Locally Led Development
KPSRL Distilling Series 2021 – 2024

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Knowledge Platform
Security & Rule of Law

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Executive summary

This paper distills findings from 23 different KPSRL products (events, research, podcasts etc.) from the current iteration 2021 – 2024 where the theme of Locally Led Development (LLD) played a central role.

Stumbling towards LLD

LLD is not a new ambition and took many shapes and forms over the past decades. The many definitions all include **more local power over decision-making and funding, and facilitating local leadership through equal relationships of trust.**

Realizing LLD means reshaping deeply engrained 'mental models' that have driven (Western) societies for centuries: linear ideas of progress and malleable societies, racist biases and hierarchies of knowledge. These models don't fit the complexity of Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings (FCAS), nor what we know of how societal change happens.

Although there is momentum on a technical level and political commitments, donors' politicians increasingly focus on domestic priorities, while civic space in FCAS (and beyond) is shrinking. And even if donors are willing, LLD is not always easy to implement. Term 'local' – which already sets the tone for a Western gaze in itself - is often used in a too generic way (gate keepers, 'local' INGO offices) and facilitating local leadership requires a conflict sensitive approach due to changing local power dynamics or the risk of alienating grassroots organizations from their constituencies. Even if absorption capacity is there for in-country partners, donors' systems are often also not ready yet to relax administrative hurdles, resulting in unbalanced consortia and flown in consultants.

Recommendations

Within those challenges the KPSRL network still identified plenty of concrete recommendations to realize LLD in equal partnerships. Many concrete recommendations and resources are already mentioned in our recent report 'Pathways to Locally Led Development' – findings that are summarized on page 11. Recommendations in this paper:

- To bridge the 'mental models gap', it is important to create a safe space and take plenty of time in a (longer?) inception phase to **make core (and often unconscious) worldviews explicit**. It might also require different interactive meeting formats, methods and media, such as **theater, music and storytelling**.

- To prevent unintended effects and engage in a conflict sensitive matter, it is advised to **organize dialogue with those who might disagree** (and might be a source for backlash) and to **design M&E in a more open-ended way** to be able to capture effects beyond the 'results framework'.
- Instead of seeing LLD as a one-way street to 'local', it is more useful to **clarify the complementary roles international and local organizations**. That still does mean the role of INGOs will be limited to strengthening ongoing in-country initiatives, structures and sharing capacities – all with a clear **exit strategy** in mind (or at donor level: a country portfolio exit strategy), instead of the current INGO's growth mindset. An INGO's particular added value could for example be a role of a watchdog, voicing taboos, speaking out where local partners would be at risk, convening actors in closed door meetings or acting as a 'political buffer' for donors to be able to continue funding volatile contexts. **Decentralization of INGO offices should only happen with a clear strategy to strengthen local capacities and shifting power.**
- Donors are advised to engage in **approach-based partnerships**, focusing on the 'how' (inclusive processes) instead of the 'what' (specific outputs). **Resilient relationships and networks can be just as important as more classic development results from a specific project.** Especially now civic space is shrinking, local partners call to maintain those relationships and remain engaged.
- Such an approach-based partnership demands a strong feedback loop, which is strengthened through **participatory design of M&E and downward accountability to those affected**. It also means redefining some expenses, as there is currently little space for local partners for 'overhead' costs involved in learning processes. **The collected data in such learning processes, studies and M&E mechanisms should again be shared** beyond the particular project to strengthen in-country local capacities and actions.

Introduction

About the KPSRL distilling series

In 2024, KPSRL is finishing the 2021 – 2024 iteration of the platform. This article is part of a KPSRL 'distilling series' in the run up to the Knowledge Platform Annual Conference 2024 (KPAC24). It looks back at contributions of the network to KPSRL products (events, research, podcasts etc.) between 2021 and 2024 on four themes:

1. Locally Led Development (this piece)

   This paper collects findings on rethinking power relations and diverging interests within this sector, taking leadership and ownership, and navigating risks for local organizations and donors in times of donors focusing on domestic priorities and shrinking civic space in FCAS.

