How to do Localisation?
Making Global Peacebuilding and Development Policies Relevant[1]
Discussion Note

There is a growing recognition among donors and policymakers that the impact of global policies on peacebuilding and sustainable development depends on context-specific action driven by local realities, experiences and needs. Consequently, the call for the localisation of global policies has become a prominent theme in global policy discussions. However, there remains no common understanding of what localisation truly entails. While localisation takes different forms in different contexts, identifying key elements that could guide these efforts is essential to ensure that global policies have meaningful impact on the communities they serve. This discussion note intends to inform further conversations about what localisation means in practice.

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Why are global policies relevant to communities?

Global policies should serve to enhance the well-being of people and communities, particularly the most vulnerable. In efforts to do so, global policies establish universal principles, provide policy guidance and tools to advance these universal principles, ensure financial backing for their implementation, and support accountability for commitments made. In this, global policies must reach their intended beneficiaries. Localisation is essential in this process, as it ensures that the universal principles outlined in global policies are translated into actions that resonate with and meet the specific needs of local communities.

What principles underpin the localisation of global policies?

The impact of global policies largely depends on them becoming locally-relevant and -responsive. Localisation is underpinned by several key principles: 1) a certain degree of 'letting go' by development and peacebuilding stakeholders towards enabling local ownership both in terms of enabling participation and in decision-making power more generally, 2) involving local actors on equal footing[2], 2) building local strategies and plans on 'what exists', and 3) putting local needs ahead of political interests. Localisation efforts also need to be adequately supported financially and politically. When adequately resourced[3], localisation can effectively leverage the knowledge and experience of local actors, mobilise local capacities to respond to security risks and developmental challenges and build on adaptive capacities of communities.

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[1] Based on the discussion 'National Practices in the Localisation of SDG16+: Lesson Learned towards a more Transformative Global Policy' on 16 July 2024 co-organised by the Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), Permanent Mission of the Netherlands to the United Nations, and Quaker UN Office.

[2] The processes should include inclusive, meaningful and active participation of local actors.

[3] To ensure financial support for localisation, beyond the donor community, multilateral development banks and international financial institutions, such as World Bank and IMF, should restructure their operations to better work with civil society to support sustainable development, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

How to practically operationalise localisation efforts?

There are several steps that could be followed to practically operationalise localisation[4]:

STEP 1: Raising Community Awareness

Since localisation assumes that local actors participate in developing development and peacebuilding programming on equal footing with other stakeholders, sensitisation and awareness raising among communities are required to ensure that they can understand and relate to global policies.[5] Once local actors grasp and connect to global policies, it shifts their mindset, transforming them into champions of these policies in principle and in action. Increased awareness subsequently enhances their ability to meaningfully participate in the implementation of global policies.

Awareness raising requires information effectively delivered to local actors[6]. First, global policies must be accessible not only in local languages but also in simpler, jargon-free language that stakeholders without a global policy background can easily understand[7]. Additionally, participatory and interactive methodologies should be developed to help diverse groups understand the purpose and the goals of global policy agendas, as well as help them picture their roles in implementation efforts. Such methodologies could include community sensitisation initiatives, door-to-door campaigns, dance and drama performances, talking circles (platforms for dialogue between community members and authorities), village dialogues, radio talk shows, and more[8].

Participation in global fora can similarly enhance local awareness, strengthen capacities for action through learning and exchange, and open up opportunities for partnerships among various stakeholders for local action[9]. While local actors can benefit from global engagement, international stakeholders, who often lose sight of the actual on-the-ground impact of global policies, can also obtain some 'injection of energy' from these engagements.

The main entry point for localisation is through local governance structures (i.e., local councils, etc.). These structures must work with local communities to raise awareness and foster local ownership of global policies. It is then the responsibility of local governments to develop inclusive strategies for implementation and ensure inclusive implementation, with the support of relevant stakeholders including national government, donors and development partners.

