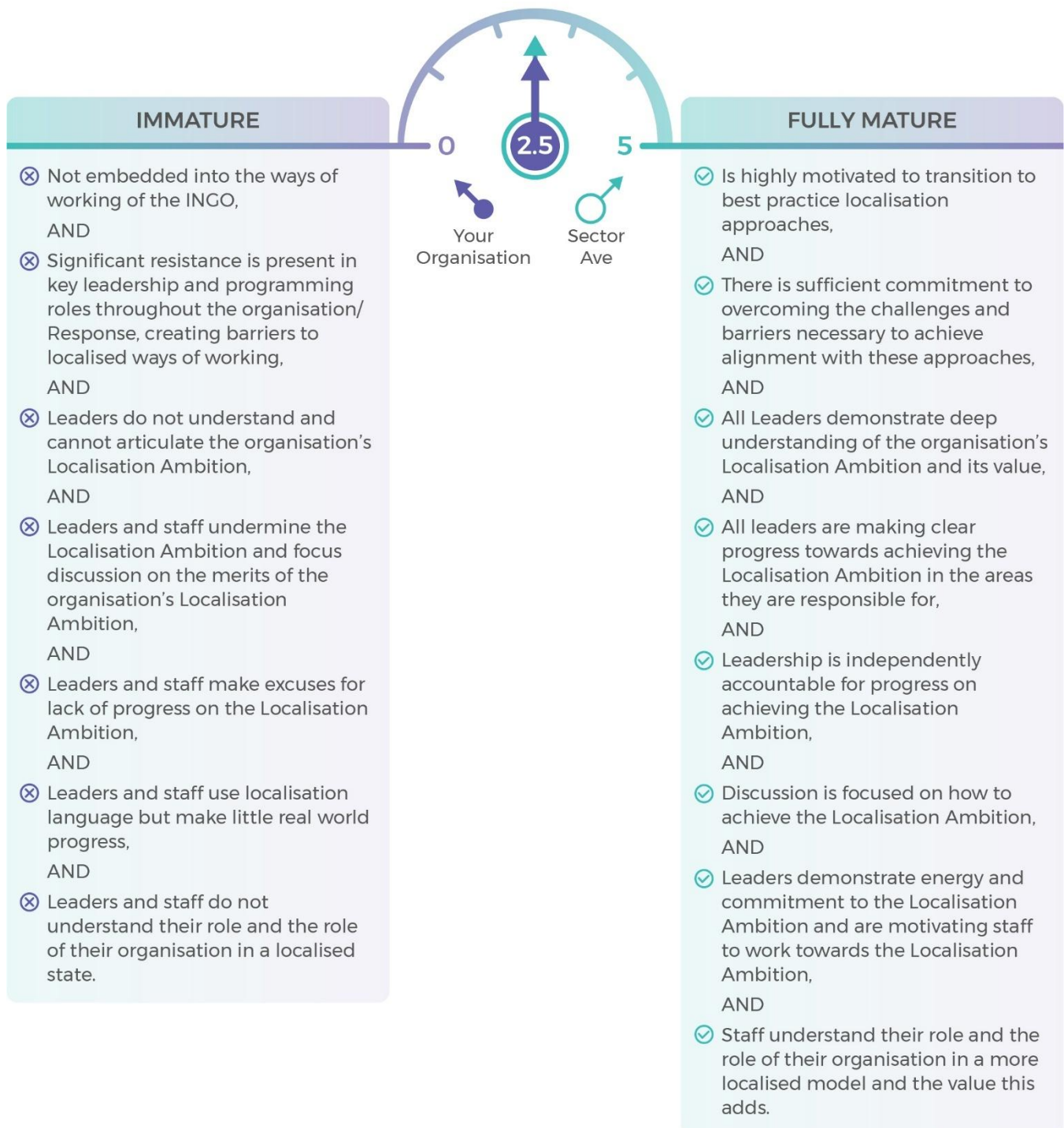
- 1) Partner selection
- 2) Decision making
- 3) Power dynamics
- 4) Risk management
- 5) Capacity exchange
- 6) Systems adaptation
- 7) Role of the INGO
- 8) Funding goal
- 9) Trust and equity
- 10) Donor change
- 11) Timeframes



Two: Leadership & Cultural Orientation

The Localisation Ambition will not be achieved without leadership focused on it, and a staff culture that understands it and is aligned to it.

