

Security and Rule of Law and Building Back Better: Why localization matters in promoting inclusive and sustainable development in a post-COVID world

Online Discussion January 28th, 2021

Key Takeaways

On January 28th, 2021, CARE Nederland, Mercy Corps, the Netherlands Food Partnership, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law, convened development practitioners and implementers, researchers and policy makers to discuss the localization agenda, its key principles and how it can promote inclusive and sustainable recovery. The following points are the most important takeaways from the discussion.

1. Localization in a post-COVID world: why does it matter?

- COVID-19 has nations and governments all over the world operating in a context of radical uncertainty, facing difficult trade-offs between health, economic and social challenges. The pandemic can no longer be referred to as simply a health crisis, as it has exposed inequalities in the systems and has revealed enormous disparities in our society.
- Programming and policy responses to this crisis carry the potential to give a different shape to societal and institutional dynamics. However, it cannot be presumed that such responses will necessarily bring positive shifts towards equality. Potential interest-based allocation of resources could re-enforce inequality, polarization and division of societies.
- Fighting inequalities is a complex issue that demands deliberate, pro-active inclusive and multidisciplinary action to improve local resilience, dependent on extensive context analysis and long-lasting partnerships of trust.
- Viewing the COVID-19 epidemic as not only a humanitarian or development crisis, but rather an intersection between both that requires a long term recovery plan led by the local actors who are most impacted is crucial. Re-framing the COVID-19 crisis into a catalyst that **prioritizes localization in the governance of long term funding** is required to reduce poverty, fight inequality, prevent conflict, and promote stability.

2. Meanings, perspectives and principles of localization

- Localization is increasingly recognized as a priority within the humanitarian, development and peace related interventions, but lacks definition/understanding of what it means in practice. There is progress, but until now this is more theoretical and policy based, than applied in practice.
- Local organizations are often still trapped in the role of implementing agency (Local partners are merely seen as implementers, not partners or experts). Participation is increasing, but roles are not changing. Ensuring that local organizations are not only participants, but also involved in design and decision making is crucial and involves:

1. Shifts in the balance of power, changing perspectives and prioritizing local voices.
 2. Continued engagement with local actors for deep and contextual understanding of issues.
 3. Ensuring sustainability by amplifying local voices.
 4. Providing opportunities for local responses and actions.
 5. Strengthening resilience capacities, local ownership and drive
- The majority of actors acknowledge that progress on localizing will mean shifts in power, as well as changes to funding processes, systems and requirements to enable the systematic consideration and strengthening of local systems and structures.

3. Challenges of implementing localization

- Although there appears to be renewed focus on ‘localization’, it is not clear how this differs from similar previous efforts which were aimed at building local systems, empowering and strengthening the capacity of local actors and prioritising local voices.
- Focusing on localization may limit the extent to which appropriate scale can be achieved.
- It is not easy for local actors to move beyond implementation end of the programming chain. (For example, local NGOs have little autonomy)
- It is not clear how ‘transfer of power’ could be achieved and its implications. It is not clear how structure has been in place for a long period can be reformed.
- Despite progress that has been made, influencing changes at the system level is difficult and it is not clear how this is to be achieved or how it would look like.
- Concrete capacity and organisational development remain are yet to be adequately addressed.
- What is defined as ‘local’ (such as actors and status) is heterogenous and vary by size, content and capacity.

4. Strategies to move forward the localization agenda

- All humanitarian actors should recognise the need for localization, and agree on clear measurable and shared priorities. One way is to use resilience as a unifying principle.
- Donors should work for predictable funding and work with local structures. It is also important to develop and broaden the local funding of initiatives to reduce the dependency on external funds.
- Enhancing the visibility of local actors and ownership through lobbying and advocacy and meaningful engagement is crucial.
- Investing in capacity building of local actors is vital and building a strong civil society is essential. One way is to identify and provide direct support to local actors to advocate for change.
- Establishing and building strategic partnerships and alliances between local stakeholders, regional and international agencies is imperative.
- Reshaping the of the humanitarian and development aid set up to engender changes in power relations, coordination of humanitarian actors, enhance inclusivity within the NGO establishment is critical.