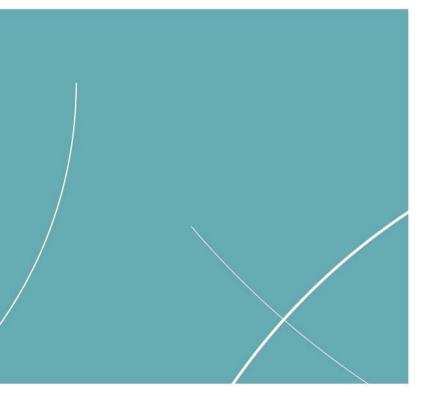# Knowledge Platform Annual Conference 2023 (KPAC23) Report

From Nairobi to The Hague

Knowledge Platform Annual Conference 2023 (KPAC23) Report

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Acronym	Definition
CSOs	Civil society organisations
DSH	Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations
GSN	Green String Network
IDLO	International Development Law Organisation
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisations
KPAC	Knowledge Platform Annual Conference
KPSRL	Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer +
LLD	Locally Led Development
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PCA	People-Centred Approach
SROL	Security and Rule of Law
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Chapter 1

Executive Summary

In 2023, the Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL) organized its yearly conference (KPAC23) outside of The Hague. The main event took place on 7 November 2023 in Nairobi, after which a follow-up event was organized on 7 December in The Hague.

Lived Experiences

The Conference strongly affirmed that those with lived experiences of conflict and instability are in a unique position to point out their security needs and SROL policies and interventions that can benefit them.

> A "person with lived experience" is someone with first-hand knowledge of a certain context or situation. During the Conference, participants used the concept of "lived experiences" to refer to the experiences of refugees, grassroot women, youth, marginalised communities, and in general people who have directly experienced and gained knowledge of situations of insecurity and conflict.

Meaningful integration of lived experiences in peacebuilding and social cohesion programming starts with the ability to understand the mental models of those who

live through conflict and instability, including recognizing traumatic experiences of violence and marginalization.

> A mental model is how the reality of conflict and instability is represented in people's minds.

Taking lived experiences from the margins as starting point for SRoL efforts closes the understanding gap between margins and centres. For example, it makes clear how a topic like climate change is abstract for elites in the Centres but is a concrete matter of survival for people living in peripheries already degraded by environmental change.

However, **tools to include lived experiences in policymaking and programming are currently under-utilized. They include theatre, visual art, music, and poetry** since these help in engaging on personal topics.

Making progress on understanding and translating lived experiences for policymaking and programming requires diversifying the definition of and channels through which knowledge informs policy making. For example, several discussions during the Conference reflected and reported back on the fact that citizens who directly experience the effects of climate change are not adequately involved in climate change policies, even though they have extensive knowledge of the natural environment where they live. Instead, climate policy is often the result of top-down and elite dominated international and domestic policymaking processes and can harm vulnerable groups' livelihoods, causes displacement (e.g., bio crop transition, or militarized or exploited lithium mines), or evokes sentiments of Environmental Colonialism.

People Centred Approach

Building on the discussions on lived experiences, a **People-Centred approach (PCA) means understanding the needs of the people, as close to the micro and individual level as possible and acknowledging the fluid dynamics and multiple interpretations that are hidden behind terms used to designate entire categories of people.** Categories such as "local" are overused and hide enormous differences in power and conditions (true also for other commonly used labels such as "youth", "women", ''refugees and displaced persons"). Interveners must understand this complexity, otherwise interventions risk exacerbating power differences and create tensions.

People-Centred approaches require starting from the perspective of the people. It does not necessarily mean that people or communities should directly deliver justice or security, as sometimes happens when security needs are left unmet.

People-Centred approaches require that institutions be "humanized." Staff must be allowed to step out of official places and bureaucratic straitjackets to listen carefully

to all views. Functioning feedback loops should be in place in responsive authorities to continue distilling and relying needs, as well as knowledge on what has worked in meeting them.

Integrated approaches

People's needs often connect multiple policy sectors and institutional mandates, requiring cooperation across sectors and institutions to meet them. Therefore, **hybrid and multi-sectoral policy and programming approaches are part of People-Centred approaches.** Hybrid models bring together formal and informal institutions, multiples levels of government, and State and non-State actors.

Climate change, food insecurity, displacement, gender-based violence and violent extremism are all issues that do not separately wait for a dedicated pot of funding but come together in complex crises. Climate change, for example, interacts with fragility caused by political and governance problems. Droughts might cause displaced pastoralists' cattle to destroy crops, but conflict arise only in the absence of effective governance mechanisms to mediate tensions peacefully, reallocate limited resources equitably, and create safety nets.

In conclusion, **SROL needs to be part of a multisectoral approach** (including health, infrastructure, investments, and governance). This forces SROL to take the search for new partnerships across the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus seriously. Innovative financing mechanisms that are not constrained by sectoral boundaries are also necessary. Policy and programming should choose concepts like "resilience" as objectives, useful frames to understand interconnected risks and opportunities.

> There are many official definitions of "resilience", but all definitions point to the ability of a system to predict, cope with, and recover from shocks.[1]

Locally led development approach

The Conference reaffirmed that the locally led development approach (LLD) should be part of improved policy and programming and equitable partnerships.
Consensus is coalescing in the KPSRL network on parts of the LLD agenda, but disagreements and unknown variables remain.

A point of consensus is that in LLD the role of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) will change. More direct funding will flow to in-country organizations, with INGOs retaining an intermediary role when donors do not have the capacity to fund directly. INGOs will also have a role in strengthening in-country organizations capacities, lightening their administrative load, and advocating for their needs in donor countries and at international fora. **Innovation in funding**

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[1] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08955ed915d3cfd0001c8/EoD_Topic_Guide_What_is_Resilience_May_2016.pdf

mechanisms should go in the direction of expanding access from partner countries and unlocking local sources of funding.

Open questions remain on how to achieve true representation of communities, also on the part of country actors. Donors and INGOs should critically look at whether they work with intermediaries that truly represent their communities, rather than a thin layer of elites. Country organisations are encouraged to look critically at their own role: constantly questioning whether they are "gatekeeping" or missing some constituencies.

Many members of the KPSRL network have introduced reforms towards LLD. However, **they know little about the effectiveness of their reform packages** in achieving results ranging from more effective aid, more equitable aid, to better organizational effectiveness, given a diversity of contexts.