2. People Centered Approaches (to be found [here](#))

   This paper collects findings on bridging the gap between individual experiences and humane institutions, defining 'people centeredness', hybrid security and justice, fostering trust between communities and/or institutions, and taking needs instead of a system's siloes and regulations as a starting point.

3. Roots of Disagreement and Polarization (in development)

   This paper collects findings on the sources of polarization and diverging world views, identifying arguments that parties to polarized SRoL debates use to justify their positions. Ultimately, the piece aims to suggest points of common ground to allow for useful dialectical opportunities rather than a clash of worldviews.

4. Learning About Learning (in development)

   This paper collects collects findings on knowledge management and organisational learning, It reviews the variety of theories of and approaches to organisational learning, and the conditions under which they have been successful. Ultimately, the paper offers the reader a map and compass to find the learning approaches that suit their organisations.

The distilling papers' goals are to bring together KPSRL's 2021 – 2024 efforts on these themes, that can feed into KPAC24. It does not seek to give a comprehensive historic and academic overview of the debates. However, we do briefly touch upon the most recent state of this debate for our field, including some key dilemmas and definitions.

This distilling should solidify the overarching narratives and recurring recommendations over the years. This should facilitate further uptake with policy makers, researchers and practitioners within the KPSRL network.

Distilling Locally Led Development

Key themes that were discussed around LLD within our network in the past years, which this paper will dive into were:

- How centuries old mental models shaped structural barriers for LLD;
- How the social contract lens helps in more realistic, modest and conflict sensitive positioning as an international actors;
- How the complementary roles between INGOs and NNGOs can be rebalanced (referring for many arguments and recommendations to our earlier report of the Unboxing Localisation trajectory);
- How shared learning can be facilitated best for effective locally led adaptation and innovation.

Debates and definitions

LLD over time

Ambitions for Locally Led Development (LLD) gained renewed momentum after the COVID pandemic forced the development sector to work with less internationally posted colleagues and after emancipatory movements like Black Lives Matter increased awareness in donor countries of systemic racism. Interpretations of LLD differ (see examples in text box[1&2]), but all include **more local power over decision-making and funding, and facilitating local leadership through equal relationships of trust**.

Discussions on LLD have been ongoing for decades, under various names and through different political lenses. Think of the government-heavy interpretation of alignment with 'national development plans' as early as the 1950's. More recently, the OECD-DAC's Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) focused on ownership, alignment and mutual accountability, with a strong emphasis on measurable results. Through the Grand Bargain (2016) the humanitarian sector committed to "localization", of which an important aspect was to channel funding as local as possible. This term is also discussed, as it is criticized for acquiring knowledge and experiences from 'the field' through systems and methods from the Global North.[3]

Recent momentum has propelled many initiatives. Most OECD donors committed to LLD in a donor statement in 2022,[4] the OECD-DAC released several guides and recommendations on strengthening ownership,[5] GPPAC and RFF guide financing peacebuilders in FCAS[6] and PeaceDirect stresses decolonization of aid.[7] There are concrete tools, such as NEAR's framework to measure progress on LLD[8] or USAID's

OECD-DAC Results Committee's working definition: "*Development co-operation that supports locally led humanitarian and development assistance by recognising and enabling diverse local actors' agency in: i) framing; ii) design; iii) delivery, including resourcing; and iv) accountability and learning.*"	**USAID Fact Sheet:** "*Locally led development is the process in which local actors – encompassing individuals, communities, networks, organizations, private entities, and governments – set their own agendas, develop solutions, and bring the capacity, leadership, and resources to make those solutions a reality.*"

partnership assessment tools.[9] Conducive Spaces for Peace released learning notes that give an overview of concrete LLD innovations.[10]

A policy trend to highlight is the focus on the People-Centered Approach (PCA), which is described in the previous text box and discussed in the other KPSRL Distilling piece. **LLD and PCA are supportive to each other**: PCA is a more operational element of LLD and is also easier to accept with both conservative donors as well as partner governments (more technical problem-solving), whereas LLD's focus on shifting and transforming power speaks to those open for a more fundamental conversation.

If the ambitions for ownership and local leadership have been there for decades and concrete recommendations are out there, why is it still so hard to realize them? Why still that gap between narratives and general practice?