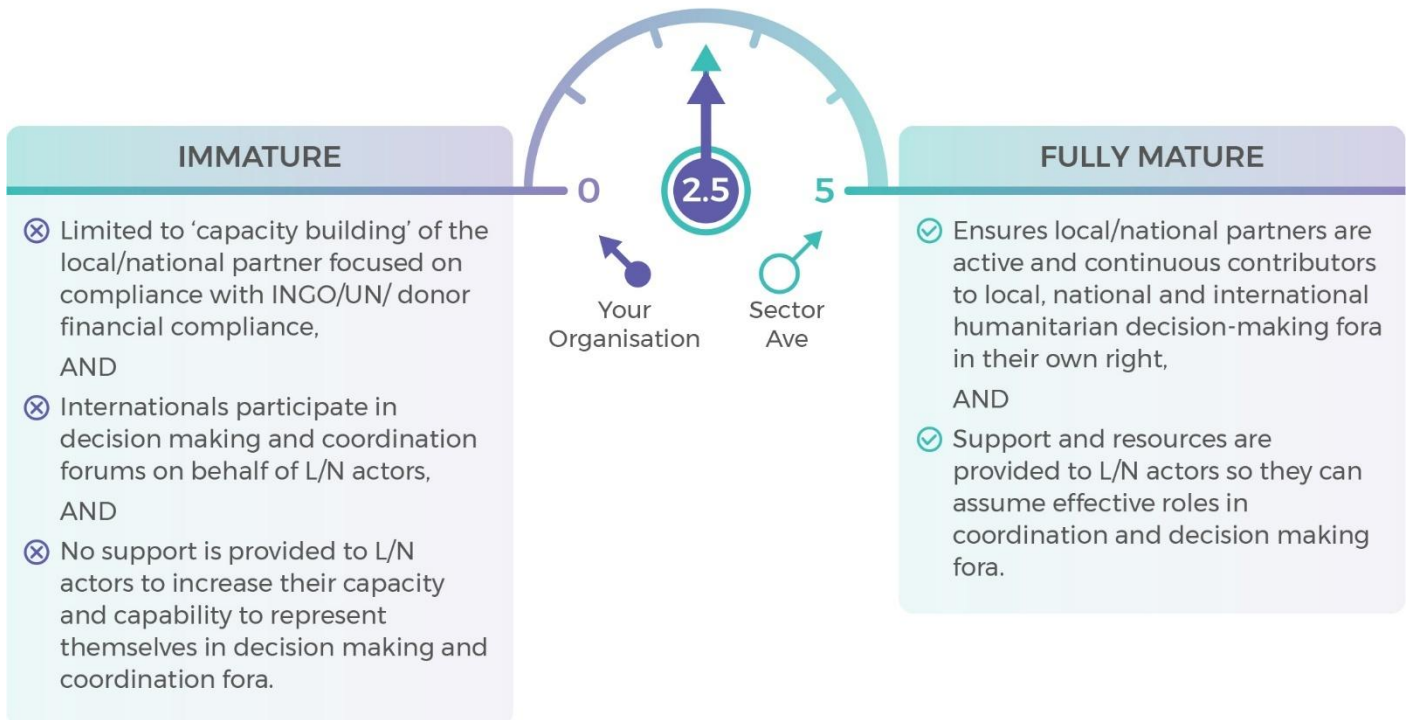
2. Leadership & Cultural Orientation is...



Three: Promotion of Local Leadership

Equity in decision making extends to coordination forums such as clusters. An INGO or UN agency in a fully mature state of localisation will be finding ways to empower and support L/N actors to participate fully in these fora, including as chairs and co-chairs.