Dealing With Anti-Democratic Trends

Many regions of the world experience a backlash to the post-1989 globalization and liberal democracy era. The backlash takes place equally across development lines and includes rise of illiberal regimes and movements, nativist and populist movements advocating narrow national interest first, and polarization between supporters and opponents of open societies and progressive cultures.

The Conference explored how SROL policy and programming can be maintained in closed and oppressive contexts:

1. SROL policy and programming should be based on a thorough understanding of the reasons why some people support illiberal regimes and reject formally democratic regimes. Whilst every case is different, Conference participants noted that in many cases illiberal regimes were born from dissatisfaction with shallow forms of democracy that did not deliver for the people.
2. SROL policy and programming can continue in closed and oppressive contexts through supporting democracy and human rights activists and the free media, with the humble aim of maintaining a candle lit for the future. This includes supporting unregistered organisations, artists, and lawyers.
3. Western policy priorities (security, migration, trade, geopolitics) should not turn partner countries' Governments away from meeting their citizens' priorities. This dynamic has played a role in creating a hotbed of resentment that is fertile ground for illiberal, unconstitutional, and anti-Western turns.
4. Remaining engaged and understanding the deeper causes for unconstitutional turns does not mean that donors should legitimize authoritarian leaders, but that "quiet diplomacy" can continue. Safe spaces for mediation can continue through closed door meetings. At the same, the value of remaining engaged needs to be better explained to members of parliament and public in the Netherlands (and other donor countries).

Chapter 2

Introduction

2.1 Conference theme and process

On Wednesday November 7th, 2023, the Annual Conference of the Knowledge Platform for Security opened at the Heron Hotel in Nairobi with performances of spoken-word poetry and music, followed by three conference days in Nairobi and a follow-up event in The Hague on 7 December.

The Conference used the lens of 'Margins | Centres' to discuss the contribution of SRoL policy and programming to social contracts. It defined centres as spaces and actors that shape dominant interpretations of SRoL issues and control resources and authority to act on them. Margins, instead, are the spaces that must follow those interpretations.

In healthy 'Margins | Centres' dynamics, the centres are occupied by those with lived experiences of conflict and instability. The authorities, duty bearers, service providers, and allies respectfully retreat to the margins, ready to support. When

dynamics are unhealthier, status, biases, privilege, or the threat of repression pushes those who stand to benefit from or are impacted by SRoL policies and programmes to the margins. In short, KPAC23 debated the question: "How can SRoL institutions and mechanisms contribute to heal these unhealthy dynamics?"

The KPSRL Secretariat shaped the Conference's programme together with the KPSRL network, and the programme included:

1. A three-day Conference in Nairobi, spread over three days:
    a. During day one, music performances opened the programme, then network members shared experiences and insights in the format of market stands at a Marketplace of Ideas.
    b. During day two, eleven thematic and geographic sessions introduced and unpacked many forms of imbalances between centres and margins.
    c. During day three, participants drew implications from the preceding discussions.
2. A half day Conference in the Hague, which continued the discussions initiated in Nairobi and responded to questions raised there.

2.2 Report structure and methodology

This report aims to faithfully capture the discussions that took place at KPAC23. Chapters three and four cover the main insights and recommendations discussed at KPAC23, starting with sessions that took place in Nairobi and moving to sessions in The Hague.

The content of this report is entirely based on notes taken during KPAC23 sessions by dedicated note-takers and shared afterwards with the KPSRL Secretariat. Notes have been summarized to fit the limited space available for this report.

The report highlights the sessions' main insights and recommendations, but the limited space unfortunately does not allow for verbatim coverage of discussions. It also highlights insights and recommendations that were not object of consensus among all participants.

Chapter five connects KPAC23 with KPSRL processes in 2024 to close the feedback loop to practice. In particular, it makes explicit how the discussions held at KPAC23 contributed to the thematic headline guiding KPSRL activities in 2024.

Chapter 3

The Nairobi Hub

3.3 Opening plenary: keynote discussion

IDLO, Netherlands Embassy to Nairobi, GROOTS, Turkana Council of Elders

The frame of "Margins and Centres" questions who holds the power, who is at the centre of decisions, and how societies connect people and power holders. From the Dutch vantage point, social contracts should ideally be people centred and based on dialogue. Achieving this is a complex endeavour.

The opening session introduced the discussions of margins and centres with the example of refugees and internal displaced persons (IDPs) housed for long periods in marginal areas where economic opportunities are scarce. It then covered the experience of grassroot women, whose accounts of their lived experiences are often rendered invisible behind those of men. It finally discussed traditional communities living in areas that are progressively degrading due to the early effects of climate change.

These three categories of people are the object of policy choices made by the Centres. As people who know best their own issues, they should be empowered to more directly shape policy making and programming, and to take direct action.

In opening policy and programming spaces up to dialogue and co-creation, policymakers and programming partners should be aware that these groups and communities hide multiple interests, needs, and lived experiences. It is therefore important to understand where consensus among people inside these groups leads.

Factors that make it easier for people with lived experiences of conflict and instabilities to shape their future include:

1. Transformational support in the long term.
2. Programmes that respect local culture and costumes but are not afraid to challenge social norms when this is imperative for broadening inclusion.
3. Innovative funding and mixings of funding, for example adding climate finance to development or peacebuilding programmes because people's needs do not divide neatly along departmental lines.
4. A shift in the balance of power among stakeholders of development interventions, localizing decision making.
5. Flexible and adaptive programmes.

3.4 The weaponization of social media

Mercy Corps

The session discussed an intentional approach to detecting and countering hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation on social media.

The first step is to scan social media and understand the actors and dynamics of hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation. The landscape scan should include both those actors with the ability to build peace and those who move people towards violence.

Once the landscape is clear, peace champions should be employed to engage in social media discussions and push critical, peaceful messages with the potential to alter online debates. The peace champions should be able to deal with the emotions that online debates create, especially anger, as much as with the content of these debates. Responding must be done in a gender conscious way as well.

Government should also be able to thread the line between banning hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation with the right of freedom of expression.