Dealing with centuries old models

Answering those questions starts with acknowledging that **there are deeply engrained 'mental models'[1] that have driven (Western) societies for centuries: linear ideas of progress and malleable societies, racist biases and hierarchies of knowledge**.[2] These mental models don't change within a few years, or even decades.

There is often a mental gap between international peace actors and local communities that causes faulty assumptions on which international support would be effective. It will be hard for Western aid workers with political science degrees to escape the (post-)liberal democracy paradigm that prioritizes national institution building and market economies,[11] or to completely unlearn racist biases engrained in society and this sector. Those in FCAS might have generations of experiences with customary justice or security provision and non-Western conceptions of e.g. community and leadership, which influence their ideas of what society should look like.

This means **logics and conceptions of causality can differ greatly**, from 'transactional' Western logic (systems- and task oriented, individualistic) to more relational logic of those that lived through generations of marginalization and cycles of violence (relying on networks and communities, fostering social relationships, considering identity).

For donors, these transactional mindsets resulted in **perceptions of development as a (measurable) project** with best practices and copy-paste approaches. In such a malleable world, ambitions for the international community's programs can be endless. A recent Dutch policy evaluation emphasized that this ambition is still a common problematic starting point, as the influence of development cooperation from external actors to 'force' change is limited.

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[1] See also KPSRL's Fragile Truths podcast episode 'The 'Mental Landscape' When Living Amidst Violence' with Mareike Schomerus on her book *Lives Amid Violence* (2023) here.

[2] The Center for African Research worked with KPSRL on re-envisioning security and rule of law responses in the Great Lakes region after pandemics, focussing on the role local actors can play to improve responses. Read the conclusions here.

The 'transactional mindset' is incompatible with what we now know about development and transforming social contracts – especially in notoriously unpredictable (post)conflict settings. **Societal change is non-linear, constantly transforming and only sustainable if locally carried and internalized, fitting the particular context.** Conflict transformation and a positive peace are not feasible if attempted top-down.[12]

Finding common ground during geopolitical shifts

There is momentum for LLD, exemplified by donor commitments, restructured partnerships and ongoing initiatives. At the same time however, geopolitical and - economic changes impact foreign policy in donor countries, with knee jerk responses of either 'hiding' behind borders, or practicing Realpolitik. [13] This results in **an increasing need from Western donors to prioritize how aid is spent and a constant need for more measurable results that should directly contribute to national interests** – which counterproductively leads to worse results. Afghanistan (but also South Sudan) was often highlighted as an example of how over-engineered **aid can even undermine a social contract**, e.g. through the dominance of INGOs and international actors that formed the majority of the country's income and who surpassed national level governance.

Looking at broader policies beyond development cooperation, national interests on other policy areas (economic, military, migration and geopolitical priorities) create **policy incoherences [14] that clash with donors' locally led ambitions within the development sphere**.

Meanwhile, also in FCAS the space to find common ground is in decline. The **political will for inclusive and people-centered justice and security reforms seems to be declining, as is the room for maneuver for civil society to advocate for change.** International indices for democracy and rule of law are in decline – a trend that goes beyond FCAS, but is particularly visible in focus regions of many donors like the Sahel. **The current sentiment under donors is to disengage from controversial political situations**, or to only work with local CSOs (through INGOs). **Politization of aid in FCAS is also not uncommon** through a combination of populist pragmatism and profound critiques of anti-(neo)colonialism, clashing values on human rights and gender roles, or discussions on climate change responsibilities.[15]

In sum, **recent trends in both donor countries and FCAS have not made it easier to work towards LLD around shared goals**.

Recurring themes 2021 - 2024

The previous chapter described broader trends related to the momentum for LLD and why it is urgent – but difficult - to materialize these ambitions. This chapter focusses on the more practical level: the recurring challenges the KPSRL network faces with LLD and the recurring recommendations to face them.