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[4] GPPAC (2022). Localising Climate, Peace and Security: A Practical Step-by-Step Guidance Note for Local Peacebuilders: https://gppac.net/resources/localising-climate-peace-and-security-practical-step-step-guidance-note-local
[5] During the discussion on 16 July 2024 (see fn.1), local actors raised the fact that the SDG16+ is still not understood by the communities in many contexts.
[6] Bwire & Kumskova (2024). Participatory Governance and SDG16+ Localisation: The Case of CECORE, in DCAF (2024) The Contribution of Civil Society to SDG16 through Security Sector Governance and Reform
(pp. 62-74): https://www.dcaf.ch/contribution-civil-society-sdg-16-through-security-sector-governance-and-reform.
[7] In preparation for presenting its Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the SDG implementation progress, the government of Mexico supported efforts to translate SDG into local languages and conduct Local National Reviews. Once the local reviews were conducted and information was analysed, the VNR was first presented at the national level to gather citizens' feedback.
[8] GPPAC (2022). Localising Climate, Peace and Security: A Practical Step-by-Step Guidance Note for Local Peacebuilders: https://gppac.net/resources/localising-climate-peace-and-security-practical-step-step-guidance-note-local
[9] Bwire & Kumskova (2024). Participatory Governance and SDG16+ Localisation: The Case of CECORE, in DCAF (2024) The Contribution of Civil Society to SDG16 through Security Sector Governance and Reform
(pp. 62-74): https://www.dcaf.ch/contribution-civil-society-sdg-16-through-security-sector-governance-and-reform.

STEP 2: Conducting Community Mapping

Effective implementation of global policies requires a holistic and inclusive approach that engages all relevant actors in localisation efforts[10]. It is important to recognise that various actors such as parliamentarians; local communities; the donor community; and the UN – each have essential roles to play and are permanent fixtures in the localisation landscape Localisation assumes a certain degree of 'letting go' and transferring responsibility to local actors. This requires building relationships based on trust rather than control and addressing existing power imbalances. Developing such partnerships is a gradual process, as building trust takes time.

One of the main challenges in localisation is the lack of a clear definition of who constitutes a local actor. Local peace and development experts argue that local actors include local governments, security forces, thematic experts, local communities, traditional and indigenous leaders, women, and young people, along other actors who operate at the local level. It is important to map critical local actors relevant to the localisation of a particular global policy and to build constructive partnerships among them. This is important because these local actors are closer to emerging security risks and developmental challenges, and could respond quickly to early signs of fragility.

Once all relevant stakeholders come together on equal footing, they are able to form a coordination structure, jointly develop a common understanding of the relevance of global policies, identify objectives for the implementation of global policies relevant to their community and develop tools to achieve these objectives. Civil society organisations operating at the local level could play an active role in identifying relevant stakeholders. Mapping should not rely on a single exercise but rather incorporate a snowball sampling approach. The participation of networks of local actors is important, as these networks are already representative and accountable to their constituencies; giving them legitimacy to represent a wider range of community actors.

STEP 3: Developing Localised Tools and Mechanisms for Action

Global policies need to be implemented by means relevant in a specific community context. Peacebuilding policies often favour complex and highly-scientific approaches over context-specific solutions. This tendency stems from a bias favouring knowledge and research originating from the 'Global North', creating a knowledge elitism that perpetuates disparities in the evidence base used by decision-makers, making policy and programming unable to respond to local needs. Localised frameworks, indicators and data collection mechanisms are required to ensure that communities have concrete guidance for engagement and the necessary tools to contribute to sustainable development and sustaining peace. In Kaabong, Uganda, for example, local peacebuilders developed an indicator related to armed cattle raids as connected to the advancement of progress towards SDG 16.1 target on the reduction of all forms of violence and 16.4 on the reduction of financial and arms flows[11]. Additionally, storytelling can also be included in data collection mechanisms. Local actors, for example, have the unique knowledge to understand bird migration patterns and their impact on climate and security. Depending on the direction they fly and the sound they make, local actors

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[10] CECORE, GPPAC (2020). SDG16+ in Uganda: Progress towards Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies: https://www.gppac.net/resources/sdg-16-uganda-progress-towards-peaceful-just-and-inclusive-societies
[11] Bwire & Kumskova (2024). Participatory Governance and SDG16+ Localisation: The Case of CECORE, in DCAF (2024) The Contribution of Civil Society to SDG16 through Security Sector Governance and Reform
(pp. 62-74): https://www.dcaf.ch/contribution-civil-society-sdg-16-through-security-sector-governance-and-reform.

know that a drought is coming, impacting peace and stability in the locality.[12] Such data can then inform adequate and timely response by stakeholders responsible for and capable of responding to the risks and utilising communities' adaptive capacities. Periodic constructive dialogues can similarly ensure the flow of information between the respondents and communities in need.

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[12] Marion Akiteng (2022). Local indicators for climate security risk assessment: Learning from Uganda how to strengthen climate action and peacebuilding:
https://www.gppac.net/news/local-indicators-climate-security-risk-assessment-learning-uganda-how-strengthen-climate