3. Promotion of Local Leadership is...



Four: Capacity Building

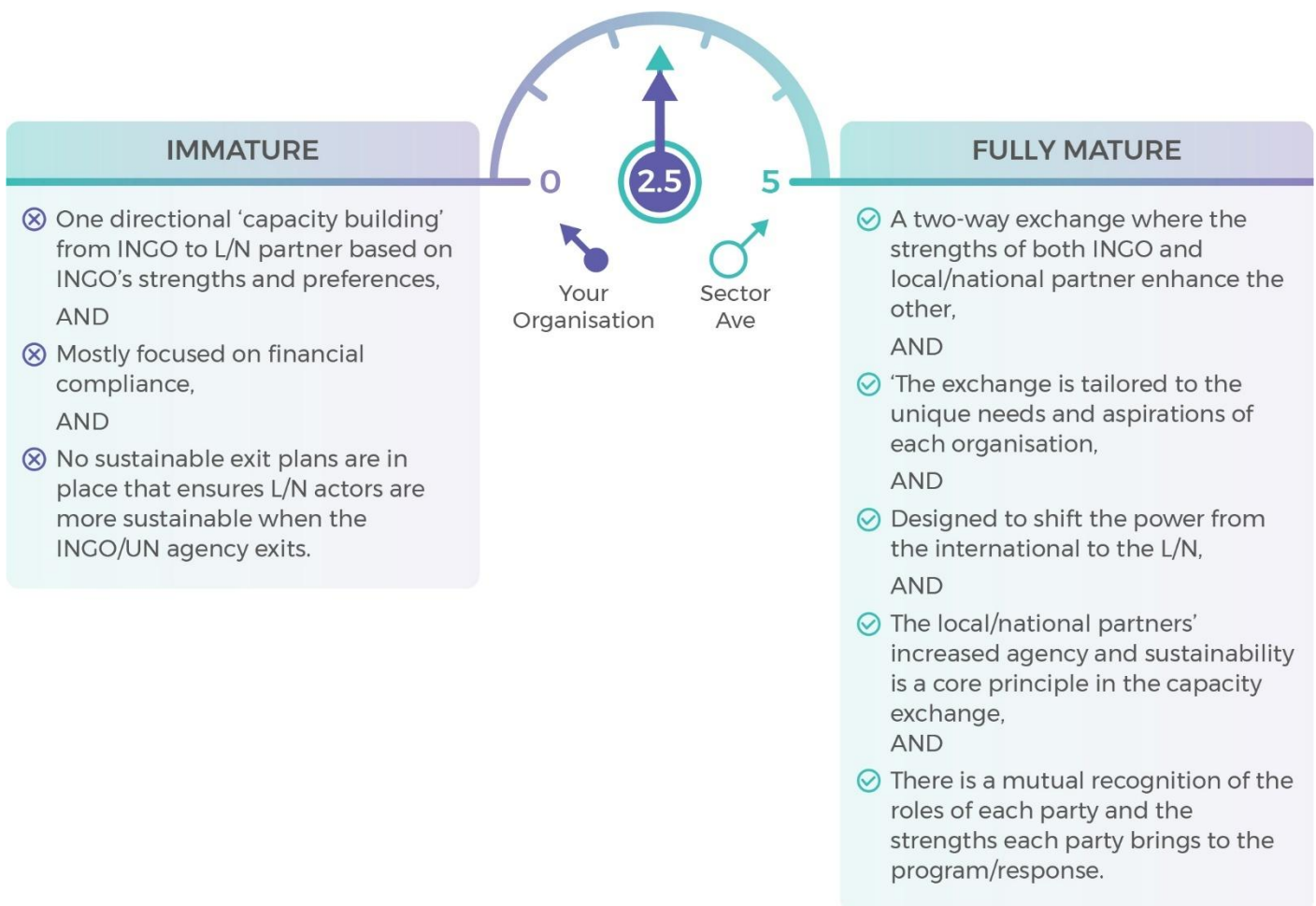
Meaningful progress on localisation recognises that INGOs and UN agencies have access to vastly more resources.

This usually means they are able to employ a wide variety of expertise that has been used internationally.

L/N actors by comparison, are leaders in understanding their context, needs and what has and has not worked in their context before, including the use of local approaches and methods.

These two types of expertise need to work in harmony to maximise the benefits to affected communities.