Key challenges in realizing LLD

- When discussing Locally Led Development, the first question is: what is 'local'? The term itself firstly already sets the tone for a Western gaze. The KPSRL network has stated on several occasions that **'local' is too often used as a glossary term**.[3] Even in-country partners might be unfamiliar with certain communities or regions, as at (sub)national level there are many different views and interests. Too often, **decentralized INGO offices are labeled 'local'**, making them more eligible to donor funding. USAID for example differentiates between a 'local entity' and an international 'locally established partner'.[16] Not being critical of differentiating different types of local has partially led to the international community often working with **gate keepers** instead of a wider variety of communities and organizations.[4]
- Gate keepers are not just the result of not diversifying partners though, as they are also a reality of local power dynamics**. If international actors have not invested in fully grasping the local context, localization can create many unintended effects**. In the end, locally led development is about shifting and transforming power, which means local power dynamics can change to the benefit of some.
- There is a **disconnect between local and (inter)national** peace initiatives. A recent IOB evaluation for example emphasized how restrained Dutch diplomatic efforts at national level are not in balance with the strong ODA commitments.[17]
- It is not always a given that local actors benefit from intensified, leading roles in international partnerships. The legitimacy of local CSOs is often based on its

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[3] In the Distilling PCA piece ([here](#)) there is more context and recommendations on navigating the complexity of what e.g. 'people-centered' really entails and how to de-romanticize the local.

[4] KPSRL and PeaceDirect hosted a [session](#) at the Stockholm Forum for Peace and Development on how to overcome such challenges, called 'Still Engaging, But Differently: Shifting the Power to Locally Led Peace Initiatives'.

bottom up mobilization. **Collaborating with international donors might alienate grassroots organizations from their constituencies**, especially when it has to change its 'business as usual' or compromise goals to satisfy donor requirements. **In times of shrinking civic space, international collaboration might even put in-country partners at risk**.

- Donors' systems are not apt for LLD. Working with **tax money has created a large set of complex checks and balances to manage risks** (which is why donors prefer to work with INGOs with systems in place to manage those risks for them) and **donors don't have the capacity to finance in 'bite-sized' sums to fit the absorption capacity of in-country partners**. This results in:

    o Constructions like **consortia where power is often imbalanced** due to many factors: organisational size, budget capacity, access to information, reputation with donors, networks, traditional donor-'implementer' dynamics, gender relations etc.[5] Local partners often still automatically follow INGOs in the use of tools, systems and approaches for e.g. finance, knowledge management or reporting. Donors prefer working with INGOs to reduce compliance risks.

    o **International consultants with particular skills instead of investing in local capacities**. This happens regularly with M&E: there is little coordination with other organizations that have similar efforts, causing data fatigue with citizens, forged data and **private datasets that are not shared amongst each other**.[6]

Implications for policy & programming

Although this piece up until now has been a daunting list of problems, **within those challenges there's still plenty possible to realize LLD in equal partnerships**.[18] The KPSRL network has shared many concrete ways to improve access to funding, information and decision making for local organizations, and more broadly shifting roles and power between donors, partner governments, INGOs and NNGOs within the sector.

It should be noted that this paper follows a recently published **report 'Pathways to Locally Led Development'** by KPSRL, CSPPS and the NL MFA's (see key findings in the text box).[7] This is the result of their 'Unboxing Localization' trajectory, where the KPSRL network did extensive work on how the 'infrastructure' that shapes the development chain can be reshaped to facilitate LLD better. To avoid duplication, this paper will refer to the concrete solutions and examples already written down there when relevant.

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[5] More information on consortia dynamics can be found in this blog by NIMD on its own experiences while researching their decentralization processes with support of KPSRL's KMF funding.

[6] An episode of the KPSRL podcast Fragile Truths discusses the lack of data sharing by international actors in Somalia. Listen to it here.

[7] Find the full report 'Pathways to Locally Led Development' here.

