

Report: Localized SRoL Support In A Multipolar World

Friday 21 October 2022, 09:30 – 11:00

IDLO: Hofweg 9-E, The Hague

Highlights

- With the Annual Conference (KPAC22) fresh in the minds, KPSRL organized a side event on 21 October with its Advisory Committee (AC), Consortium Partners (CP) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to explore the ways in which, while operating in a multipolar context, Western donors position their SRoL work in a localized way.
- It is a good development that the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector is increasingly aware of its biases, language and excluding processes – showing interest to ‘unlearn’ these problematic patterns:
 - A next step could be to monitor progress in that regard.
 - Participants noted that in discussions on localization, the role of the state is increasingly overlooked.
- For many reasons, the INGO or intermediary will keep on playing a key role in SRoL efforts. It is important to reimagine their role and the concept of ‘partnerships’.
- When talking about ‘reimagining social contracts’, there is a need to distinguish different phases of the social contract better and what support is needed in those phases. International actors are better at supporting some phases than others.

Summary

On Friday 21 October, KPSRL organized a side event to its annual conference (KPAC22), capitalizing on the in-person presence of the AC in The Netherlands, together with the MFA. The goal was to explore the way Western donors position their SRoL work in a localized way, while in a multipolar context. This entailed how to combine a normative (e.g. human rights) and an impact-driven (needs-based and efficiency-oriented) agenda smartly and subsequently linking localized efforts with national peace processes and reforms.

Renegotiating social contracts

Participants expressed appreciation for the way the theme of **reimagining social contracts further opened up the conversation about local leadership, clashes of worldviews and concepts like trust**. Two critical notes however were that (1) the emphasis on localization and horizontal social contracts still includes **too little room for discussions on the role of the national governments**, therefore still missing a more political part of the conversation by only focusing on technocratic problem-solving or bottom-up initiatives and (2) there are still **tensions to be explored between justice (human rights) and peacebuilding (trust and norm setting)**. In short, a balanced approach in simultaneously building community resilience and strengthening institutions is needed.

In a similar vein, participants noted the positive development of the SRoL sector becoming more aware of its own biases, positionality and power dynamics – with the intention of ‘unlearning’ harmful habits. A next step would be to concretely **start monitoring progress on topics like localization and equal partnerships, as well as start budgeting for innovative funding schemes and the creation of opportunities to stop and jointly reflect**.

During KPAC22, many sessions shed different lights on the concept of social contracts. Participants indicated this is yet to be brought together. It could be worthwhile to **further distinguish different phases of a social contract and the role the international community (IC) can play in them** – especially as the IC has difficulties providing support during those phases where things seem to be going ‘in reverse’.

The role of youth was stressed again; they are the ones that can do this ‘reimagining’ of social contracts best and they play a lead role in flipping the power within the sector. Besides from listening to youth’s needs in FCAS and involving them in the solutions, organizations can be more aware of the untapped potential of youth everywhere throughout the sector – also within their own organizations.

The role of intermediaries

Although progress is made in (discussions on) localization and equal partnerships, the MFA indicated the political and practical reality that **the role of intermediaries will remain important**. It is simply impossible for large donors to manage a multitude of small, local contracts, while vice versa smaller organizations cannot deliver on the Parliament’s checks and balances. At the political level, the position of a formal actor such as MFA makes direct funding risky for the Ministry itself (directly linking to volatile situations and actors without all expertise of that context) and the partners involved (linking to foreign governments while civic space is shrinking).

It is therefore important for a donor to **keep asking partners about their vision on localization**; an existential conversation that can only take place in a partnership where learning is valued as much as accountability. There are plenty of **country or sector specific toolboxes for increasing local leadership** out there that take the role of intermediaries into account.

There should however be more **innovative ways to fund smaller organizations, that fall in-between small seed funding grants and big development tenders**. Embassies can play a role at country level to more directly convene and support smaller organizations, whereas regional embassy hubs could coordinate for a stronger impact (due to the sum of smaller parts and links to national or regional level diplomacy) on the one hand and synthesizing needs and lessons towards HQ on the other.

As mentioned before, we should not think that localization or ‘building on local resilience’ only means working on more equal footing with smaller organizations. **Building on local resilience is also applicable to institutional levels**, supporting an institution’s roots in society and the social tissue; an area of work that could link local initiatives to national level progress.