COOPÉRATION CANADA

Shifting Power in International Cooperation:

Connecting the Dots

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Preface

For those of us committed to effective international assistance and global social justice, it is impossible to avoid taking stock of the challenges facing international cooperation in the third decade of the 21st century. With growing interconnected crises in ecosystems and human societies, and a fast-changing geopolitical context, the international cooperation architecture founded after World War II and expanded after the waves of independence from colonialism is being pushed to change. Traditional aid recipients are demanding a fairer international system, one that engages all countries equitably and recalibrates power relations. Shifting power in international cooperation is not optional: the tide is already rising. But this evolution should not be seen as a threat. As an international community, we should not be swimming against this rising tide but rather learning to swim with it. This is a rare window of opportunity for change. Change for greater global justice.

Canadian international development and humanitarian actors, including civil society and government, can embrace new ways of collaborating with partners and communities around the world. This requires tackling systemic issues such as racism and colonial legacies in government policies and organizational practices. We know that embracing these new ways of working will not be straightforward, especially as Canada grapples with a tight fiscal environment and rising political polarization. But inaction is not an option. Failure to change will sooner or later push us to the sidelines. It is therefore important, or rather essential, for Canadian international cooperation actors to reflect critically on their role in the international cooperation ecosystem, and the actions they must take to ensure their relevance, effectiveness and impact into the future.

The role of local actors in international development initiatives and humanitarian response, and the nature of their relationship with international actors, have been discussed for decades. In recent years, what is commonly referred to as the 'localization agenda' has become a major policy issue. The questions related to localization are generally underpinned by two main themes: effectiveness and power. On effectiveness, it is clear that local organizations, closest to the opportunities being leveraged and the challenges that are being addressed, are best placed to lead initiatives and responses – often in partnership with others – that support sustainable development and humanitarian action in their communities. The question of power, and shifting it, in international cooperation, is much more complex. Unpacking why and how we must shift power in international cooperation is the impetus behind this paper.

This paper helps connect the dots of the numerous initiatives happening globally and break down some of the complex challenges standing in the way of shifting power into possible avenues for action for Canadian actors. We at Cooperation Canada hope that this can lay the groundwork for Cooperation Canada's members, and possibly other Canadian actors, to share good practices, learn from each other's successes, and work together to operationalize concretely commitments to shifting power in international cooperation.

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Author's note

This paper uses the terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' to refer to individuals and entities operating in different contexts across the humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development spaces. We nevertheless recognize the artificial nature of this binary, which neither reflects the geography of the countries nor captures the geopolitical complexity and evolving socioeconomic landscape of the 21st century. The term Majority World, used by some cooperation actors, appears once in the text.

Contents

Figures

Boxes

Acronyms

APN — Africa Philanthropy Network

CSO — Civil Society Organization

DAC — Development Assistance Committee (OECD)

FIAP — Feminist International Assistance Policy

GAC — Global Affairs Canada

GFCF — Global Fund for Community Foundations

IDRC — International Development Research Centre

INGO — International Non-Governmental Organization

NGO — Non-Governmental Organization

ODA — Official Development Assistance

OECD — Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

MEDA — Mennonite Economic Development Associates

NEAR — Network for Empowered Aid Response

PIANGO — Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations

USAID — United States Agency for International Development

WPS — Women, Peace and Security

WVL — Women's Voice and Leadership

Executive Summary

The development-humanitarian landscape has changed beyond recognition since the 1960s, and the mainstream international cooperation system is critically lacking in the tools needed to tackle the ongoing situation of interconnected social, ecological, financial, and humanitarian crises. The very notion of development is inherently and increasingly political and contested. Around the globe, traditional recipients of international assistance are challenging the global order, demanding a recalibration of power relations, and unapologetically asserting their rights and agency. Despite decades of North–South capital flows, trust and relations between development providers and recipients are strained. Geopolitical tensions have exacerbated old fault lines and created new ones. Those tensions and contestations are at the heart of what is called the 'power shift agenda,' the focus of this report.

In seeking to connect the dots around this power shift agenda, this paper necessarily starts in Chapter 1 with a brief overview of the concept and an explanation of key terms such as 'localization' and 'locally led development.' This is essential because words matter, and language carries and reveals power. The paper thus presents the key arguments underpinning the power shift agenda – namely, the themes of ethics, effectiveness, and geopolitics.

There is a compelling argument for building a more ethical and equitable cooperation system. The vocabulary of international cooperation has for decades borne the marks of racism and colonial paternalism. Development and humanitarian practices continue to carry the double assumption that higher-income countries are best placed to assist people in lower-income countries and that their contractors are less likely to mismanage financial resources. Local actors and organizations are often branded 'high-risk' despite growing evidence to the contrary. Shifting power is therefore not only a matter of ethical principle but also supported by arguments about effectiveness: every international assistance dollar needs to be made to work as hard as possible, and promoting local ownership of assistance programs improves their effectiveness. Further, the redefinition of the global geopolitical map and the growth of new regional alliances are forcing traditional aid providers to confront their mistakes and learn to work differently.

Chapter 2 presents the power shift agenda as a coin with two faces. On the one hand, the Global North is localizing, relinquishing power as donor governments and international non-governmental organizations confront their racial biases and colonial practices. Moving along the localization spectrum is a challenging exercise, fraught with tensions. The systems transformation required to shift power is an intentional, collaborative, and painstaking process, requiring different interventions to reform culture and mindsets, modify policies and services, and alter the distribution of resources between various actors in the system. This transformation does not happen without resistance from Global North actors who wish to hold onto their established financial security and acquired privileges. On the other side of the coin, Global South actors are asserting their power along the locally led development continuum. This is not void of obstacles either, as decades of internalized oppression have entrenched dependency on external aid channels. There are thankfully increasing numbers of examples of local actors asserting their leadership and deploying innovative approaches to solve local problems.