4. Capacity Building is...

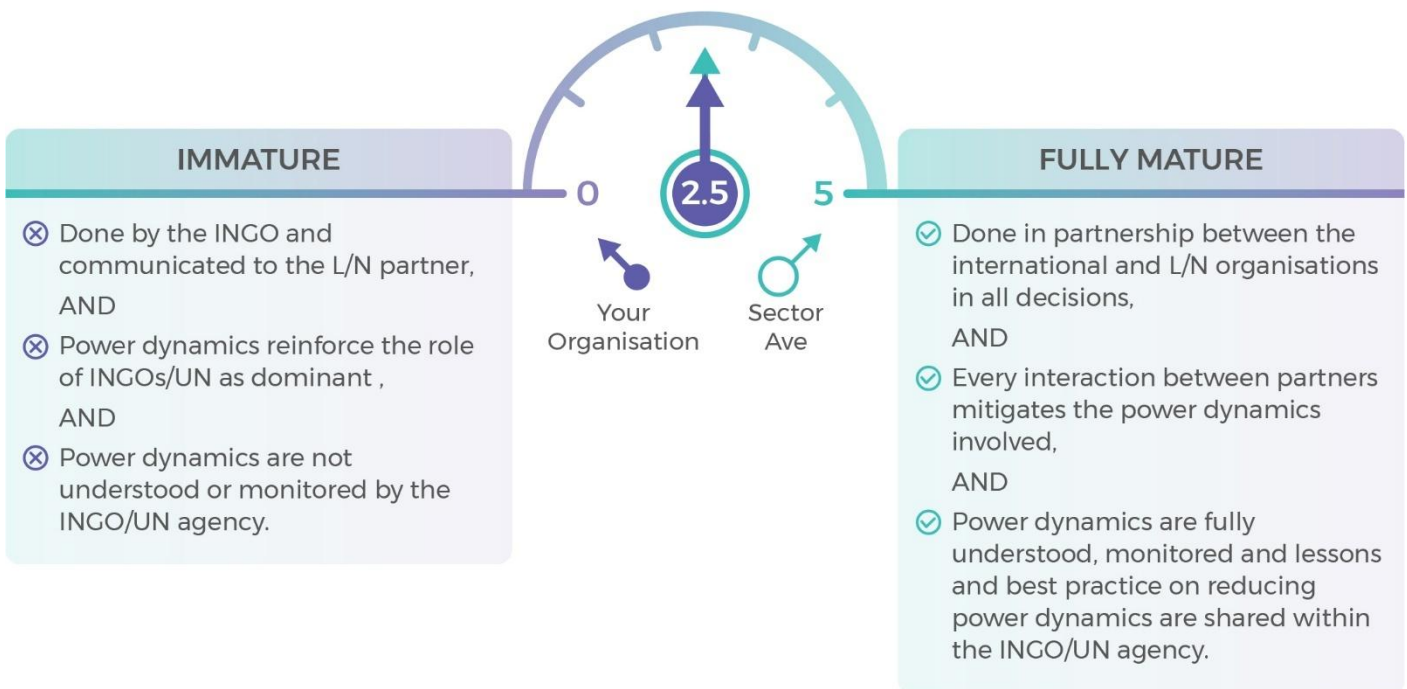


Five: Equitable Decision Making

Localised programming is ultimately about equity. Equity in power, equity in funding and equity in voice.

The level of equity between L/N actors and INGOs/UN agencies is both a key test of progress on, and necessary for, achieving localised ways of working.