Currently, in Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations (FCAS), countering hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation are almost exclusively funded by foreign interveners, whereas locally raised resources and policy frameworks have been slow to emerge.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the User Engagement Algorithms of social platforms are another part of the problem, as they promote extreme content that is likely to create strong reactions and therefore engagement on the platform. Governments have so far under-regulated these algorithms and under-invested in algorithms for peace.

3.5   Understanding and engaging authoritarian regimes
Tiwlate Peace Network, KPSRL

The Sahel has been a conducive environment for unconstitutional developments due to ongoing military conflicts, jihadist violence, resource scarcity, and failure by nominally democratic regimes to deliver for their people.

Until 2021, Mali had a formally democratic regime where only 20% of the population voted, mostly in the South. Meanwhile, in the North, jihadist violently demanded the introduction of Islamic law. The population had grown disillusioned with the presence of French soldiers (2012 to 2018), which had not stopped Jihadist violence, and with the failed implementation of the 2015 peace-making accords. A youth fringe of the population began mobilizing against the formally democratic government with year-long street protests, without being listened to. In this context, whilst the international community blindly asked for elections, senior figures in the army sided with the young protesters in the streets and overthrew the government. Siding with the protestors ensured the new regime's initial popularity, also boosted

by anti-colonial rhetoric against the French and regional institutions that condemned the coup in ways perceived hypocritical (only some unconstitutional changes are condemned).

In Burkina Faso, the trigger for the unconstitutional change was the death of soldiers in the conflict against the Jihadists. Young men movements supported the turn towards "strong men" to solve this period of crisis, and here as well the regime initially presented itself as being for the people. Soon, however, it turned against the people and closed the civic space to further political contestation and dialogue, repressing the free media and civil society.

The West interpreted the unconstitutional developments across the Sahel region mainly through the prism of its fear of Russian meddling. It is true that sectors of urban, uneducated youth across the region look at Russia with favour, as everything that the West is not. They praise Russia's conservative approach to social policies (gender and sexual orientation especially), its straight/militaristic approach to international relations (which is found to be less hypocritical than the West's insistence on democracy and human rights) and appreciate its heavy investments in the region. Instead, according to panellists and participants, the Western model of neo-liberal, small governments lost attraction in the region because it is perceived not to offer avenues for positive social and economic change. Nevertheless, the unconstitutional dynamics are overwhelmingly internal to the region, not the consequence of Russian actions.

The panellists proposed the following recommendations:

1. Regional institutions should not sanction unconstitutional regimes automatically. Sanctions often increase regimes' domestic popularity.
2. When crafting policy responses, Western development partners should be in listening mode, reflect on the real causes of coup d'états, and take stock of what worked in the region. They should not let their policy response be influenced by geopolitical aims and fears, such as countering Russia.
3. At the least, international partners should keep supporting free media, activists, and diplomatic negotiations in countries that undergo authoritarian transitions.
4. International partners should ask for elections only when the right conditions are in place. In particular, political parties should come together in dialogue before the elections to set ground-rules for democratic coexistence.
5. International partners should propose a model that goes beyond shallow democratic institutions (elections) and focus on improving socio-economic conditions and quality of governance.
6. Dealing with aggressive masculinity should be part of democracy support to tackle the connections between groups of young men fascinated with strong leaders and unconstitutional turns.

3.6 Building a Social Contract: People-centred approaches to protecting civilians

Dutch MFA, CIVIC, PAX, DCAF

The session discussed the elements that qualify programmes protecting civilians as people-centred, and identified the following elements:

1. Being responsive to the often-expressed requests to support livelihoods with SRoL programming, instead of thinking through donor's budget siloes.
2. Engaging beyond "usual suspects" and (elite) gatekeepers when designing policies and programmes, breaking down generic terms like "local," "women", "youth" into their intersections so that all legitimate demands come to the fore of policy making and programming.
3. Acting at local, provincial/subnational, and national levels of representation and governance. Actions at the local levels are important because they are relevant to conditions on the ground and to empowering people at the margins. Provincial and sub/national levels are important because here different "service providers" overlap, connections are made between local needs and national governance, and there are opportunities to act without controversial or absent national justice and security services. The national level is key for scaling up action.
4. Committing for the long-term to build trust.
5. Understanding that engaging with lived realities often means dealing with (intergenerational) trauma stemming from marginalization or violence.

3.7 Building our Peace: a celebration of sustainable community-based peace processes

PAX

Using South Sudan as case study, this session explored the potential of community-based peace processes.

South Sudan fell into civil war and communal violence immediately upon emerging from decades of civil war against Sudan, and among many problems that contributed to the spiral of violence was also the unresponsiveness of law enforcement actors to communities and their needs. Security agencies were centralized in Juba and other urban areas, hampered by limited capacity, and influenced by elite conflicts over posts and resources.

Consequently, communities took the law into their hands through local armed gangs of youth. These groups acted on revenge, as attack forces against neighboring communities, and were not held accountable for their actions.

In this context, the experiences of Wunlit (1998-1999) and Payinjiar-Yirol (2018-2019) people-led local peace processes between Dinka and Nuer communities showed that

inter-communal conflict can be solved through traditional approaches to justice if the following elements are in place:

1. **Local Ownership and Inclusivity**: People-led peace processes ensure that the affected communities own peacebuilding efforts. That requires communities to be directly involved in decision-making, and their perspectives, needs, and concerns to be considered in the process. Inclusivity of all the diverse stakeholders within the community, including women, youth, elders, and marginalized groups is a fundamental aspect.

2. **Cultural Sensitivity**: Grassroots peace processes are often deeply rooted in the cultural context of the communities involved, where local actors understand cultural nuances, traditions, and social dynamics.

3. **Active involvement and trust building**: When communities are actively engaged in the peace process, there is a higher likelihood that the resulting agreements and solutions will be sustainable. Communities are more likely to trust the outcomes when they are directly involved in the process.

4. **Addressing Root Causes**: Local actors are often better positioned to identify and address the root causes of conflicts.

5. **Flexibility and Adaptability**: Local actors can quickly adjust their strategies based on the evolving needs and dynamics of the conflict.

6. **Complementing Formal Processes**: People-led peace processes can complement formal peace negotiations conducted at higher levels.

7. **Communication through local organisations**: Effective communication between communities, through local partners, is essential to sustain the mutual confidence that the peace process has generated (through radios and mobile phones).

3.8 Diverse pathways of justice in East Africa

International Development Law Organization

The session discussed how women and other marginalized communities can be empowered inside justice mechanisms alternative to formal, State courts and tribunals.