> **Recommendations on partnerships and funding from the 'Pathways to Locally Led Development' report**
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> ¤ International and local actors have **complementary roles** that constantly evolve due to changing circumstances;
> ¤ Partnerships should go **beyond technocratic 'project' goals**. Sharing networks and capacities in partnerships can be part of the goal in itself.
> ¤ There are many innovative examples of **participatory grant making** and management of funding that should be used as an inspiration.
> ¤ **Network organizations** can play an important role in bridging the gap between small CSOs and donors – beyond legal requirements - simply do not have the capacity to work directly with all of them.
> ¤ To work locally led means having **language inclusivity** as a top priority.
> ¤ There are many myths about what requirements are a legal obligation and which are merely thought up by INGOs and donors. It is useful to **do 'homework' on which requirements are not legally necessary**.
> ¤ Donors can set up **permanent dialogue frameworks at national partner country level** to engage with local actors on their policies beyond direct diplomatic ties and development project.
> ¤ Creating space for local initiatives means making **space in donors' systems for informal realities** (beyond formal track records, indicators and formally organized meetings)
> ¤ To hold oneself accountable, there are existing **tools to measure progress on localization**.
> ¤ **Longer inception phases** give time for international actors to familiarize oneself better with the context and to build trust in the partnerships with local partners.

Knowing your place

Starting with those most abstract obstacles of mental gaps and decolonizing development, the KPSRL network proposed a wide variety of recommendations.

Central is the role of deep partnerships based on trust and cultural sensitivity, that take the time in the inception phase to make core (and often unconscious) worldviews explicit. This requires difficult conversations between donors and partners on biases and racism, which knowledge counts, salary differences between local and international staff, hidden agendas etc.[8] **Bridging the 'mental gap' also requires different meeting formats**, methods and media, such as theater, art and storytelling.

The thematic headlines of 2022[9] and 2023 regarded the concept of 'social contracts'. **Applying the lens of social contracts to development cooperation has helped the KPSRL network in looking beyond Western societal models and linear ideas of development**. For example, the network discussed customary institutions (e.g. *xeer* justice in Somalia[10]) and non-Western conceptions of citizenship (e.g. *madaniya* during the Arab spring[11]).[12]

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[8] Once more, concrete tools can be found in the 'Pathways to Locally Development' report.

[9] See conclusions in the KPSRL analytical paper with overarching findings on the 2022 thematic headline: 'Reimagining Social Contracts: An analytical paper of KPSRL discussions in 2022'

[10] Read the full KMF research by Consilient Research on Somali customary justice here, or the shorter policy brief.

[11] This concept was discussed during the KPAC22 session 'Imagine Madaniya! Voices from the MENA about the Civil State', which can be rewatched here.

[12] For more information on the role of informal alternatives in comparison to formal institutions in delivering services that are more apt to people's needs, see Distilling PCA. This also goes into e.g. the need to humanize institutions.

Broadening conceptions of the social contract also implied not separating local and (inter)national peace initiatives. Moreover, it forces donors to come to terms with the reality of certain power distributions and wide spread customs in partner countries, even though they might not agree with them. An argument that was repeated regularly was to **at least keep lines of communication open, even with non-democratic actors or undermining regional players** – in the end they play a key role in finding or blocking solutions. [13] This is the reality local partners deal with on a daily basis.

Looking at social contracts in all their complex dynamics creates a starting point for more modest and realistic expectations of the role and scope of international actors' influence in complex societal systems. A recent IOB evaluation[19] also stressed this **urgency of more realism with the international community**: society cannot be planned and change hinges on local ownership.

A donor's stronger sense of realism means knowing that **engagement with any context requires humility and curiosity**; every 'local' is different. It also puts timelines of four year projects in perspective within centuries long societal processes. **National level reforms are not to be expected in short periods of time and such reforms demand political will and ownership.** If that willingness is not there, the best the international community can hope for is building resilient relationships and networks (which again goes beyond specific projects) with those local partners that do share the same values, while being prepared for moments of improved political momentum.[14]

This more modest and holistic starting point automatically makes any type of support more conflict sensitive, as power (imbalances) are mapped thoroughly. Embracing that complexity also pointed the KPSRL network towards making more deliberate efforts to **prevent unintended effects**, as impact goes beyond the direct goals of a program. [15] This for example entails organizing conversations with those who might disagree (and might be a source for backlash), more open-ended M&E that includes openings for results ' beyond the framework' and creating space as a donor (again: trust) for more realistic conversations with partners about what can be achieved and what didn't go as hoped for.