Chapter 3 brings the global home, presenting an overview of what Canadian actors are doing to advance the power shift agenda. As is the case for other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, Canada is in a tight fiscal space, which constrains its international assistance budget. Canadian international cooperation actors are under pressure to demonstrate the impact of their international assistance programming in the context of complex geopolitics and a rising cost of living at home. Nevertheless, there are promising Canadian examples of shifting power that could be expanded to forge new ways of working and build a more equitable international cooperation system. The paper points to some initiatives taken by Cooperation Canada, its members, and the government in this regard.

More important in this paper is the way forward for Canadian actors, as presented in Chapter 4. Shifting power in international cooperation requires steadfast determination and can be operationalized by expanding the political space for decolonizing the international cooperation sector, setting targets for investment in local organizations and direct funding to local actors, or testing innovative mechanisms via prototypes of equitable partnerships. As a proclaimed feminist global leader, Canada seems to have all available levers, political and technical, at hand but is yet to make full effective use of them to truly enable a shift in power.

The international cooperation system is at a turning point. Socio-ecological crises, Covid-19, the Black Lives Matter movement, geopolitical shifts, and budgetary constraints are disrupting 'business as usual' approaches. At this pivotal moment, Canadian actors are facing a unique opportunity to imagine new ways forward and harness the power of collective action. Cooperation Canada supports the growing demands to reform the international cooperation sector's structure, culture, and practices, driven by local and international non-governmental organizations. As the national, independent umbrella organization for Canadian international development and humanitarian organizations, Cooperation Canada is well positioned to incubate a support mechanism for its members and to provide thought leadership and momentum to the power shift agenda. Challenging power dynamics lies at the heart of this agenda and is the condition we must meet to restore trust in international cooperation, as we collectively recognize the colonial history and structural racism that have for too long plagued international cooperation efforts.

1. Introduction

Transform the aid system. Reimagine international cooperation. Decolonize development. A cursory glance at debates happening in international cooperation over the past decade reveals the ubiquity of these and other related phrases alongside growing calls to address racism and colonialism. At the centre of the debates lies the issue of power and what is referred to as the 'power shift agenda,' an agenda in which traditional cooperation providers seek to localize their practices while local actors assert their agency, perspectives, and preferences. Underneath this term are layers of complexity, which this chapter attempts to explain by providing an overview of the power shift concept, defining some associated terms, and presenting the main justifications.

1.1   The concept of power shift

1.1.1   Planting the seed

The power shift concept is about addressing power imbalances in international cooperation, including by putting more decision-making and funding in the hands of local actors in places where humanitarian and development interventions happen. The idea rose to prominence during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit but in fact predates it.

Building on conversations about community development and participatory approaches in the 1960s, a seed was officially planted in United Nations Resolution 2816 (XXVI) of 14 December 1971, which called for the international community to provide assistance to countries without prejudicing individual country programs.[1] The principle of local ownership later became a core building block of effective development cooperation, as affirmed in the Paris Declaration of 2005 and the 2011 Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.

When the United Nations convened the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016, about 9,000 participants, representing governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), and private companies, collaborated to generate a myriad of commitments and references to reinforcing national and local systems, investing in local capacities, and ensuring that international assistance adequately complemented local efforts.[2] Among the major initiatives launched at the Summit was the Grand Bargain, an agreement between large donors and aid providers that aims to get more resources into the hands of people in need, including by providing 25% of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020.

1.1.2   A Summit after the Summit

Just a few months after Istanbul, in December 2016, community philanthropy organizations gathered at the Global Summit on Community Philanthropy in Johannesburg to discuss how to move away from existing top-heavy and top-down systems of international development and philanthropy.[3] In the lead-up to the Summit, the organizers used the hashtag #ShiftThePower as a rallying cry to set the tone for the meeting. Those three words became a signpost for evolving conversations on people, power, and resources, as illustrated by a rap song from Zambia (link in Box 1).

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1   United Nations General Assembly (1972). Assistance in Cases of Natural Disaster and Other Disaster Situations. Resolution A/RES/2816(XXVI), 26th Session, 1971. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/201561?ln=en
2   World Humanitarian Summit (2016). Commitments to Action. Istanbul, 23–24 May. https://agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/resources/2017/Jul/WHS_commitment_to_Action_8September2016.pdf
3   Global Summit on Community Philanthropy (2016). Why a Global Summit. Johannesburg, 1–2 December. http://cpsummit.ngo/why

Box 1. Shift the Power Zambia

Shift the Power Zambia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBvhb6wDhns

The Johannesburg Summit triggered emotional reactions, as many participants took an inward look at their core values and the impact of their work. More importantly, the Summit ignited conversations[4] about what shifting the power is and what it is not.

Box 2. Understanding #ShiftThePower: What it is[5]

#ShiftThePower means ceding decision-making power closer to the ground and focusing more on growing grassroots' ability to design their own projects. It's about doing things differently.

#ShiftThePower is leaving no one behind, appreciating that different actors have different capacities and roles to play, and finding the best point of convergence that allows us all to leverage each other's efforts.

#ShiftThePower is about realizing we can't continue doing the same things and expecting different results. It's driven by the exciting stories of change that illustrate what can happen when the inherent, global, human desire to take action on behalf of oneself and one's neighbours is unlocked.

#ShiftThePower means accountability driven by mutual understanding, honesty, long-term relationships, trust, and solidarity (and not just by log frames).

#ShiftThePower means unlocking local resources (community philanthropy), which in turn helps communities activate and flex their social muscle as engaged and active citizens with a stake in how government allocates public resources.

#ShiftThePower means expanding our horizons beyond money as the central driver of change, and placing greater value on other kinds of infinite non-financial assets and resources (knowledge, trust, networks, etc.).

#ShiftThePower means moving away from 'building capacity' as defined by external actors and requirements towards community organizing and movement-building, where 'capacity' equates to relevance, rootedness, and constituency.

#ShiftThePower means changing the language we use so it enables new ways of working and thinking, rather than constraining them, and challenging the dominance of English.

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4   Adapted from GFCF (2019). Announcing the "Pathways to Power" Symposium, London, 18–10 November: Taking #ShiftThePower to the Next Level. 5 June. https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/news/announcing-the-pathways-to-power-symposium-london-18-19-november-taking-shiftthepower-to-the-next-level/
5   Ibid.