In Kenya, alternative justice systems have been recognized with the constitution of 2010, thanks to advocacy and activism from civil society organisations (CSOs) and are now part of government policy. They are recognized as a system:

1. Which parties in a dispute can access when they agree to. So it is a voluntary mechanism.
2. Whose agreements can be adopted and given legal force by formal courts.
3. Which does not have strict jurisdiction boundaries between criminal and civil cases if the outcomes respect the Constitution.

Customary informal systems have potential to solve small land disputes and criminal cases where rehabilitation of offenders is central. Government should avoid overregulating the informal systems but should provide systems for their accountability.

The focus of CSOs activism has now moved to advocating for funding and capacity building to roll the national policy out at local level.

Other example of informal justice approaches coming from the Africa Centre of Excellence network are:

- In Zambia, community paralegals are engaged in one stop Centres for GBV cases.
- In Malawi, paralegal advisory services are working with village mediators to solve disputes.
- In Senegal, established *maisons de justice*, community-led and driven, provide justice services.
- In Rwanda, through CSOs, the judiciary set up cybercafés to promote access to digitalized justice.

Elderly males often dominate customary, informal systems. Yet, examples of women assuming leadership roles in alternative justice systems are growing, such as women becoming Islamic judges in Malesia, leading paralegal networks in Uganda, and wives of chiefs mediating in Sierra Leone. Another case comes from Somalia and Somaliland where IDLO established Alternative Dispute Resolution Centres that in the last 15 years solved 5,433 justice cases. Over this period, women submitted 50% of the cases and were included in the centres as adjudicators and community paralegals, enhancing women's trust in the ADR Centres.

Justice providers in alternative systems need to include representatives from the younger generations as well.

While customary and informal justice systems are supported, formal systems need to be strengthened as well to the point when they become an actual alternative. A key issue is to support formal courts to deliver justice in short timeframes.

3.9 Growing disconnect between elites and public: changing roles of political links in the Somali region
NIMD, Media INK, Interpeace, VNG, IDLO

Disconnection & counterproductive answers

In the Somali context we witness the disconnect and discontent between decision makers (Centre) and the public (periphery/margins). This disconnect and discontent is negatively impacting the already fragile social contract and is exacerbated by two relatively new phenomena: disinformation, and shifting roles of increasingly polarized stakeholders like traditional elders, political actors, government agencies, diaspora, CSO's, media etc.

Trying to counter this, external interventions in Somalia - whether in the form of peace operations, diplomatic mediation, diaspora contributions, or others - have not always positively contributed to peacebuilding. In some cases, (external) influential actors pursuing their own interests in Somalia contributed to prolonged crisis.

Shifting societal roles

The session explored the shifting role of intermediaries that connect (or disconnect) government and elites with the wider population.

In Somaliland, for example, **clan elders** are important intermediaries, but can also misinform their constituency. Their role has significantly changed over the past years, from respected community representatives to pragmatists driven by individual interests - which makes them easier to manipulate by influencers, diaspora etc.

Much of **civil society** (heavily intertwined with **diaspora**) have meanwhile become part of the status quo, so they can be considered as part of the conservative "centres."

The **international community** is also part of the global conservative "centre": preferring stability over large overturns, allowing trade that enlarge inequalities, and intervening militarily for geopolitical reasons.

Online influencers on social media are key players with big influence on politicians as they spread hate speech, misinformation, and fake news. This is often driven by individuals or groups with a certain interest in the economic or political spectrum of the country. While **media** can be used to strengthen the social contract, bringing the margins closer to the centres, we noted that often **(social) media** are used to incite violence (e.g. in Las Anod and Garowe).

Of course, we should not see social groups as an entity with the same goal, because reality is always more complex.

In conclusion, the Government and the elites in Somalia and Somaliland have many interlocutors, but little direct contact with the actual communities at the margins. People do not always feel comfortable or see benefits in expressing their needs through the official systems because they do not trust in the good faith or capacity of institutions and elites. A way forward can be to support the work of lower levels of government, who can show face in the communities.

Recommendations

1. To the international community, understand which actors benefit from the status quo in Somalia and Somaliland, and
2. Be critical of the diversity of interlocutors and how close they are to communities and to the "margins" that they supposedly represent. Consider Somali civil society (and linked diaspora) as a status quo actor.
3. Focus on lower-level representatives who can connect with communities.
4. Create space for more institutionalized approaches to solving past injustices (esp. in the light of Al Shabab), to not get lost in present day injustices that often have roots in the past.

3.10 Learning to mainstream SRoL in the aid-to-trade transition and business operations

Netherlands Embassy in Nairobi and IDLO

The Netherlands Embassy to Kenya includes trade in its portfolio, working to advise Dutch companies in Kenya, Kenyan companies in the Netherlands, and monitoring and improving the business environment in Kenya. Initially, its approach was from aid to trade, but now it has developed a combi approach of aid AND trade.

In a trade relationship like Kenya-Netherlands, market barriers exist that prevent all firms to trade, and business informality on the Kenyan side means that informal entrepreneurs directly bear the risk of business. Additionally, imbalances in macro-economic and financial strength exclude some Kenyan actors from international trade (even though Kenya exports more to the Netherlands than it imports).

The Embassy works to address these vulnerabilities in the Kenyan economy, and reform the Kenyan business environment. This includes facilitating digitalization processes to start and register companies, supporting better justice mechanisms to solve small trade and commercial disputes, supporting companies (with focus on Small and Medium Enterprises) with grants or subsidies to overcome market barriers, and improving how companies deal with human rights and corruption.

Inkomoko, for example, is supported by the Embassy to expand **economic and financial opportunities for refugee communities** in Turkana by providing training, loans without collaterals, and consultancy support on how to comply with government regulations. Inkomoko provides support to both host and refugee communities to avoid stoking feelings of resentment.

IDLO has worked with Dutch funding to support the **automation of case file systems**, and the **efficient functioning of commercial courts for smaller cases** to get around the backlog in mainstream courts.

International interveners and African governments have also bet on the **expansion of digital technologies** to strengthen their economies. Countries like Kenya have indeed become a centre of digitalization processes. Digitalization has however been connected to exclusion and power dynamics in technology adoption and data control. Digital tools have become a tool for controlling small firms, employees, and the people through big firms' control of data flows and databases, creating new barriers to marketing and employment. Digitalization should instead be better understood as a tool for many ends, a sandbox where things can be built and destroyed rapidly.