A new role for INGOs and donors
Befitting this realistic and modest approach is also rethinking the role of INGOs. LLD is often understood as 'cutting out the middle man'. However, there are **complementary roles international and local organizations** can play. International actors can play the role of watchdog, voicing taboos, speak out where local partners would be at risk,

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[13] KPSRL facilitated a discussion between UNDP and the Dutch MFA on how to remain engaged in a time of shrinking civic space called 'Localized SRoL Support In A Multipolar World'. A summary can be found here.

[14] Read the full IOB evaluation here, which was presented during a discussion with the network.
Report: Localized SRoL Support In A Multipolar World

[15] An episode of the KPSRL podcast Fragile Truths discusses the unintended effects of aid, which you can find here.

convene actors in closed door meetings or act as a 'political buffer' for donors to keep funding volatile contexts.

The KPSRL network repeatedly concluded that the **future role of INGOs should be limited to strengthening ongoing initiatives and structures, focusing on its own added value**. Think of fundraising and international advocacy, program advice, facilitation and sharing of learning across networks, and risk sharing. **Adapting to this new role and mindset also requires changes in Human Resources strategies and recruitment.**

If all goes well, that added value should diminish over time as capacities at the local level change – something that is part of improved **exit strategies** at program and country level (who takes over, what revenues will replace donors?), instead of the current INGO's growth mindsets. **Decentralizing INGO offices only happens with a clear strategy to strengthen local capacities and shifting power** for increased ownership.

Instead of setting goals from the start, donors can take an 'approach-based partnership' as a starting point. This type of partnership focusses on the 'how' of supporting sustainable processes instead of the 'what' of donor's desired (too often short-term) priorities. In general, this means moving away from the current 'deficit mindset' among donors and INGOs, that only focuses on problems and assumes deficiencies with local partners.[16]

Focusing on the approach instead of pre-set goals makes **resilient relationships and networks just as important as more classic development results from a specific project**. Here again, the KPSRL network emphasized that **especially during volatile transitions, maintaining those relationships and remaining engaged is important**. Because especially when civic space is under pressure, local CSOs benefit from predictable funding and from engagement on themes like government reform and inclusive governance.

An approach-based partnership demands a strong feedback loop. The KPSRL network extensively discussed how exchange of knowledge between partners and adapting their course accordingly can be improved. **Adaptation requires connecting finance, legal and operations more at work level**, so systems work in favor of change and innovation – instead of hampering them.

In that sense, our sector could learn from the research community, where **funding is focused on learning and innovating instead of on specific goals**, while reporting on solid process instead of only on the outcomes.[17] **Participatory design of M&E and**

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[16] For more detailed descriptions of how LLD was implemented in the demining sector in Iraq and Afghanistan, see 'What Strengthening Localisation through Capacity Building and Inclusion in Iraq' and 'Localization in Humanitarian Mine Action in Afghanistan'.

[17] KPSRL participated in a panel at the Stockholm Forum for Peace and Development Session where this idea was proposed, called 'How effective is the current peacebuilding financing architecture at building peace? Reflections from local to global peace actors'.

downward accountability help in making the monitoring and learning process more relevant for local actors. Conversely, complex and extensive M&E gives power to INGOs that have the capacities and share the 'language' to execute it.

Learning taking such a central role, requires a **redefinition of expenses and overhead**. Local partners should have budget for learning and exchange, and time for building trust and capacities. Donors should incentivize sharing lessons across programs, countering competitive.

These learning processes create a lot of data from feasibility studies and M&E reports**.** The **collected data in such should again be used – and shared - to strengthen local partners and systems.** In FCAS limited availability of information, which stresses the need for partnerships for information position. Programs and policies need to be based on reliable information after all.