Box 3. Understanding #ShiftThePower: What it is not[6]

#ShiftThePower is not just about where offices are (either in the Global North or in the Global South).

#ShiftThePower is not just an opportunity for Southern non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to re-position themselves for more funding.

#ShiftThePower is not just a response to declining flows of international funding.

#ShiftThePower is not driven by pride that 'we,' the Global South, can 'do it alone.'

1.2   Related terms and their background

As seen in Box 2, shifting power is tied to language, so language matters. It frames behaviour and constrains conversations within boundaries that could perpetuate unequal and oppressive relations. Language can also serve as a catalyst for collective advocacy and movement-building. It is thus important to define the key terms in this paper, drawing on the collective intelligence accumulated in the international cooperation sector.

1.2.1 Local

The term 'local' is far from a static and homogeneous category. Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partner-ships for International Assistance refers to 'local' organizations as those that are working on the ground in host countries.[7] International cooperation actors use the term 'local' to refer to local and national govern-ments; local and national non-governmental, civil society, and community-led organizations; and commu-nities themselves.[8] A broader definition even includes volunteer groups, private sector, and diaspora bodies involved in a response.[9]

Geography complicates the definition of local actors. It is generally established that an NGO coordinating activities at the international level or having an extensive network of offices in other countries is an inter-national NGO (INGO).[10] However, some INGOs set up field offices run by local staff and, in doing so, deny local actors their own independent agency or, worse, cannibalize locally driven processes by forming hybrid identities that have a leg up when it comes to fundraising and reputation. Further, the usual application of the term 'international' to Northern actors overlooks the role of entities from the Global South operating across borders (such as BRAC, Adeso, etc.), which play a major role in development, conflict, and humanitarian re-sponse in several countries.[11] Khan argues against the concept of 'local,' contending that a so-called 'Global North' entity is local to its own constituents, as much as a so-called 'Global South' entity is to its constituents.[12]

6   Ibid.
7   Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance – A Feminist Approach. www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/civil_policy-politique_civile.aspx?lang=eng
8   Baguios, A., King, M., Martins, A. and Pinnington, R. (2021). Are We There Yet? Localisation as the Journey towards Locally Led Practice. London: ODI. https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/ODI-SH-Localisation-Report-Oct21-Proof06.pdf
9   Wall, I., with K. Hedlund (2016). Localisation and Locally-Led Crisis Response: A Literature Review. https://www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/L2GP_SDC_Lit_Review_LocallyLed_June_2016_final.pdf
10   WACSI (2023). Decolonising Aid: Perspectives from Civil Society in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa. https://wacsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/DECOLONISING-AIDPERSPECTIVES-FROM-CIVIL-SOCIETY-IN-FRANCOPHONE-SUB-SAHARAN-AFRICA-1.pdf
11   Baguios et al. (2021). Are We There Yet?
12   Khan, T. (2023). Envisioning an Alternative Ecosystem for Global Development and Humanitarianism. Burwood: CHL. https://centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Alternative-ecosystem-paper_FINAL.pdf

1.2.2 Localization

Though now a ubiquitous term within the aid system, 'localization' is a politically contested concept, and its definition a perilous exercise triggering emotions and tensions. The term was coined in the 1990s, not on the premise of questioning or shifting power but rather to describe the process of adapting a product or service to a specific locale or local market.[13] Over the years, the term was coopted by international cooperation actors and mainly driven by major donors.

In the humanitarian context, according to ICVA, localization is about 'decentralizing power, money, and resources in humanitarian and development aid. It's about local actors influencing actions and making decisions throughout – with international actors (including INGOs) stepping in only if and when necessary.'[14] ALNAP defines localization as 'an ambitious and broad ranging policy agenda meant to correct historical exclusion of local actors by increasing their power and funding in humanitarian response.'[15] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) understands localization as a process of recognizing, respecting, and strengthening the leadership, ownership, and capacity of partner country civil society actors in development cooperation, humanitarian action, and peacebuilding.[16] For Global Affairs Canada (GAC), localization of international assistance is about shifting decision-making, resources, power, capacity, and project management to local partners, including national and subnational governments and/or national and local CSOs and women's rights organizations.[17]

This small sample of definitions points to a gradual act of changing the power dynamics between international and local/national actors. The common thread is that localization is a Global North-driven process, whereby Northern actors rearrange themselves for new ways of collaboration with local actors. There is an undertone in localization as Global South actors may be seen as passive and patient recipients of the discretionary goodwill of Global North actors who must consider how to engage with their Global South colleagues.[18]

1.2.3 Locally led/owned development

Locally led development is distinct from localization in that it centres local CSOs, focusing on their rights and self-defined priorities. According to Peace Direct, locally led development refers to initiatives owned and led by people in their own context.[19] While external partners may assist with resources, local people or groups set their priorities, look for solutions to contextually identified problems, and design and lead their own approaches.

13   Blackwell, N. (2023). It's Time for an Honest Dialogue about "Shifting the Power". https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/its-time-for-an-honest-dialogue-about-shifting-the-power/

14   ICVA (2021). Localization Advocacy Report. https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2022/01/DRC-EN.pdf

15   ALNAP (2023). A More Localised Aid System: Current Status Discourse Summary. https://www.alnap.org/a-more-localised-aid-system-current-status-discourse-summary

16   OECD (2023). Toolkit for Implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9ea40a9c-en.pdf?expires=1691760708&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=B41FACBA5E-A40334CC84ED792CA50AC0

17   Rao, J. (2023). Report on the Findings from the Study: Canadian International Development Organizations' Engagement with Localization. https://canwach.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EN-Localization-Study-Report-2023.pdf

18   Peace Direct (2022). Localisation and Decolonisation: The Difference That Makes the Difference. www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PD-Localisation-and-Decolonisation-Report-v3.pdf

19   Peace Direct (2020). Towards Locally-Led Peacebuilding: Defining "Local". https://www.peacedirect.org/towards-locally-led-peacebuilding-defining-local/

1.2.4 Power

Power is a big word.