Implications for practice
All participants

On the third day, participants discussed the implications of KPAC23's discussions for their work. Below a summary of their takeaways.

1. Avoid always relying on intermediaries for **funding**, and transform **partnerships** via trust-building, open communication, flexible funding, and local ownership.

2. Unlearn assumptions about who holds technical expertise and what technical expertise is, and improve approaches to transfer expertise, focusing on coaching and peer to peer review.

3. **Invest more in getting programmes design right during proposal preparation and inception**. This includes strengthening targeted research to understand risks and gaps (before design and implementation), and engage communities from the start to co-create, test, and improve programme approaches. In doing so, interveners should be more sophisticated in assessing who is labelled as community or beneficiaries, in cognizance of power dynamics (refugees, IDPs, indigenous people…). In engaging with communities:

    a. Harness the power of informal social spaces (outside of official policymaking and programming spaces) and create avenues for constructive dialogues to achieve transformative partnerships, involving everyone.

    b. Be aware of cultural clashes and sensitive issues and prepare to invest much more than expected to solve these issues.

    c. Bring global debates, such as those on climate change, down to the level of communities, in the format of debates about carbon trade, deforestation, and migration routes.

    d. Use different methods, such as theatre, to speak a language that everyone understands.

    e. Invest in translation in local languages beyond the official UN languages.

    f. Pay upfront communities' time investment and knowledge during co-creation processes.

    g. Avoid creating a parallel government and power structure around the aid system.

4. When programmes are underway, donors should put in place **tools for programmes to adapt effectively**. This includes providing direct, unrestricted, and multi-year funding to foster trust, adaptability, and sustainability in partnerships. If unrestricted funding is not possible, flexible/

malleable funding could allow partners to at least navigate changing contexts.

5. Introduce a "**holistic approach**" to policymaking, programming, and funding to identify and fill gaps and incoherencies in sectoral policies and understand major interlinkages across sectors and scales. Researchers should also consider implications for better policy coherence when presenting recommendations, by looking beyond the specific policy area of their research to implications for other areas.

6. **Humanize institutions and organisations**. This requires investing in human-centred approaches that understand needs and desires of the target group. It also means introducing positive human values inside institutions and partnerships, such as honesty, transparency, kindness, and responsibility. It also means transforming donor management requirements into something that can work for country CSO organisations, and prioritizing skills and knowledge rather than procedures.

7. Remain engaged with **authoritarian regimes**:
    a. Where possible, continue supporting civil society and free media after authoritarian / unconstitutional turns.
    b. Mainstream human rights into programmes delivering economic issues.
    c. Engage groups that support authoritarian regimes to understand their reasons and worldview (for example urban youth in the Sahel region), and, where possible, problematise their support for authoritarian positions.
    d. Look into the gender dynamics of authoritarian regimes' support.

8. **Reform** the aid sector:
    a. Engage voices that are opposing development cooperation, in both partner countries. European countries are shifting to the right and are considering whether to continue with aid budgets. The development sector must therefore be able to communicate its value to voices that do not agree with an altruistic aid model. It should learn to engage local constituencies also in donor countries. In doing this, aid practitioners should be savvy of media dynamics, such as how honest, critical voices that argue for the aid system's reform can be used by conservative media to argue for stopping aid entirely.
    b. Explore the entirety of the space available for programming partners and donors to do things differently inside current legal rules. This space is often bigger than expected. Exploring it requires bringing departments together to discuss common issues, including legal and finance departments.
    c. As programming partner, be honest enough with donors for them to improve, even if it puts you in a vulnerable position. All failures

should be reported, even though that assumes/requires donors to create spaces to discuss failures safely.

    d.   Increase collaborations among INGOs.

    e.   International partners should avoid parachuting in experts. Instead, they country partners should lead conversations more.

9.   In-country CSOs should improve their capacity to advocate on behalf of the citizens in political centres (e.g., Parliament).

3.11 Translating insights to continue the conversation: key insight in the areas of lived experiences, power dynamics, interconnected risks, and engaging authoritarianism

All participants

On the third day, participants discussed which topics should be picked up during the follow-up event in The Hague. Below is a summary of the discussions.

How to place those with lived experiences in a leading role during policy making and programming.

1.   **Learn to listen to and speak with people with lived experiences of conflict and instability.** Review that HQ processes and, more generally, spaces where policy conversations take place are adequate to include people with lived experiences of conflict and instability. In doing this, organisations should be aware of their role of intermediaries and of the cultural, language, and media barriers that stand between them and those with lived experiences of conflict and instability. Storytelling and other arts-based methods are a good

choice to discuss and share experiences unencumbered by bureaucratic boundaries, technical knowledge, and professional jargon. Engagement of people with lived experiences of conflict and instability should continue throughout the whole policymaking and programming process (design, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning) not just at the beginning. Finally, accompaniment measures should be included in processes that include people with lived experiences of conflict and instability, such as Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to avoid retaliation/revenge or re-traumatization.

2. **Learn to engage communities better**. This includes visiting the communities where they are, rather than inviting representatives in artificial spaces of dialogue connected to programmes. Assess how communities use different media channels and leverage them, think about ways of engaging communities that rely on sports, arts, and cultural channels. Be mindful about the dilemma generated by topics that communities find sensitive to discuss and can generate conflict, for example feminist values underlying a Feminist Foreign Policy. For example, good to wrestle with the question: is Feminist Foreign Policy neo-colonial? Legitimacy only comes from community participation when accompanied by broad participation, ownership over the long term, and regular engagement.

How to rebalance power dynamics inside the aid system?

1. **Align with partners' priorities.** Donors should align as much as possible with partner governments' plans and allow their programming partners enough space to co-create programmes from the context up. Donors often cannot avoid coming to the partnership with a political agenda agreed in their capitals but should at least be honest about that agenda.

2. **Programming partners and donors should avoid creating a system of localized elites and parallel quasi governments** based on which communities they can reach and involve in programmes. Instead, programmes should be embedded in partner countries' policy frameworks as an exit strategy.