5. Equitable Decision Making is...

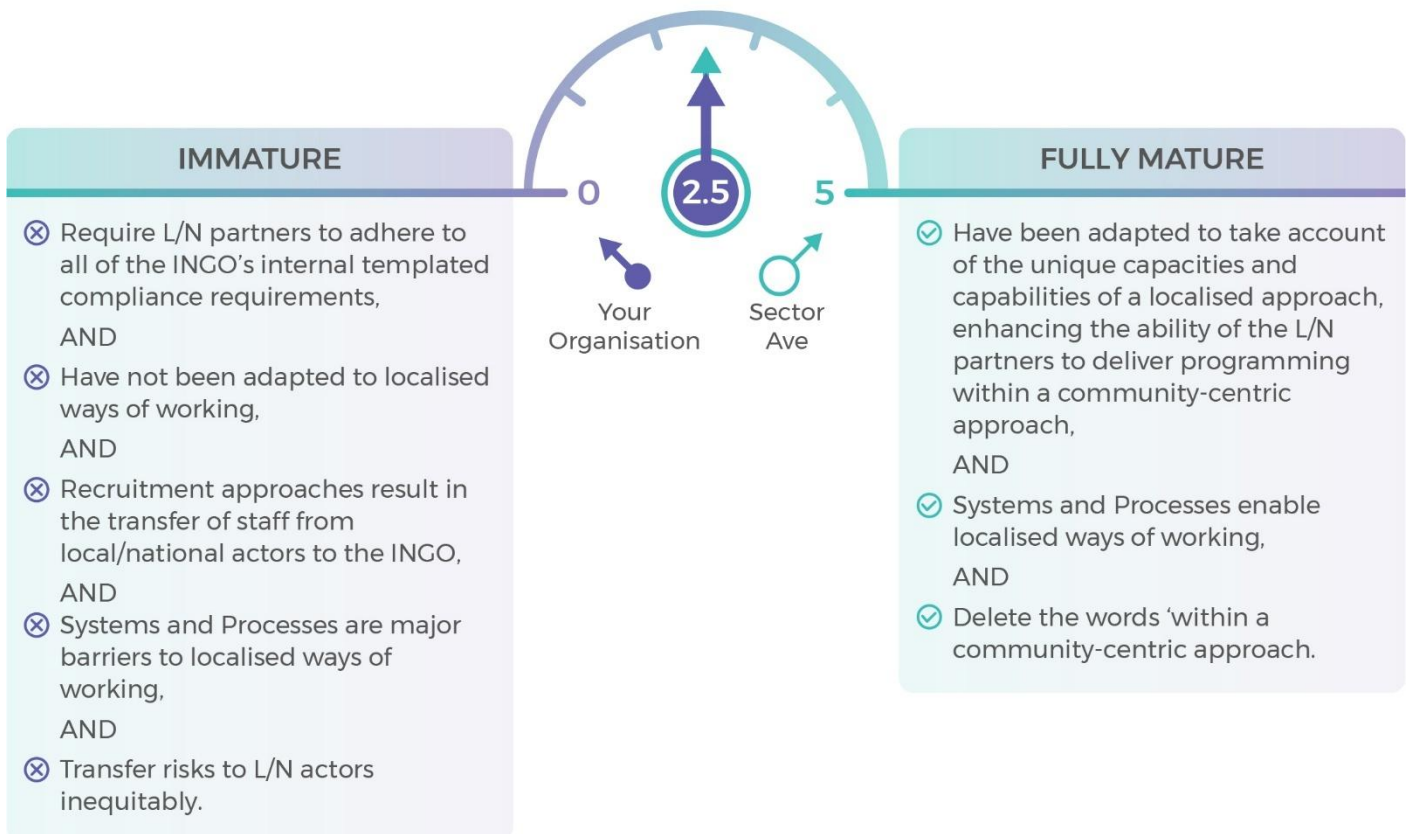


Six: INGO Systems and Processes

Systems and processes are significant factors that impede localised ways of working. They have often been designed to reduce a risk or streamline an activity. Their designs therefore rarely consider the need of enabling localised ways of working.

When scoring this area, you need to take account of all the key systems that enable or impede localised responses – everything from finance and compliance systems to monitoring and reporting.

6. INGO Systems & Processes are...



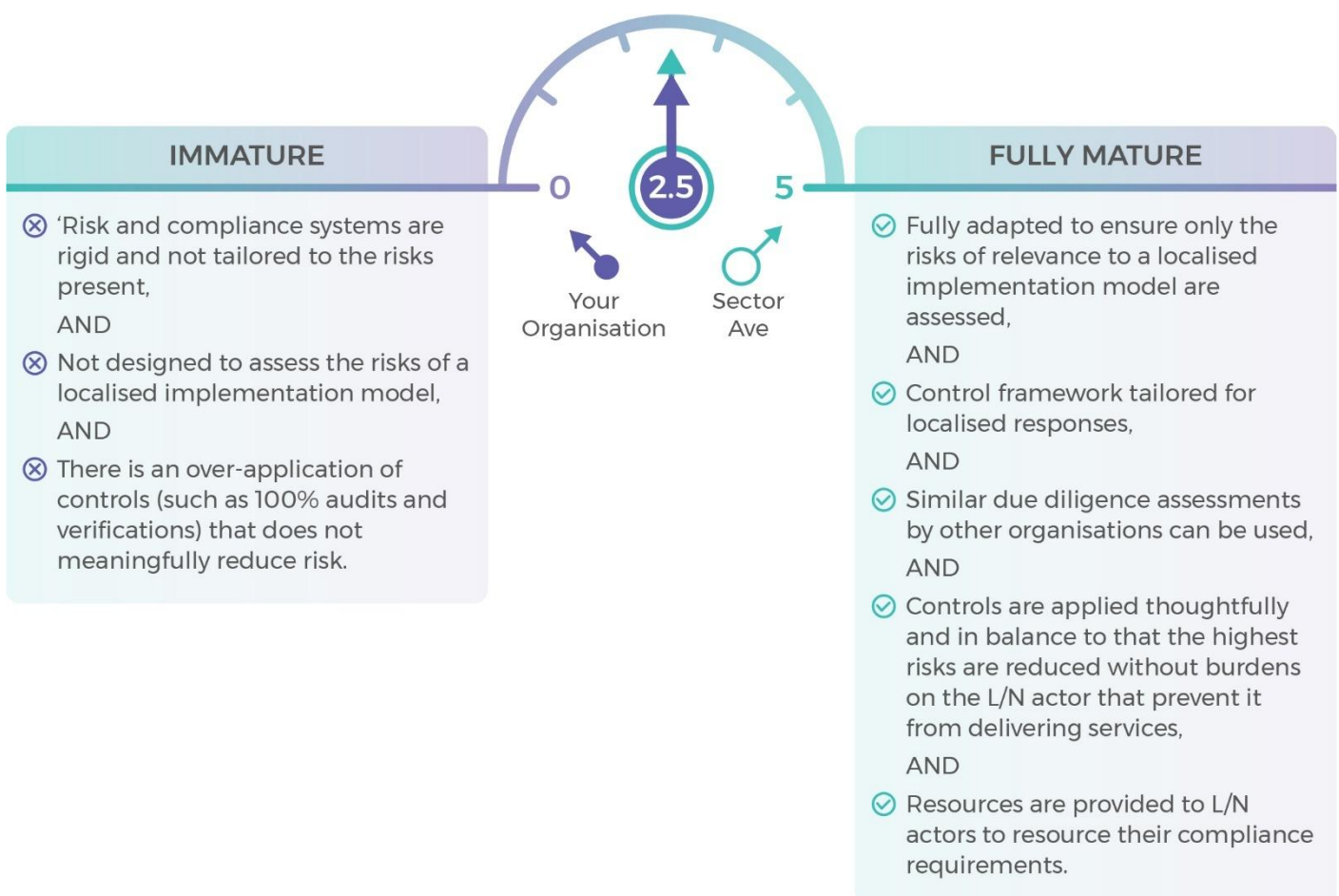
Seven: Risk and Compliance

It is important to implement controls and mitigations that to reduce risk. However, in any situation, eliminating risk is usually impossible without an incommensurate investment of time and resource.