To summarize these recommendations per actor:

Foster approach-based, resilient and patient partnerships: (1) focus on 'how' instead of 'what', with a central role for innovation and learning, (2) don't disengage during political transitions and (3) accept that change is slow and needs momentum before a partnership bears its fruits.	Donor
Apply a non-liniar 'social contract lens' that is open to non-Western interpretations of institutions and the state.	Donor
Engage every context with humility to the particular practices and realities. If values don't align, at minimum keep lines of communications open.	Donor
Only engage with a clear exit strategy in mind, both at national portfolio and at programmatic level.	Donor & INGO
Start partnerships with difficult conversations on interests and biases, which likely require different formats than formal meetings (e.g. theater, visual art, mediation, storytelling).	Donor & INGO
Counter unintended effects: (1) organize conversations with those that disagree, (2) more open-ended M&E and (3) create space for conversations on what didn't go well	Donor & INGO
Set up a strong and adaptive feedback loop fed by participatory M&E – and share that data to strengthen local systems.	Donor & INGO
Contextualize complementary roles, with the INGO always supportive to ongoing initiatives and structures	INGO & in-country partner
Only decentralize offices with a clear LLD strategy	INGO
The new role for INGOs requires different skills, which should be reflected in Human Resources strategies and recruitment	INGO

Gaps & Future Action

Gaps

In the 'Towards the 'Pathways to Locally Led Development' report that was referred to several times in this report, a few next steps were formulated. One was to go beyond technical solutions and **dive deeper into the political side of dealing with diverging interests and values of donors and local organizations**. This distilling paper did touch upon some of these topics, such as closing the mental gap or remaining engaged during volatile transitions.

However, there is still a great deal more to be explored in rethinking development cooperation in a more sustainable way that focusses on long-term, shared goals while acknowledging those diverging interests and values. That means **exploring the practical methodologies to identify such common ground** and strategize better around them. On a different level, it is a matter of finding the right **convincing language and narratives that convince (the constituencies of) donor politicians** that this engagement beyond short term national interests is worthwhile. It also entails **mapping safe and sustainable ways for local organizations to engage with international actors** and lead change in contexts of shrinking civic space.

Another gap mentioned in that report was **showing the effectiveness of LLD** – something that would not just guide our future actions, but also help make the case for that convincing narrative. Arguments often remain anecdotal or difficult to proof, which only makes sense with such complex dynamics. However, we still invite the KPSRL network to share examples with us.

Future action KPSRL

This distilling paper serves as input for the Knowledge Platform Annual Conference 2024 in November with the theme 'Building trust, pacifying power, connecting realities'.

KPSRL is also planning to implement recommendations in its own structure and governance. The current proposal is to decentralize from The Hague to learning hubs in the Global South, facilitating bottom-up agenda setting and leadership in learning processes. The KMF is supposed to be reformed through participatory grant making.

Notes

[1] OECD (2024). *Pathways Towards Effective Locally Led Development Co-operation.*

[2] USAID. *What Is Locally Led Development? – Fact Sheet.* www.usaid.gov/documents/what-locally-led-development-fact-sheet.

[3] F. Mihlara (2024). *Coloniality and the inadequacy of localization*. The Humanitarian Leader.

[4] USAID (2022), *Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development.* www.usaid.gov/localization/donor-statement-on-supporting-locally-led-development.

[5] OECD (2023). *Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries*. OECD (2021). *DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*.

[6] Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict and Radical Flexibility Fund (2024). *Shifting the power balance: Effective Options for Financing Local Peacebuilding*.

[7] PeaceDirect (2022). *Race, Power and Peacebuilding*.

[8] NEAR (2019). *Localisation Performance Measurement Framework*. https://ngocoordination.org/en/library/near-localisation-performance-measurement-framework.

[9] USAID (2016), *Organizational Capacity Assessment*. https://usaidlearninglab.org/resources/organizational-capacity-assessment. USAID (2022). *Community Led Development (CLD) Tools.* https://usaidlearninglab.org/resources/community-led-development-cld-tools#:~:text=CLD%20Evaluation%20Tool%20(also%20known,principles%20of%20community-led%20development.

[10] Conducive Spaces for Peace (2023). *Learning Note: Innovative Practices – Changing the International System to Better Enable Local Leadership*.

[11] M. Sabaratnam (2013). Avatars of Eurocentrism and the Critique of the Liberal Peace, *Security Dialogue*, 44 (3), 259-278.

[12] S. Autesserre (2021), *The Frontlines of Peace*. Oxford University Press.