The International Civil Society Centre used the following definition of power during its Power Lab: 'Power is the ability and capacity to make and execute relevant decisions.'[20] This definition recognizes formal and informal manifestations of power, each with their own ability to shape priorities and decisions over resources and processes. Shifting power is not limited to a 'North' vs 'South' approach to power imbalances but can apply to any country in any region or income category. One thing is certain, as stated by Frederick Douglass, shifting power is rarely a peaceful exercise.

<p align="center">**"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will."[21]**</p>

1.3   The case for a power shift

There are three drivers for a power shift in the international cooperation sector: ethics (connected to values), politics (stemming from ongoing world events), and effectiveness (linked to the long-term sustainability of cooperation initiatives).

1.3.1   The ethical case

The power shift agenda is rooted in, and propelled by, a moral imperative to dismantle the power asymmetries and paternalism that have shaped the international assistance system, with intergenerational effects in both the Global North and the Global South. Unfortunately, many international cooperation actors remain blind or short-sighted to the systemic practices that did and continue to alter the resource base and sense of identity of Global South communities. It is necessary to examine decolonization and racism if we are to unpack the ethical case for power shift.

1.3.1.1   Decolonization

The original meaning of decolonization refers to the process of a state withdrawing from a former colony. European colonizers justified and enabled the extraction of human and natural resources to support the industrialization and enrichment of their countries. Upon flag independence waves in the 1950s and 1960s, aid policies were developed and framed as solutions to problems in former colonies. Poverty and poor communities thus became the clientele of many charitable organizations and the centrepiece of a Eurocentric development agenda.[22]

Peace Direct points out a secondary meaning of decolonization – that is, the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies about the superiority and universality of Western thought and the Western socioeconomic model.[23] The international cooperation sector has widely adopted this model, which is linear, rational, material, and commodification-driven, and contains entrenched stereotypes against non-Western actors. The sector is now being called to decolonize – that is, to learn to operate in a space where many worlds fit, and many types of actors have knowledge and agency. Such learning cannot happen if developed countries are the ones defining what decolonization means for what some call the Majority World[24] (developing countries) because this would simply constitute and perpetuate colonization.[25]

20   International Civil Society Centre (2022). Accelerating Inclusive Power Shift: An Aggregated Benchmarking Study. https://icscentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ICSCentre_Aggregated-Benchmarking-Study_December.pdf
21   Douglass, F. (1857). Speech on "West India Emancipation". Canandaigua, NY, 3 August. https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1857-frederick-douglass-if-there-no-struggle-there-no-progress/
22   GFCF (2023). Who Pays the Piper? A Synthesis of Decolonising Aid Conversations. https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/WhoPaysThePiper_ASynthesisReport.pdf
23   Peace Direct (2021). Time to Decolonise Aid. Insights and Lessons from a Global Consultation. https://peaceinsight.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/PD-Decolonising_Aid_Report_Second_Edition.pdf
24   Chukwuezi, D. (2022). Majority World Diasporas. https://www.scienceopen.com/document_file/ea642831-8673-460c-9f11-c5e9654ac9b5/ScienceOpen/264_Chukwuezi_EVA22.pdf
25   Alam, S. (2007). The Majority World Looks Back. https://newint.org/features/2007/08/01/keynote-photography

Decolonizing in earnest means challenging stereotypes and changing norms around global racial and knowledge hierarchies. This includes challenging the myth of the 'white saviour' that is unfortunately still visible in some INGO fundraising campaigns, practices, and attitudes vis-à-vis black and brown local partners painted as needy and less capable.[26] This is why decolonization cannot be divorced from addressing racism that lurks in plain sight in international cooperation.

1.3.1.2   Anti-racism

Because colonial masterminds attributed colour to people in contrast with a presumed norm of 'whiteness,' anti-racism is intrinsically linked to ethical arguments about shifting power, even more so since the Black Lives Matter uprising ignited by the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination in that it is not an act but a system institutionalizing advantage and oppression based on race.[27]

The headline of an executive summary of a 2021 BOND report is unequivocal: 'Racism still matters in development.'[28] The report shows how racism affects how staff get in (recruitment), get on (organizational cultures), and get up (career advancement) in the international cooperation sector, and how this trickles down to programs and interactions in countries of intervention. Sadly, as the BOND report states, 'social justice organisations are perfectly capable of reproducing the kinds of oppressive practices inside their organisations that they purport to transform outside of them.' In fact, locally led development can potentially happen without decolonization if organizations only replace white bodies with brown bodies by putting nationals into positions expatriates once occupied. As stated above, decolonization requires challenging the norms established around racial and knowledge hierarchies.

1.3.2   The political case

The 2023 OECD Development Co-operation Report[29] offers a critical look into the changing political economy of aid. It acknowledges the disconnect between the development cooperation system engineered in the 1960s and current geopolitical realities, taking stock of growing contestations against the mainstream development model and traditional aid providers. Contending that today's challenges offer an opportunity for change, the OECD proposes avenues for keeping development cooperation relevant and impactful. Two of the four proposed avenues are directly linked to shifting power – first support locally led transformation in partner countries then rebalance power relations, finding common ground for partnerships (see Figure 1).

26   WACSI (2023). Decolonising Aid.
27   Cooperation Canada (2021). Anti-Racism Framework for Canada's International Cooperation Sector. https://cooperation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Antiracism-Framework-3.0-5.pdf?_ga=2.24032250.1712957603.1697571336-1460989847.1670359353&_gl=1*6vawbf*_ga*MTQ2MD-k4OTg0Ny4xNjcwMzU5MzUz*_ga_R8PSG77VMS*MTY5NzcyNDIwNi4yNTcuMC4xNjk3NzI0MjA2LjAuMC4w*_ga_T57QF9X2RM*MTY5NzcyNDIwNi-4yMTMuMC4xNjk3NzI0MjA2LjAuMC4w
28   BOND (2021). Racism, Power and Truth: Experiences of People of Colour in Development. https://www.bond.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/bond_racism_power_and_truth.pdf
29   OECD (2023). Development Co-operation Report 2023. Debating the Aid System. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/development-co-operation-report-2023_f6edc3c2-en