The same is true in a localised program. A balance is therefore required to ensure that key risks (e.g., fraud or disallowed costs) are managed, without reducing the L/N actors ability to deliver services on the ground.

The goal of a localised risk and compliance framework is therefore to meaningfully reduce key risks, while preserving the ability of a L/N actor to deliver.

7. Risk and Compliance is...



Eight: Equitable Funding

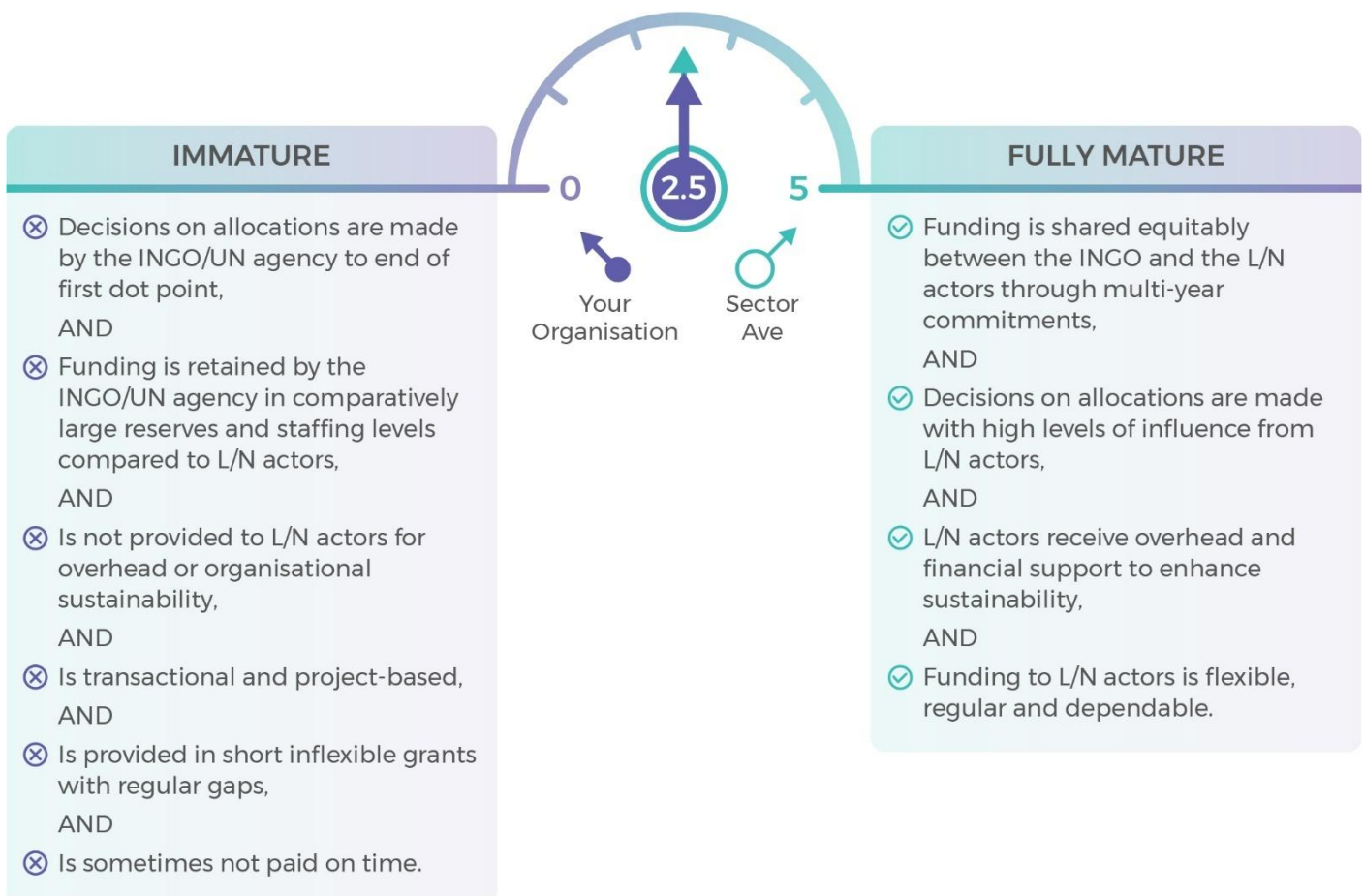
A common exploitative funding approach is not providing or sharing overhead costs to L/N actors. This reduces the sustainability of the program once the INGO/UN agency exits, while also placing unfair burdens on the L/N actors that the INGO/UN agency rarely experiences themselves.