1. **Move forward with the localization agenda**. International programming partners should enhance the capacity of community-based organisations to understand power dynamics themselves through institutional development support. Moving forward with the localization agenda, donors should consider directly funding local organisations and shortening the sub-contracting chains. INGOs' role should change away from direct implementation of programmes, and top funding unaccountable consultants that are flown in, make their report for HQs, and leave.

3. **Improve organizations' capacity to trust partners**. Programming partners should become incentivised to prefer working in consortia rather than competing for the same pot of money. The aid system should set in place

mechanisms that allow trust across organisations, especially to trust organisations without long track records and from partner countries.

How to respond to interconnected risks?

1. **Include conflict-sensitivity and redress and grievance mechanisms in the green growth agenda.** Green growth investments can cause displacement and conflict. Examples are the policy of carbon trading and its displacement of people from traditional land uses. Global food policies that marginalize indigenous people and their food systems are another examples. Companies often conduct feasibility and viability studies, but demanding accountability and offering compensations are political questions.

2. **Include communities and their knowledge in the design of sustainable development policies.** Often, policy debates are restricted to elites. Forms of knowledge that are diluted across society, for example in indigenous communities, and their ability to support cultural shifts are overlooked. This leads to develop policies that do not resonate with the population's world views or are not as effective as could be.

3. **Connect international forums, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for climate change policy, with local interests and debates.** Otherwise, policies agreed internationally will be implemented locally without domestic and local consultations and involvements, and the implications for communities of these policies will be overlooked.

4. **Question dominant narratives.** Policy disagreements can often be traced back to the fact that some issues, for example climate change, mean different things to different people, and that different people have divergent interests on those issues. Ultimately, powerful voices risk dominating processes of harmonization from disagreements and so marginalising critical voices.

5. **Introduce policy and funding mechanisms that allow multisectoral approaches across arrays of institutions to collaborate** (from health, infrastructure, investment, or political governance). This requires integrated tools and systems that can carry out dual analyses, for example conflict and climate change analysis, and different actors that can bring their own part of the (bigger) problem to the debate. Similarly, we need tools to spot and use opportunities that emerge from interconnectedness.

6. **Use positive objectives, such as resilience, to bring multiple sectors together.** We need to move away from putting problems always central. A concept like resilience, for example, helps to put a positive approach at the centre of collaboration and allows for environmental sustainability to be organically pursued in a way that ensures people to also get by.

7. **Critically disentangle cases that require multi-sectoral cooperation from those that do not.** Evidence should guide the identification of which

problems are connected, not everything is connected (for example the link between climate change and conflict has been empirically challenged for the Sahel). Other times, the issue is not so much in the interconnectedness of policy arenas but in political objectives. Environmental Colonialism, for example, is a term that refers to an implicit practice of pushing for a "green" world in the rich world, and dumping dirty materials, production, and savings in disempowered areas.

How to respond to authoritarian trends in partner countries.

1. Stopping security assistance after a coup makes sense, but **do not leave allies of democracy and rule of law behind** when they risk their lives every day. Continue to support and share risks with them. Make space for informal methods of fund transfers to get around barriers to legal registration and funding in partner countries. Be realistic about what results can be achieved. Build room for manoeuvre for pro-democracy and peacebuilding activists at a local level. This takes time, and getting into the big topics immediately is ineffective and provokes backlash.

2. Be aware that the foreign policy of Western countries opens the flank to accusation of hypocrisy, as Western actors promote the rules based international system at times and at times transfer arms, work with dictators, and execute enemies. **Accusations of hypocrisy have traction** in the media of partner countries and influence public perceptions on the legitimacy of democratisation activists.

3. **Stop preaching for elections and start listening to the real reasons behind authoritarian and unconstitutional trends**, without confusing own geopolitical worries (for example, Russia) with the real causes of political events. Do so without legitimizing dubious de facto authorities with e.g. joint pictures. That means engaging carefully and discretely, even when partners do not share your values. Besides, sanctions and red lines can be difficult to navigate at the local level. For example, an armed group can be officially ostracised from negotiations, but cannot be ignored at the local level when working on local level peacebuilding and humanitarian access.

Chapter 4
The Hague Hub

4.12 Opening plenary – keynote discussion
Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cordaid, SAPPC

The number of democracies worldwide is at its lowest since the end of the cold war, and contrary to commonly held assumptions some authoritarian regimes are supported by a sizable part of their populations. Anti-democratic trends have taken hold in traditional democracies of the Western world, where right-wing political leaders contest the importance of international cooperation. Policymakers and programming partners must find a way forward for international cooperation in security and rule of law in this harsher public opinion environment.

Programming partners face difficult trade-offs and dilemmas in balancing their missions with policy objectives pertaining to closed societies, including migration management, border control, and trade protection. Programmatic partners will likely have to choose between losing funds and making themselves relevant to policy objectives that do not fit in the current altruistic model of international cooperation.

Preserving a space for locally led and people-centre cooperation requires improving DSH's (and programming partners') messaging to the Dutch public on the value of international cooperation. So far, DSH has safeguarded development cooperation in SRoL from competing demands of military support to Ukraine, which was routed through general budget rather than development cooperation budget. This might not work in the future.

Participants mentioned that international cooperation is always approached as a matter for internal democracy in the Netherlands, meaning that the Dutch population is seen as the legitimate population to vote on whether to continue with it or not. Perhaps, international cooperation should not always be seen as a matter of political preference for democracy to decide, but rather an act of responsibility for historical acts, such as colonialism or historical greenhouse emissions.

The panel offered the following recommendations:

1. When dealing with anti-democratic countries, focus on supporting representative local practitioners rather than dubious elections.
2. Network approaches and funding directly country CSOs are important to reach the most affected populations.
3. Connect communities with the spaces where international policy and funding are shaped.
4. The Dutch public should be reassured that investing in international cooperation is compatible with investing at home. Investing in SRoL is in the interest of the Netherlands and Europe because it contributes to a more stable world. There is also a measure of moral responsibility that comes from historical acts carried out by the Netherlands.

4.13 Building on Lived Experiences

Mareike Schomerus, Jeremiah Kinyanjui - Green String Network, An Michels
The definition of a "person with lived experience" is someone with first-hand knowledge of a certain context or situation. Thinking about lived experiences starts from the concept of "mental models", the mental representation of the world and the set of theories held by people on how the world works. Everyone has mental models. They guide policymakers, programmers, country actors, and their counterparts in their development and peacebuilding work.