Figure 1. Ways forward for the aid system: Anchors for a power shift[30]
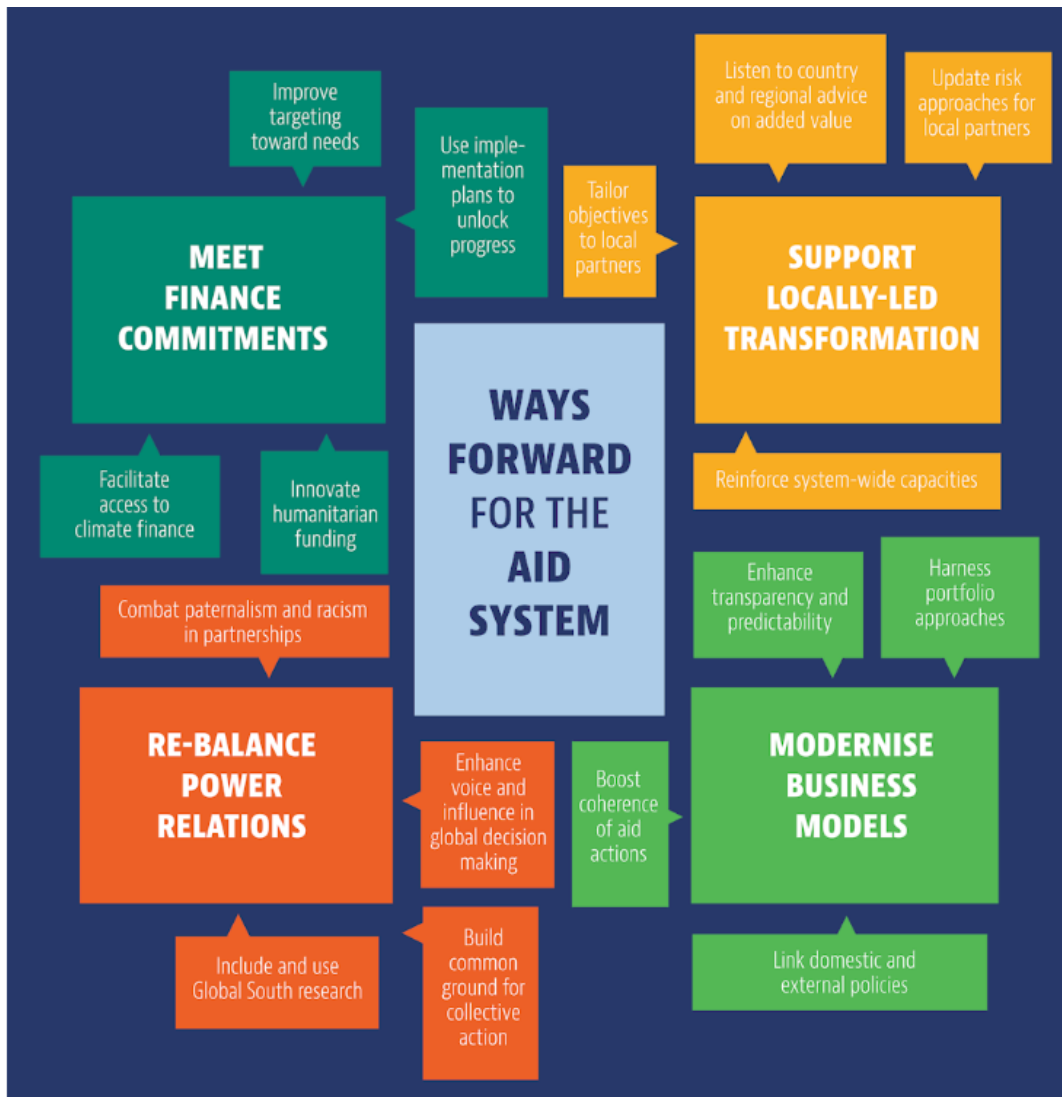
Note: Red highlights added by the author.

1.3.3 The effectiveness case

Effectiveness, or value for money, is in some corners the best-selling argument in favour of shifting power. Few would deny that the international cooperation system has grown into a technocratic aid delivery industry that prioritizes certain results and value for money over structural long-term changes. The 2023 OECD Development Co-operation Report admits that official development assistance (ODA) will not solve all development challenges because growing and competing demands are stretching national budgets to breaking point. OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries provide 81% of assistance funding through the United Nations and a substantial portion to INGOs that have over the years become bigger and more corporatized. This has led most INGOs to be more dependent on international donors, and less accountable to the local communities they purport to serve.[31]

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30   Ibid.
31   Peace Direct (2021). Time to Decolonise Aid.

In the meantime, and in contrast, many local actors manage to use limited resources to design and implement initiatives that often bring more value for money because those actors have contextual knowledge, legitimacy in many cases, and accountability (they are not going anywhere). Supporting grassroots efforts therefore has the potential to reinforce community resilience and increase the long-term benefits of interventions. This is by no means about romanticizing local actors, as no community is ever monolithic and insulated from power asymmetries. This is rather about recognizing that, in each geographic context, individuals, groups, and CSOs have the agency, knowledge, and social capital needed and necessary to define, design, and implement initiatives to improve and restore their well-being. It is also about acknowledging past mistakes and the evidence of too many projects failing or causing harm for not engaging with the complexity of the local political economy. Further, it must be recognized as each country's right and obligation to define its evolution, whether they appear to do it correctly or not.

