



# Localisation:

Just another civil society  
buzzword?



In a recent gathering hosted by the CivLegacy Foundation, various civil society actors convened to share their insights and reflections on a study paper commissioned by the Foundation, on a study paper that had been commissioned by the Foundation, titled, *'A more sustainable and responsive approach to global development: What does capacity for local organisations mean under the localisation agenda?'* The study paper sought, among others, to critically appraise the concept of localisation, its application in the 'Global South', and its inadvertent consequences, one of which was identified as the transference of the responsibility onto already under-resourced local organisations without the attendant funds. Civil society has been accused of pursuing buzzwords in a bid of seeming politically correct without adopting the accompanying politic.

In the recent years, localisation has become a popular concept within the humanitarian and international development aid sectors. Many International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) have transplanted their offices to different countries in Africa in a bid to become 'local'. These offices, however, often employ expatriates from the 'Global North' who occupy the positions in the apex and the country staff in the rest. This is but one of the examples of uncritically applying development concepts in local communities. It has also been argued that, perhaps, these concepts are working as was intended and this intention falls short of working with communities to address the issues they face.

The localisation agenda has been criticised for its failure to address the structural issues and power imbalances within the international development aid sector. Localisation aims at 'empowering' local organisations and actors in humanitarian response efforts through 'capacity building' programs that centre traditional international development aid interventions rather than local ones. This then creates a disconnect between the communities and the local organisations given the disparity in priorities. The concept of building capacities also assumes that local organisations are incapable of addressing community concerns. The idea of co-creation with communities, local organisations and donors has emerged as a way of addressing this phenomenon.

When asked what localisation means to them, the civil society actors at the convening, the responses reflected the understanding, and indeed desire, that localisation should address issues within the aid sector like power imbalances, agency, responsiveness, meaningful participation, direct funding to communities as well as centering locally led solutions. The conversations raised many phenomena that plague the international development aid sector such as whether NGOs and local organisations are an authentic representation of various communities or whether they are simply a local extension of INGOs with a limited understanding of their issues. The participants also questioned if localisation is a new form of neo-colonisation as local civil society is usually forced to conform to Western-centric practices and structural architecture to make them palatable to the global market and receive funding. There were a number of recommendations that emerged including, local civil society adopting collective action stance against stringent funding conditionalities, communities should be centred in all development efforts, the need for institutional support rather than projectized interventions to local organisations, and, adopting a decolonial approach to international development aid.

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## OUR VALUES

**D** **DIGNITY**  
We value our common humanity  
treat others with respect, guided  
Ubuntu philosophy: I am because  
are.

**A** **AUDACIOUS**  
We are bold, original, challenge  
dominant narratives and are wil  
chart new paths.

**R** **RELIABLE**  
We are dependable, accounta  
committed to excellence.

**E** **EQUITY**  
We believe in just and equal o  
opportunities, resources, and  
civil society in its diversity.



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