Trauma is part of the mental landscape of those experiencing violence and marginalization. It changes their mindsets and leaves them with real or perceived helplessness and lack of choices, often in a way that exacerbates vicious cycles of violence.

However, "building on lived experiences" goes beyond understanding "their" traumatic past. "Building on lived experiences", instead, means embracing approaches and lenses that take into consideration the entirety of a person's mental landscape, including their social realities, context, long term effects of conflicts, and individual and collective trauma. Decoding lived experiences is an area where policymakers and programming partners still need to progress.

Progress in this area looks like individuals with direct experiences of conflict, instability, and marginalisation able to express, distil, and make sense of these experiences as inputs into policymaking and programming processes, and being recognised as agents able to direct action to solve their issues. As benefit for their efforts to decode lived experiences, policy and programming partners would be rewarded with policies and

programming that are more effective in achieving their goals, and an increased climate of trust and cooperation domestically and internationally.

We can think of the following framework to make progress on this problem:

- **Progress area 1 -** How to capture lived experiences with the right contextualization, nuances and subtilities. It requires making progress on currently available analytical and bureaucratic tools.
- **Progress area 2** - How to be relevant to these lived experiences. It requires making progress in translating lived experiences, some which could also be controversial or incompatible, in policy implications.
- **Progress area 3** – Specifically for the case of SROL policy and programmes, how to be aware/cognizant about the impact of our own mental models of violence and exclusion on the design of peacebuilding programs.

Green String Network (GSN) has developed an approach that considers the interconnectedness of individuals and communities, exploring the ways in which trauma and healing-centred interventions impact not only the individual, but also the community. In GSN's approach, communities play a pivotal role in co-creating the programme and implementing it, leading to holistic healing of both individual and collective trauma. In this, communities must engage and collaborate with local institutions (for example local administration, police, and prison wardens). This engagement establishes a feedback loop between communities and institutions, creating truth-telling and joint healing-centred initiatives.

To further efficacy and be culturally and contextually appropriate for the communities they serve, GSN uses culturally grounded solutions, like water colour paintings and storytelling to promote community mental health and wellbeing.

Nevertheless, healing-centred, trauma-informed, and lived-experiences-based methodologies are still underdeveloped and scarcely integrated in justice mechanisms.

Recommendations

1. Interveners should allocate more resources to trauma-informed and lived-experiences informed approaches.
2. Mental Health Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) is one of the approaches that helps to better understand mental landscapes influenced by trauma.
3. Engagement with people with lived experience of conflict, instability, and marginalisation should happen throughout the whole process of programme design, implementation, and MEL.
4. Equity should be the goal and co-creation the expected method for involving people with lived experiences of conflict and instability. That includes recognizing and meeting disparities in power to ensure safe space and meaningful participation.

5. Interveners should be aware of the risks of exploiting/tokenizing lived experiences and put efforts into avoiding re-traumatization and revictimization.
6. Integrating people with lived experiences of conflict, instability, and marginalisation and people who experienced trauma requires establishing multidisciplinary communities of practice and programme teams.
7. The practice of MHPSS would benefit from developing standards and distilling good practices.

4.14 Working in contexts of authoritarianism

IDLO and International IDEA

The session explored three contexts that experienced a closing civil society space: Burkina Faso, Myanmar, and the Philippines, and the role that civil society and political movements can play in them.

In the post-coup d'état context of **Burkina Faso**, the Government does not allow opposition and has mobilized the population for military service, leading directly and indirectly to human rights violations. Now that everyone is armed, soldiers keep their arms when they desert, and repression has led to human rights violations. The Burkinabé Commission for Human Rights had to adapt to this context. It focused on building the case with the new military government and judiciary for respect of human rights, but it needs to be careful about the content of its communication to avoid backlashes. Meanwhile, part of civil society and the media supports the unconstitutional turn and the repression, and spread misinformation and disinformation.

In the **Philippines** of the Duterte's administration, CSOs continued to defend the rule of law by:

1. Compiling evidence for crimes on victims' behalf.
2. Documenting violations of human rights by police and other security forces for the case pending in front of the International Criminal Court.
3. Questioning the constitutionality of laws and policies, such as for extending martial law in Mindanao.
4. Lobbying with Congress for laws that protect human rights, even though the chance of the law passing was limited.
5. Engaging in international human rights mechanisms.

After the coup d'état, the non-violent movement for democratic **Myanmar** has remained active in and outside Myanmar. The Movement campaigns with the international community for clear condemnation of the regime. It asks for support that makes sense in the unusual circumstances of Myanmar (for example, support that is not tied to an organization being registered in Myanmar because that is now impossible for democratic civil society), and that follows the aspirations for the future of the young people of Myanmar.

The panel suggested that international partners can keep working in authoritarian contexts by:

1. Equipping people with skills, including activists and those among government staff that think that due process should be maintained.
2. Offering support against surveillance and repression of activists and journalists by government forces.
3. Supporting mechanisms for reporting and addressing human rights violations, even when they are housed in government agencies.
4. Covering events in the country through international media and support for local free media.
5. Fighting disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech on social media.
6. Including gender responsive reforms in the work of democratic activists, to fight the appeal of "strong men" on the population.

4.15 People centred approaches to SRoL

Pax, HiiL, and International Alert
This session's goal was to translate the 'buzzword' of People Centered Approaches (PCA) to concrete practices.

In general, applying a PCA means strengthening (capacities to provide and access) justice and security services that are built on people's needs and evidence. Justice provision is guided by and held accountable to citizens. A PCA makes SRoL work and interventions more responsive, effective, and efficient, contributing to peaceful solutions to and prevention of conflicts. For development cooperation, a PCA is therefore about improving interventions and their legitimacy.

PCA requires donors and INGOs to:

- **Improve their understanding of the actual needs of the people**. Participants advocated for a "veil of ignorance" when acquainting oneself with a context or community. External actors must ask questions, instead of providing answers and making assumptions. Practically, one can combine quantitative data like surveys with qualitative community validation and should check and build on what others have tried or researched before (to keep research fatigue to a minimum).
- **In the process of identifying such needs, true PCA creates more space for encounters between rights holders, smaller organizations, and bigger international actors.** To allow these encounters to work well, interveners working with PCA should invest heavily in translation and conflict sensitive approaches. It should also let policy and funding decisions be made beyond

HQ levels. Finally, it should also bridge the gap between grassroots organizations' needs and initiatives, and the funding and policies of donors and INGOs.

