

# Unboxing Localisation - An Inclusive Dialogue Trajectory

## Session Three: Chains of Influence

13 October 2022

### Executive Summary

On 13 October, the third session of the ‘Unboxing Localisation’ trajectory took place. The goal was to share concrete examples and innovations for implementing localisation, all in the light of the concept of the ‘Chains Of Influence’; a description of how different types of organisations within the development chain can leverage local leadership. Afterwards, three different levels (donor, intermediary, in-country partner) gave examples of localisation efforts, after which further exchanges continued in break-outs. Some key take-aways:

- The Chains of Influence Framework helps you to identify opportunities to influence different layers of the sector to better enable local leadership. Look ‘up’ into your chain to advocate for the partner ‘down’ the chain.
- Innovative funding can help ownership. An example: a member-led fund in which grants are approved within 48 hours so immediate needs can be met effectively.
  - Local actors should of course be in the room when designing a program or policy, but also when funding structures and financial processes are developed.
- Donors can force change by setting specific requirements for funding (e.g. a consortium of international and in-country NGOs), or by lowering the administrative burden.
- Instead of a technocratic project approach, focus as international actors on partnerships and your in-country partner’s strengths (e.g. through a capacities self-assessment) - and subsequently how you as international partner can complement those to address needs.

### Meeting summary

#### Goals

On 13 October, the third session of the ‘Unboxing Localisation’ trajectory took place. The objectives of the session were (1) to offer a framework for understanding the institutional conditions of localisation and local leadership, (2) to identify the enabling conditions for practice change and (3) to create an environment to stimulate a multistakeholder collaboration between the various actors. The session provided concrete examples of local leadership and examined how funding and influence are running through the system of peacebuilding and the humanitarian sector.

#### The Chains of Influence

An important challenge is that the principal theories of localisation are not translated into real applications. In fact, development seems more and more aligned with national political interests. If we want to make our work more effective and needs-based, we need to critically look at how funding and power or influence flow through the development system.

To do so, Conductive Spaces for Peace (CSP) ‘set the scene’ by exploring the [Chains of Influence Framework](#): a lens to identify new ways of working in different layers of the sector to better enable local leadership.

Currently, the chains of influence - ranging from donors to beneficiaries - sustain challenges to local leadership. The approach is often top down and technocratic, also within organisations. Additionally, those that innovate within organisations are hardly enabled to implement this organisation-wide or share those lessons with the broader sector. CSP emphasises the need to

look 'up' into your chain to advocate for the partner 'down' the chain. It lists all kinds of practical tools to create space for more bottom-up influence:

- *Funding practice examples:* [The Innovative Peace Fund](#), [The NEAR Change Fund](#), multipartner trust funds (e.g. [Colombia Multi-partner Trust Fund](#)).
- *Accountability:* Local actor and peer accountability mechanisms, local actors that review each other's work, defining indicators of success: for example the Peace Building Space, the [Global Impact Framework](#).
- *Partnership practice:* Assessment tools (the [Community Lead Development Assessment tool](#)) mutual partnership assessment like the Saferworld mutual organisational capacity assessment (OCA).

### Lightning pitches with examples of localisation:

#### In-country NGO: Suleiman Abdullahi (NEAR Network)

For the NEAR Network, sustainable outcomes require investing more in the process, instead of technocratically delivering a project or result. Local actors are often not in the room when funding structures and financial processes are designed, so their access, management and prioritisation is often not truly needs-based. Moreover, there is too little investment in the relationships, while this is crucial as the in-country partners are the ones that stay after the international actors move on. Such thinking has not only made interventions unsustainable, it also eroded communities' resilience by making them dependent on NGOs' services with flawed exit strategies and without local leadership.

NEAR supports innovative, locally led funding mechanisms to overcome these barriers and pitfalls, for example in Yemen and Colombia. It also manages '[The Change Fund](#)', a NEAR member-led fund in which grants are approved within 48 hours so immediate needs can be met effectively.

#### International NGO: Liliane Bitong Ambassa (Save the Children Denmark)

Too often, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) still see localisation as an add-on. Save the Children Denmark however advocates that for, in their case, sustainable support of children's rights, localisation is the only way.

Save the Children mapped out a long-term vision (in the next 10-20 year) for supporting local and national actors and advocating for their direct access to resources. Emphasis is given on resource support and scaling up delivery. They critically look at their own added value and how to be more demand driven, letting local organisations determine the direction that they should take. A major challenge is the operationalisation through who is interacting on a daily basis with local actors. Moreover, access and leadership of local organisations is one part, but a difficult underlying question to still be answered is whether organisations are really prepared to give up influence.

An example is Save the Children's 'Innovation Fund', which provides much more flexibility and fluidity in Somalia and the Community Philanthropy in Ghana. Save the Children also manages a [localisation collection](#); a centralised place for research and evidence on localisation.

#### Donor: Merel Schalkwijk (Dutch MFA - Dutch Civic Space Fund)

More ownership for local organisations is one of the core elements of the Dutch policy framework Strengthening Civil Society. One of the instruments to foster local ownership is the strategic partnerships with civil society organisations. The MFA partners with consortiums consisting of both northern- and southern-led civil society organisations, and consider decision-making

processes on all steps, visions, programme goals and funding as a joint responsibility. Increasingly, Southern partners take lead positions within these consortiums.

Moreover, the [Dutch Civic Space Fund \(CSF\)](#) offers a way for Dutch embassies to directly support local civil society. The fund aims to support lobby & advocacy efforts and capacity building of local CSO's in selected OECD-DAC countries. The direct support strengthens local ownership and Southern leadership and strengthens mutual learning and it facilitates the network and knowledge of Embassies.

Another instrument funded by the MFA which enhances localization is [VOICE](#). This is a grant-making instrument for grass-root groups and organizations that represent or support specific rightsholder groups that have difficulty getting funding. As this grant is requested through an intermediary, the administrative workload (funding, reporting) requested from the Ministry's side can be kept at a minimum.

The Dutch MFA also puts localization on the agenda internationally, as more impact is created if we further localization collectively. For example, the Dutch MFA contributed, as co-chair and member of the OECD/DAC Community of Practice on Civil Society, to the adoption of the [the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance](#). Local leadership is a key priority within this recommendation, to which all DAC members have committed themselves. This offers an opportunity to step up our game as donor community.

### **Discussion & break-outs**

In the discussion a few topics and recommendations came up:

- Too often, national level 'donor darlings' are the winners of localisation.
- It's a challenge to support without overstepping (i.e. eroding local dynamics) or drowning them in your paperwork. Ways of identifying (and defining) legitimate local actors is important. Umbrella organisations or funds can play a useful role here for economies of scale.
- Move away from project cycles. Focus on choosing the right partners and then identify projects based on their strengths (e.g. based on a capacities self-assessment), instead of identifying projects and then finding a partner that fits your requirements. Then, you can look further on how you can complement those strengths.
- Simply fill out your own forms and administrative requirements once to experience the most burdensome or unnecessary parts.
- Create direct dialogue channels with in-country partners, including investment in the language.