Box 4. The Covid-19 experiment

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted ways of working and exposed structural inequalities in the international development sector. Yet with unprecedented challenges came real opportunities to accelerate the power shift. With lockdowns throughout the world and expatriate (expert) staff either returning to their countries or being confined at home, proximate actors became frontline responders, addressing Covid-related needs with innovative and contextually suitable solutions such as customizing mobile applications to track Covid-19 cases, crowdfunding to make high-quality masks, developing affordable testing, etc. Social entrepreneurs and community actors demonstrated innovation, resourcefulness, and effectiveness to meet local needs with local means during the pandemic. An OECD policy paper reports that solutions in low- and middle-income countries filled gaps in response, made the response more relevant and appropriate, enhanced efficiency and effectiveness, catalyzed new relationships, and built a sense of ownership.[32]

In addition to meeting immediate needs, local organizations stepped in to conduct field research and provide academics and policymakers with much-needed data. This defeated the lack of capacity argument that is too often bandied about to justify reliance on external expertise and highlighted that the real issue was probably lack of opportunity. Some say that the pandemic made it possible to see that 'normal' was the problem.[33]

It is important to emphasize that the effectiveness argument should not be subsumed under cost-effectiveness, at the risk of pitching local actors as cheap sub-contractors, even though directly funding crisis-affected people is generally more cost-efficient. What is at stake is ensuring long-term benefits and meaningful changes in areas of intervention. This is something that traditional aid interventions, following logical framework approaches borrowed from United States military circles,[34] and transposed to communities around the world, have too often failed to deliver. Worse, there are numerous examples of the ill effects of traditional 'big aid' models where years of international aid dumped into a country have ended up distorting the local economy, sustaining a small clan of elites, and impeding local resource mobilization efforts.[35]

32   Ramalingam, B. and Kumpf, B. (2021). COVID-19 Innovation in Low and Middle-Income Countries: Lessons for Development Co-Operation. OECD Policy Paper. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/19e81026-en.pdf?expires=1691162028&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=14D11547233ED-8CBB0DC54E59AF87784
33   Peace Direct (2021). Time to Decolonise Aid.
34   Baguios, A. (2019). It's Time to Decolonise Project Management in the Aid Sector. Aid Re-Imagined, 22 October. https://medium.com/aidre-imagined/its-time-to-decolonise-project-management-in-the-aid-sector-da1aa30c5eee
35   Baguios et al. (2021). Are We There Yet?

2. Power shift: A global scan

While the global rhetoric suggests that shifting power has become a major theme in development and humanitarian circles, it is not always clear how much translates into actual change at the local level. It is important to draw attention to the overall destination of the shift, along with its directionality. We do so by examining the two faces of the power shift coin, by looking at whether the wind is blowing from the Global North or the Global South, while recognizing the artificial nature of the North–South binary.

2.1 Where are we going?

The many tensions around the power shift agenda are tied to lack of clarity, diverging views, and anxiety about the end game: where and what is the finish line? The diagram in Figure 2 proposes localization as the journey and locally led practice as the destination. An ODI report, however, argues that, unless the ideals of power shift are truly embodied, localization may not necessarily lead to locally led development.[36] This is because power shapes both the journey and the destination.

Figure 2. The journey and the destination[37]

Localisation as the journey

Locally led practice as the destination

ODI's diagram is useful but not perfect as it centres a Global North perspective, omitting the role of the Global South in the power shift agenda. Both are needed to move power lines. In this analysis, we examine the journey first from the perspective of the Global North relinquishing its power, then from the perspective of the Global South asserting its power, again keeping in mind that the North–South terminology is a questionable construct.

2.2 Relinquishing power

"To truly shift power we need to ask ourselves why – as donors – we need to retain the power to trust or why our own perceptions of trust should come into the equation at all when we are not the ones with lives or systems at stake."[38]

From a Global North perspective, shifting power implies giving it away by localizing, which involves, for example, building true partnerships with local actors, transferring more funding to local actors, developing different accountability mechanisms, and expanding traditional definitions of risks.
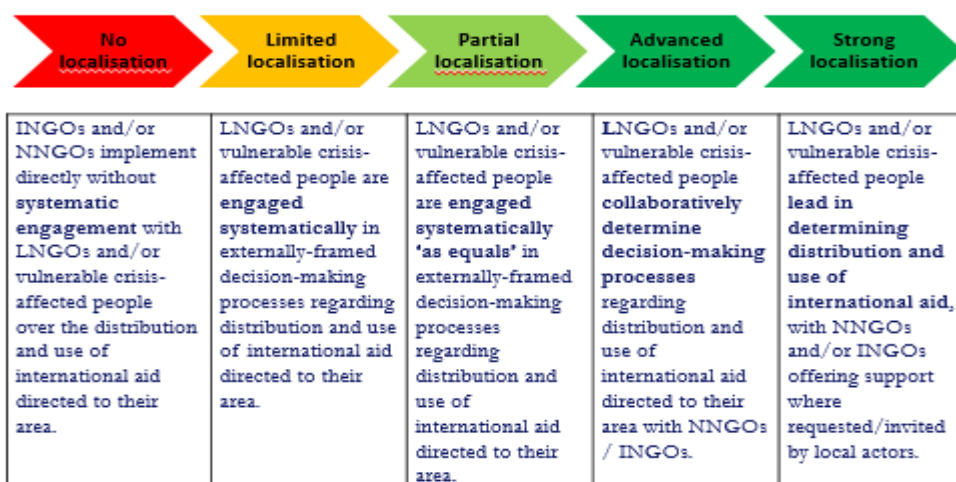
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36   Ibid.
37   Ibid. (p. 10).
38   Blackwell (2023). It's Time for an Honest Dialogue.

2.2.1 The localization spectrum

The spectrum in Figure 3 illustrates how international actors could change from being top-down and trans-actional (no localization) to collaborative and equitable (strong localization). This framework illustrates the progressive shift in roles, practices, and mindsets that the power shift agenda demands. It also suggests that a cultural shift is much harder than implementing a few technocratic fixes.[39]

Figure 3. Localization as a spectrum[40]

No localisation	Limited localisation	Partial localisation	Advanced localisation	Strong localisation
INGOs and/or NNGOs implement directly without **systematic engagement** with LNGOs and/or vulnerable crisis-affected people over the distribution and use of international aid directed to their area.	LNGOs and/or vulnerable crisis-affected people are **engaged systematically** in externally-framed decision-making processes regarding distribution and use of international aid directed to their area.	LNGOs and/or vulnerable crisis-affected people are engaged systematically **'as equals'** in externally-framed decision-making processes regarding distribution and use of international aid directed to their area.	LNGOs and/or vulnerable crisis-affected people **collaboratively determine decision-making processes** regarding distribution and use of international aid directed to their area with NNGOs / INGOs.	LNGOs and/or vulnerable crisis-affected people **lead in determining distribution and use of international aid**, with NNGOs and/or INGOs offering support where requested/invited by local actors.