Other inequitable funding practices include preserving large portions of the available funding in the INGO/UN agency while L/N actors who are delivering the services receive a disproportionately small amount compared to their contributions. These should be in balance.

Similarly, short term funding with regular gaps and the inability to influence how the funds are used, are also inequitable.

Equitable funding is therefore a core principle of localisation.

8. Equitable Funding is...



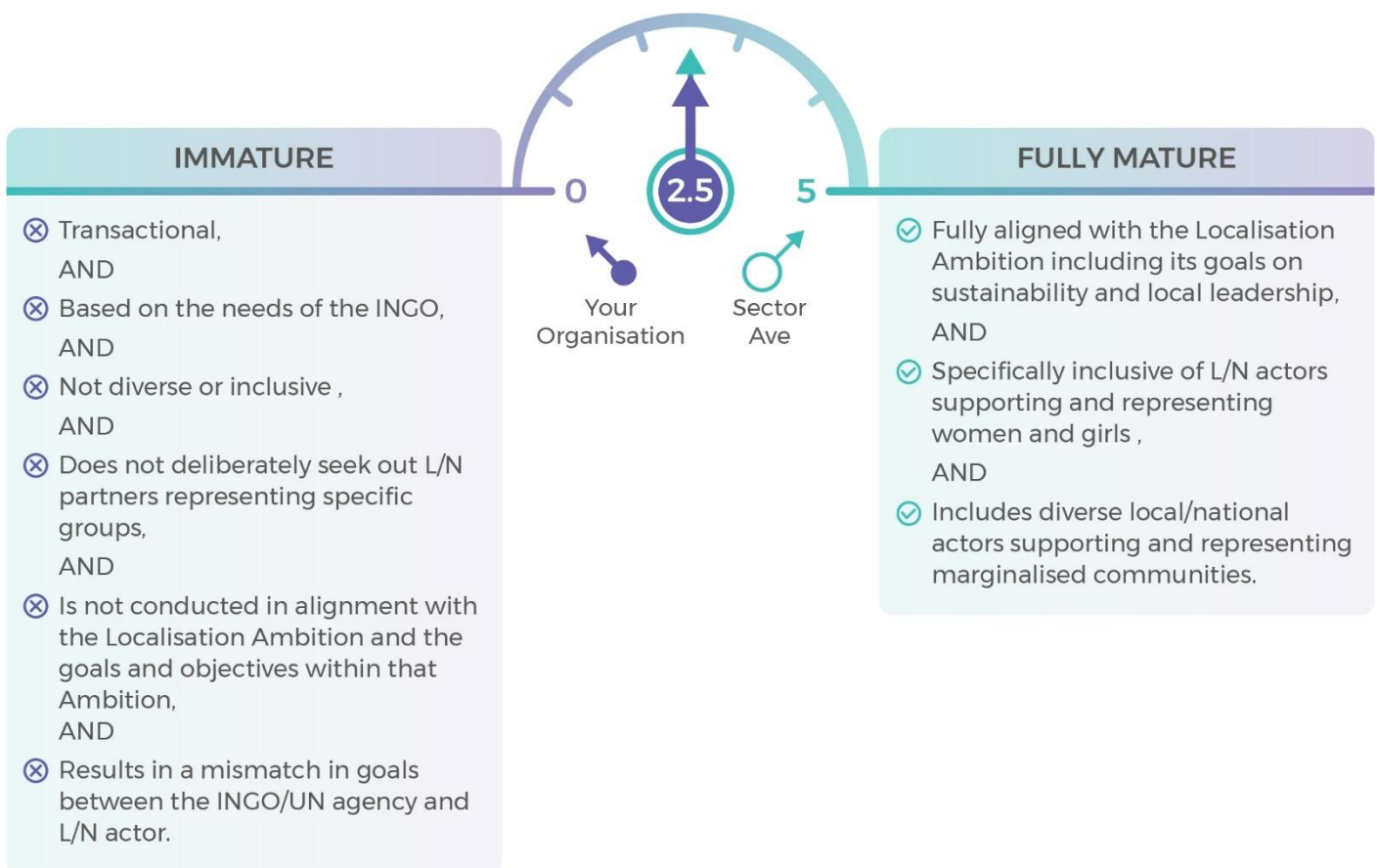
Nine: Partner Selection

Partner selection should be done mindfully and deliberately so that it aligns with the articulated Localisation Ambition of the INGO/UN agency.