[13] Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (2024). *Nederland in een fragmenterende wereldorde*.

[14] OECD (2021). *Understanding the Spillovers and Transboundary Impacts of Public Policies: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for More Resilient Societies*.

[15] J. J. Swedlund (2017). *The Development Dance: How Donors and Recipients Negotiate the Delivery of Foreign Aid*. Cornell University Press.

[16] USAID (2022). *NPI Standard Practices and Definitions*. https://www.usaid.gov/npi/npi-key-definitions.

[17] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie (2024). *Richting geven aan internationale veiligheid*: *Naar concretere doelstellingen en beter passende beleidskeuzes in het veiligheids- en stabiliteitsbeleid*.

[18] CSP Learning Note, OECD-DAC guide on Civil Society and paper on enablers of locally led development, PeaceDirect publication on transforming partnerships, Wageningen University article on innovations LLD and 'where to go from here' article.

[19] Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie (2023). *Inconvenient Realities - An evaluation of Dutch contributions to stability, security and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected contexts*.

Annex: Underlying KPSRL reports, events & projects 2021 - 2024

	Title	Lead	Type	Context	Year
1	Stockholm Forum for Peace & Development: 'Still Engaging, But Differently: Shifting the Power to Locally Led Peace Initiatives'	KPSRL & Peace Direct	Events		2024
2	Pathways to Locally Led Change	KPSRL, CSPPS, NL MFA	Report	LLD Trajectory	2024
3	Towards Effective Partnership And Shared Ownership; A Framework Based On Equity, Diversity, And Inclusion	Media INK	Report	PLI	2024
	What Strengthening Localisation through Capacity Building and Inclusion in Iraq	IHSCO, HALO	Report	PLI	2024
4	Power Dynamics in Foreign Aid	Radboud	Report	KMF	2023
5	KPSRL Annual Conference (KPAC) Nairobi	KPSRL	Session	Annual Conference	2023
6	Internal report on support to learning within the SRoL portfolio of the Somalia desk - NL MFA	KPSRL	Events	PLI	2023
7	Unboxing Localization VI - Innovative funding for local peacebuilding action: walking the talk	GPPAC	Events	LLD Trajectory	2023
8	Unboxing Localisation V - From Consultation Towards Local Leadership: Inclusive Programming in Practice	WKPSRL	Events	LLD Trajectory	2023
9	Unboxing Localisation IV - Measuring Localisation	CSPPS	Events	LLD Trajectory	2023
10	Inconvenient Realities: Discussing the recent IOB evaluation	KPSRL & IOB	Events		2023
11	Localization in Humanitarian Mine Action in Afghanistan	MAPA, DRC	Report	PLI	2023
12	Unboxing Localisation III - Chains of Influence	CSPPS	Events	LLD Trajectory	2022
13	Unboxing Localisation II – Prioritization Trajectory	CSPPS	Events	LLD Trajectory	2022
14	Localized SRoL Support In A Multipolar World	KPSRL & IDLO	Events		2022
15	Mapping Tensions And Power Imbalances In NIMD's Ecosystem	NIMD	Report	KMF	2022
16	Reimagining Social Contracts - An analytical paper of KPSRL discussions in 2022	KPSRL	Report		2022
17	The Knowledge Economy: Somalia	KPSRL	Podcast		2022
18	Manifesto: Re-Envisioning Security And Rule Of Law Responses In The Great Lakes Region In East Africa.	Centre for African Research	Report	KMF	2021
19	Unboxing Localisation I - Building Forward Better by Strengthening Local resilience	CSPPS	Session	Annual Conference	2021

20	How effective is the current peacebuilding financing architecture at building peace? Reflections from local to global peace actors	Life & Peace Institute, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation	Events		2021
21	A Clash of Contagions: The Impact of COVID-19 on Conflict in Nigeria, Colombia and Afghanistan	Mercy Corps	Events		2021
22	Local Voices Leading To Local Solutions In Pakistan, Nepal & Zimbabwe	Accountability Labs	Session	Annual Conference	2021
23	Time to Decolonise Aid	Peace Direct	Session	Annual Conference	2021