



Let's talk about localisation in peacebuilding: Are we moving towards a radical transformative agenda or is it just more of the same?



Author: [Thania Paffenholz](#)

The localization agenda has reached the peacebuilding field. In this blog I am asking the question if the localisation agenda can be the next local turn in peacebuilding. Is it an agenda that offers truly transformative change or is the agenda mainly moving us towards technical questions about aid delivery to local organisations?

When I first started working on our latest research article *Toward a Third Local Turn: Identifying and Addressing Obstacles to Localization in Peacebuilding*, with my colleagues [Philip Poppelreuter](#) and [Nick Ross](#), I was not aware how prominent the localisation topic is in the development and humanitarian sector. It is only recently that we have begun to talk about it in the peacebuilding field.

What we see happening now are slow openings towards a localised approach to peacebuilding: We see that donors are emphasizing localisation – not only by paying lip service to the countless normative frameworks that have embraced the agenda, but by trying hard to find ways to practise the agenda in particular when it comes to finding modi to funding local actors more directly. However, a truly transformative localisation agenda is still far away. So, how come implementation is so hard?

In essence, what is slowing down implementation, is the tension between a technical, a localisation sensitive and a localisation transformative approach.

A **technical approach to localisation** centers around how aid can be directly delivered to local organisations without reducing accountability mechanisms. While this is an effective way of reaching local stakeholders, it risks becoming a technical undertaking about delivery modi without changing the underlying causes of why the aid system is in need of localisation in the first place.

The next level is a **localisation sensitive approach** that goes further and wants to address some of the systemic issues, namely to change the way funding flows from international to locals have been institutionalised in a colonial way of power and control. We already see steps in the right direction: Philanthropies and some bilateral donors have started to give direct support (institutional and project) to local organisations bypassing the international intermediaries.



A sensitive approach to localisation is a great step in the right direction, however it is still not a sufficient transformative approach that addresses all dimensions of the colonial way the aid system is built and structured.

In our new article we discuss these obstacles and present ideas for alternatives. We come to the conclusion that small progress has been made with some concrete and effective projects and practices, however true progress on a transformative localisation agenda is still far away.

Here are a couple of insights from the article shedding light on why that is and what a truly transformative localisation agenda might look like.

→ **The production of peacebuilding knowledge mimics old patterns of colonial relationships.** Local researchers typically carry out data collection and are mentioned in acknowledgements, while international researchers set the agenda, publish and receive credits.

A transformative approach would entail that peacebuilding academia embraces new partnerships and research designs and enforces Global South research corporation. For example, the Open Society Foundations network connects think tanks in Africa, with the goal of developing African research agendas that contribute to addressing African challenges by African scholars as well as global challenges from an African perspective. The Carnegie Foundation has a programme to enhance African scholarship.

→ **The fundings streams for peacebuilding are still controlled by a small number of international actors.** Local peacebuilding actors continue to depend on external donors and this incentivizes local peacebuilders and development practitioners to tailor their practices, missions, and activities to what they think international actors want to hear.

Adapting a transformative localisation agenda would mean to promote access to flexible, long-term institutional funding. This would help to mitigate the competition for financial support among local actors, curtail the prevalence of short-term, project-based funding and guarantee local actors planning security.

→ **Very strict accountability requirements, with which local actors often struggle to comply, is still the norm in funding for peacebuilding.** This promotes homogenized tools and language as well as uniform technical knowledge that international peacebuilders apply in all contexts. Accordingly, organizations and practitioners from the Global North have developed several peacebuilding handbooks meant to be applicable for all contexts.

However, local actors' participation in donors' service provision initiatives does not automatically enhance local agency. Rather, local actors will only develop feelings of ownership, dignity, and fair treatment when they experience their inclusion as meaningful, that is, when they have access to resources and are able to influence decision-making processes.



So far, the localisation agenda still remains to bring transformative change to the power structures within peacebuilding. A truly transformative agenda calls international actors to abandon their dominance when it comes to agenda setting, research, funding and monitoring activities, and to embrace a new role as accompanying partners to local actors.

Read [the full article here](#) and [get in touch](#) for more information about our work on a localised approach to peacebuilding.

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