Is your INGO (for example) aiming to empower women-led CBOs; or maximising quality; or supporting local/national actors into decision making fora; or wanting fast quality delivery; or something else? The Localisation Ambition should set this priority.

Likewise, partner selection is also a broader opportunity to increase agency, inclusion and representation – when taken together with other areas of localisation such as power dynamics, capacity development and supporting local leadership.

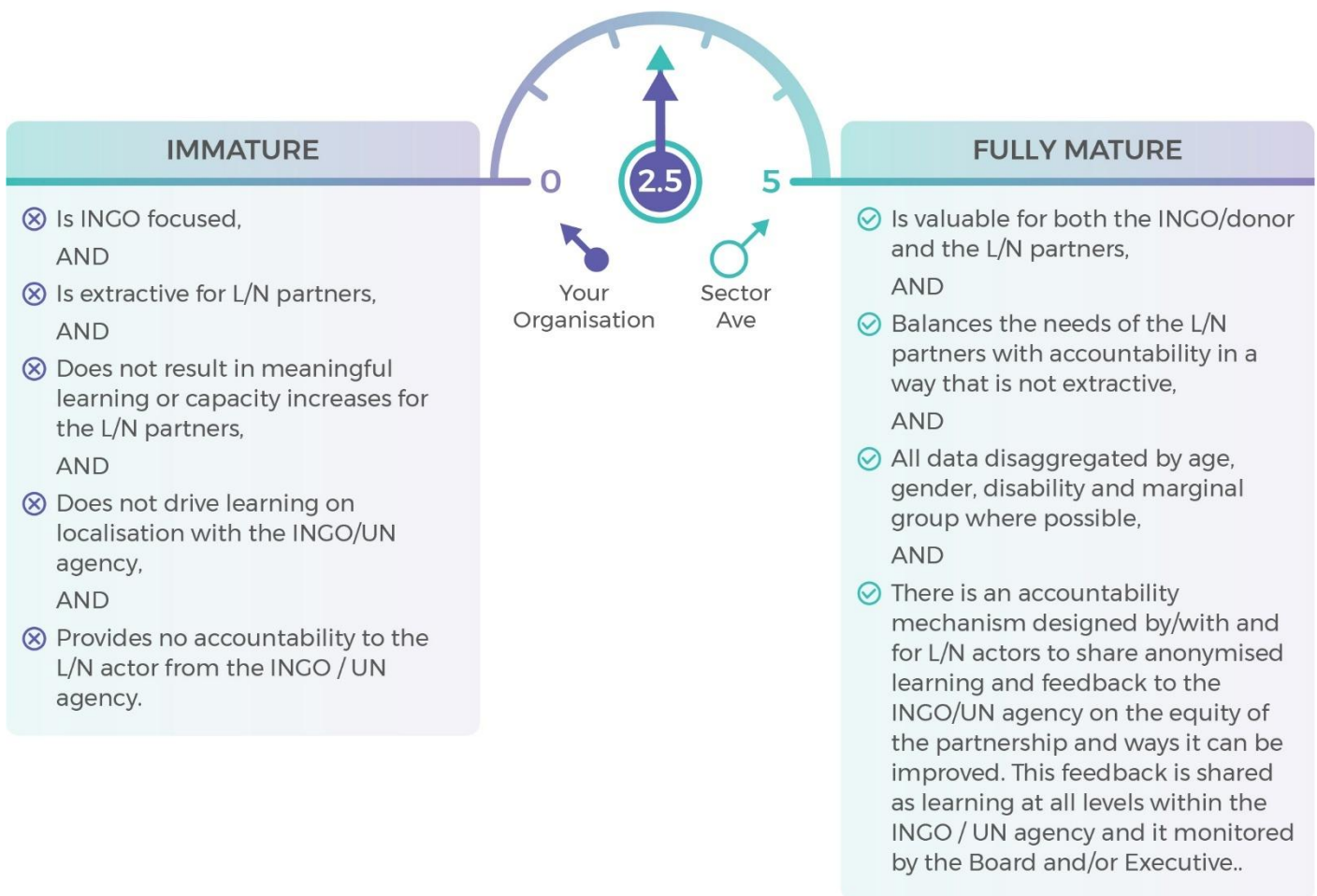
9. Partner Selection is...



Ten: Learning & Accountability

Learning and accountability in localised ways of working focuses on equitable needs between actors, agency for L/N actors and two-directional learning for both the INGO/UN agency (on how to 'do' localisation) and the L/N actors.

10. Learning & Accountability...





Further reading:

- INGO Localisation Playbook, Humanitarian Impact Institute, 2025
- Localisation, Risk and Compliance, Humanitarian Impact Institute, 2025





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