INGOs and bilateral donors are for the most part stuck in a post-World War II charitable development model created to move resources from the Global North to meet needs in the Global South. This dominaparadigm views and treats people in the South as beneficiaries and recipients rather than co-creators and development actors in their own right. The status quo undeniably carries many benefits for the 'supply side' of international aid, in the form of career status and progression, international recognition, and gratification from 'saving the world.' Consequently, vested interests tend to resist change.

2.2.2 Resistance to change in the Global North

<p style="text-align:center">'How do we solve poverty if all your jobs depend on it?'[41]</p>

It is fair to say the appetite for localization is not generalized, and that discussions among international organizations often generate considerable trepidation. Some take comfort in a vision of the future where international assistance aid is as local as possible, but as international as necessary (and preferably as much as possible), as suggested by Ian Ridley, Senior Director of World Vision, during a dialogue preceding the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.[42]

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39   Kuloba-Warria, C. (2023). Implications of Istanbul Principles and DAC Recommendations on Enabling Civil Society. CPDE. https://csopartnership.org/resource/implications-of-istanbul-principles-and-dac-recommendations-on-enabling-civil-society/
 ALNAP (2023). A More Localised Aid System.
40   Stephen, M. and Martini, A. (2020). Turning the Tables: Insights from Locally-Led Humanitarian Partnerships in Conflict-Affected Situations. Save the Children Sweden and Saferworld. https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1253-turning-the-tables-insights-from-locally-led-humanitarian-partnerships-in-conflict-situations
41   McGarvey, D. (2018). Quotation from Poverty Safari. https://www.rethinkingpoverty.org.uk/rethinking-poverty/solve-poverty-jobs-depend-barry-knight-goes-poverty-safari/
42   Wall, I. (2016). Gloves off Between Local and International NGOs. The New Humanitarian, 13 January. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2015/10/22/gloves-between-local-and-international-ngos

Donor governments and international organizations committing to shifting power must confront complex challenges. Even when they accept the premise of directly sending funding to, or working with, local actors, the road is paved with bumps. For donor countries, challenges include outdated legislation, risk aversion, a skewed definition of accountability to taxpayers, and deficit assumptions or misinformation about Global South actors. Donor governments often succumb to the pressures of national contractors and non-profit organizations that they have incubated and protected through direct financial support and ODA contributions. As a result, these organizations have developed a close bond with their 'home' grantors, a bond that sometimes looks like a parent–child relationship.[43] Those entrenched in this system of privileges, and in the logic that revenue growth is good for their mission, tend to resist the power shift agenda that suggests different ways of achieving impact and points towards a future where INGOs have less of the funding pie.[44] Fortunately, these pockets of resistance coexist with a suite of commitments on localization made by governments and INGOs.

2.2.3 Commitments to change

2.2.3.1   Governments' commitments

Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, donor governments have been discussing and announcing changes to policies and practices supporting localizing. The OECD DAC adopted in 2021 a Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance. While not legally binding, this is the first international standard of the kind and expresses a joint political commitment of all 31 OECD DAC members, including Canada. The Recommendation connects locally led development with the protection of civic space, emphasizing the importance of strong civil society leadership in the face of rising authoritarianism and shrinking civic space.[45] The first toolkit developed from the Recommendation focuses on funding modalities for local partners who to date receive only marginal financial assistance. Only 7% of OECD DAC members' CSO funding is received directly by partner country CSOs, whereas the bulk part (93%) goes to DAC country or international CSOs.[46]

In 2021 also, the United States made the headlines by announcing that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) would by 2025 provide at least a quarter of program funds directly to local partners and by 2030 place local communities in the lead to set priorities, codesign projects, and drive program implementation and evaluation.[47]

At the 2022 Effective Development Cooperation Summit in Geneva, 18 donor countries including Canada endorsed a laconic statement[48] supporting locally led development, recalling previous commitments to advance locally led development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding efforts. The statement alludes to three action areas: 1) shift and share power to ensure local actors have ownership over and can meaningfully and equitably engage in development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programs; 2) work to channel high-quality funding as directly as possible to local actors while ensuring mutual accountability for the effective use of funds, the management of risks, and the achievement of development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding results; and 3) publicly advocate for locally led development using our convening authority, partnerships, and networks.

43   Lay, T. (2023). It's Time for INGOs to Stop Living with Their Parents. Burwood: CHL. https://ojs.deakin.edu.au/index.php/thl/article/view/1808/1566
44   Kuloba-Warria (2023). Implications of Istanbul Principles and DAC Recommendations.
45   ALNAP (2023). A More Localised Aid System.
46   OECD (2023). Toolkit for Implementing the DAC Recommendation.
47   Power, S. (2021). A New Vision for Global Development. Washington, DC, 4 November. https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/nov-04-2021-administrator-samantha-power-new-vision-global-development
48   Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development 2022. https://www.usaid.gov/localization/donor-statement-on-supporting-locally-led-development

The European Union followed suit in 2023 with a Guidance Note focusing on Promoting Equitable Partnerships with local responders in humanitarian settings.[49] This Note acknowledges the need to recognize local capacities to respond to crises, strengthen the leadership roles of local actors in humanitarian action, and increase the share of local funding, while also nuancing that this must be achieved within the legal constraints enshrined in European Union law in relation to providing direct funding to local actors. Oxfam notes that, in the European context, Ukraine is a textbook case of the unfulfilled promises of localization: by the first anniversary of the Russian invasion, local organizations had received only around 1% of direct humanitarian funding.[50]

2.2.3.2 INGO and multistakeholder commitments

The power shift journey does not look the same for all INGOs but those committed to it are expressing their commitments both individually and collectively via joint platforms. For example, the Charter for Change project (see Figure 4 for the eight major commitments), led by both national and international NGOs, was undertaken to implement the recommendations of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit regarding locally led responses. Point 6 of the Charter commits to the following by 2018: 'Local and national collaborators are involved in the design of the programmes at the outset and participate in decision-making as equals in influencing programme design and partnership policies.'[51] Critics of the Charter argue that this provision refers to partnership and not necessarily locally led response.