- **PCA solutions are often hybrid solutions that bring together multiple forms of governance and institutions.** An example of the value of being people centred rather than institutions centred is a one-stop-shop for Gender Based Violence, from where one can be referred to formal and informal justice mechanisms, as relevant to address the specific case. A PCA often carries a hybrid feature, mixing work of formal and informal institutions, because they are not beholden to institutions per se. They mix and match institutions in a way that makes sense for the right holders and communities.
- **PCA includes an agenda to "humanize" institutions.** A PCA also works to 'humanize' formal and informal institutions as a collection of individuals with specific needs and ambitions, and to build their capacity to understand and meet the needs of the individuals for whom they are working.

4.16 Closing and takeaways

KPSRL, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The session opened with three policy statements that participants could vote in favour of or against.

The first statement suggested that donors and programming partners should reserve a minimum percentage of funding for country partners. The majority of participants

was in favour of this statement, nuancing it with the insight that the minimum should be set at a sufficiently high level to constitute progress from current practice.

Instead, opinions were mixed on the second statement, whether localization is the right way forward for policy and programming. Some agreed, but some mentioned that research into the effectiveness of localization reforms should dictate whether localization is indeed the way to go. Others mentioned that localization is a western frame that is not recognised nor shared in many partner countries.

Most participants, finally, were against the third statement, that mental health should always be integrated in SRoL programming. The reasons given hinged on risks of tokenism and of doing harm through re-victimization. Participants proposed that mental health should always be considered at the design phase but only integrated in programming if it makes sense in the context and enough resources are available for it.

The insights below emerged from the open discussion that followed.

1. Leaders in organisations should create the space for individuals within their organizations to encounter, discuss, and translate the needs and aspirations of the communities they work with into practical changes for programming and policymaking.
2. Everyone should be aware of how mental landscapes, assumptions, and prejudices are ingrained in language and ideas, and of how these block the sector from truly cooperating across institutional and organizational boundaries. On the part of programming partners, they should honour with honesty and openness the pledge of the Dutch MFA of being an open-minded donor. On the part of the Dutch MFA, the ambition of being an open-minded donor means that programming partners that put themselves in a vulnerable position through honesty about realistic ambitions and results should be rewarded with a cooperative reaction.
3. The KPSRL network should learn to better articulate the sense of solidarity that is at the heart of international cooperation: "wanting for others what you have been able to have."

Other important takeaways of the Conference were the:

1. Importance of including lived experiences in policy.
2. Need for INGOs and MFA headquarters to work in a more inclusive manner.
3. Need to keep spaces open for human rights defenders and prevent further degradation of human rights in authoritarian contexts.
4. Need to professionalize reporting and communication of results with the Dutch Parliament and Public.
5. Need to bring lived experiences and stories at the international level.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Next Steps

Conclusion

KPAC23 posed the question of how to heal the divide between Margins and Centres in SROL policymaking and programming. Having reviewed the discussions that originated from this question, it is now possible to propose an answer.

Unhealthy dynamics between Margins and Centres of SROL policymaking and programming can be healed through the inclusion of those with lived experiences of conflict, instability, and marginalisation in policymaking and programming processes, through the ability to respond to people's needs as close to the micro/individual level as possible, and through the reform of the aid system and partnerships towards a locally led approach to development.

From this central answer more detailed insights follow:

- Policymakers and programming partners need holistic and integrated approaches to respond to people's needs that mix sectors and institutional

mandates. This involves methodologies to work across levels of governments, with informal institutions, and across sectoral agencies.

- Policymakers and programming partners need to expand the definition of knowledge and evidence to include lived experiences of conflict, instability, and marginalisation, and to advance on methodologies available to collect, understand, and integrate lived experiences at policy-level.
- Everyone needs to understand the root causes of disagreements on policy issues, including the mental models that others are using, and ensure that debates across policy positions are productive rather than destructive.
- Policymakers and programming partners need to understand the root causes of dissatisfaction with liberal democracy models and to continue partnerships from the bottom up in authoritarian contexts.
- Programming partners need to continue discussing the practicalities of the organizational reforms needed for locally led development approach, including planning, partnerships, funding instruments and financial control, learning, and adaptive management.

This answer is applicable in all policy issues, ranging from climate change policy, gender responsive programming, protection of civilians, community-based peacebuilding, access to justice, aid and trade, countering hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation, and democratization interventions.

Continuing the discussions in 2024
The 2024 thematic headline of the KPSRL is at the intersection of People-Centred Approaches and the Locally Led Development Approach, allowing discussions on these two topics as priority for 2024.

1. Under the topic of locally led development approach, a key open question is: which LLD reforms are effective in bringing about change as variously defined as development results (at local level and at national scale), equality, or organizational effectiveness.
2. Regarding PCA, methodologies remain to be developed to understand, integrate, and translate lived experiences of conflict, instability, and marginalisation and connected mental landscapes at policy and programming levels. Work on social cohesion and polarization will continue under this roof, exploring the mental landscapes that are at the root of the most virulent policy disagreements.
3. The intersection of PCA and LLD seems a useful place to search for policy improvements for more just social contracts, because it combines understanding of and responding to people's needs with empowering people to participate in the search for solutions.
   a. The Dutch election of November 2023 made more urgent the need to explore the interplay between locally led and people centred

> international cooperation in the SRoL sector and the Dutch national interest.
>
> b. Work on responding to authoritarian trends will continue in this vein as well. Authoritarian regimes include those who work ostensibly for the people but without involving them, so without being locally led, and those who co-opt local elites into regimes that do not deliver for the people, so that are not people centred.

Dedicated learning events and stock-taking of findings will continue to explore PCA and LLD in 2024.

Development of a joint policy statement

KPAC24 will close with the identification of a joint policy statement outlining consensus area and implications on people-centred and locally led approach to development cooperation in SRoL.

The detailed methodology is still to be defined. The Secretariat is considering a write shop at the end of the programme of KPAC24, during which participants develop formulations of the joint statement. Once enough statements are completed, participants will be invited to vote for their preferred one, after which the most popular statements will be refined until a consensus is reached.