Figure 4. Charter for Change[52]

In 2019, the Manifesto for Change was drafted following conversations facilitated by the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF), with organizations from the Global North and Global South brainstorming on ways to take #ShiftThePower to the next level.[53]

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49 DG ECHO (2023). Promoting Equitable Partnerships with Local Responders in Humanitarian Settings. Guidance Note. https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/dg-echo-guidance-note-promoting-equitable-partnerships-with-local-responders-in-humanitarian-settings.pdf

50 Green, D. (2023). Where Has the Humanitarian Sector Got to on Localization? Great New Update. Oxfam blog, 28 June. https://frompoverty.oxfam.org.uk/where-has-the-humanitarian-sector-got-to-on-localization-great-new-update/

51 Charter for Change (2019). https://charter4change.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/charter4change-2019.pdf

52 Ibid.

53 Manifesto for Change (2019). https://shiftthepower.org/more-than-a-hashtag/manifesto-for-change/

Another initiative, the Pledge for Change (see Figure 5), was convened by Adeso and the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership to further centre Global South leadership. Building on previous commitment, such as the Charter for Change and the Grand Bargain, the Pledge reflects an acknowledgement of the unequal power dynamics in the development and aid sectors and the need to ensure a fairer future, and particularly the role INGOs must play in ensuring Global South civil society and communities continue to grow and flourish. The Pledge emphasizes the role of local organizations and the rights, needs, and priorities of local communities.

Figure 5. The Pledge for Change[54]

Furthermore, some INGOs have recently joined a handful of donors and United Nations agencies to develop individual roadmaps with milestones for reaching 25% funding to local organizations. These roadmaps are to be published by the end of 2023.[55]

These few examples illustrate how civil society actors from around the world are joining forces and minds to shift power in international cooperation. Meanwhile, despite persistent inequalities, civil society groups in the Global South are being more vocal and assertive in demanding real and fast action. It is to their voices that we turn next.

2.3   Asserting power

We have established the failures of the mainstream international cooperation system, whereby aid-providing countries paint themselves as 'developed,' oblivious to the fact that colonial plunder enabled this development and that ongoing predatory practices facilitate wealth flows from the South to the North that are larger than the assistance provided from North to South. It is therefore essential to centre Global South perspectives about taking ownership of development and humanitarian interventions. This is expressed in a 2020 open letter from about 146 Southern NGOs to INGOs.

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54   Pledge for Change. https://pledgeforchange2030.org/
55   Green (2023). Where Has the Humanitarian Sector Got to?

'We appreciate that over the years, many of you have sought to help deliver much-needed services, and have helped to elevate some issues of concern, like debt relief, gender or climate change, to the world stage.But times are changing. And you have (rightly) been facing a number of critiques in recent years – around your legitimacy, your "whiteness" or the fact that far more aid money ultimately ends up in the pockets of northern organisations' headquarters than it does in the Global South.'[56]

2.3.1 The continuum of locally led development

Locally led development, described in Figure 6, exists in a continuum parallel to the localization spectrum (Figure 3). In Stage 1, initiatives are driven from the outside and simply implemented locally, whereas in Stage 5, local people, groups, and CSOs design their own approaches and set priorities, while outsiders may assist with resources.

Figure 6. The continuum of locally led development

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Local communities and actors are **informed about the project** and its intentions. Opinions may be sought but there is no inclination for the actors to take them into consideration.	Local communities and actors are **consulted on a project idea** that the international actors have committed to. There is an expressed willingness to act on the feedback received.	Local communities and actors **work in partnership with the international entity** providing leadership and owning the core and strategic decisions over the goals of the project. There is a formal system established to work jointly.	The international entity **delegates power to make critical decisions over strategic directions** and key actions to be taken to address the issues that they have jointly agreed to address. A formal agreement frames this relationship.	Initiative in terms of vision and goals originates from the local actors and communities. **Local leadership is supported to host, manage, and take ownership and responsibility** over the outcomes of the project.

2.3.2 Assertion of local leadership

Southern NGOs, long viewed as the unseen workhorses of the international cooperation sector,[57] are loudly calling for change and mobilizing their own efforts towards it. They realize they must take their governance and leadership seriously, seeking to build and strengthen their own governance structures, rather than limiting themselves to project implementation or waiting for donors to facilitate capacity-building processes.

The examples of some humanitarian and development NGOs provide apt illustrations of local actors evolving along the locally led continuum. In Myanmar, where, like elsewhere, most international assistance transits through international actors, 14 large local NGOs launched in 2022 the Local Intermediary Actor network to channel direct funding to frontline civil society groups.[58] The Centre for Disaster Preparedness, a national organization in the Philippines, negotiated a simplified due diligence process with USAID for its Community Solidarity Fund, which gives small grants to community-based groups.[59] A regional initiative, the Africa Philanthropy Network

56   An Open Letter to International NGOs Who Are Looking to 'Localise' Their Operations (2020). www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/an-open-letter-to-international-ngos-who-are-looking-to-localise-their-operations/
57   Ramalingam, B. (2015). The Demand for Feasibility and Scope of a Global Network of Southern NGOs in Disaster Resilience. Adeso. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/demand-feasibility-and-scope-global-network-southern-ngos-disaster-resilience
58   Décobert, A. and Wells, T. (2023). To Help Tackle Aid Inequality, Support Myanmar's Local Intermediaries. The New Humanitarian, 3 August. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2023/08/03/help-tackle-aid-inequality-support-myanmars-local-intermediaries?utm_source=The+New+Humanitarian&utm_campaign=ea292258d5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_07_28_Weekly_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d842d98289-ea292258d5-75874404
59   ALNAP (2023). A More Localised Aid System.

(APN), is a non-profit organization committed to promoting and advancing philanthropy in Africa.[60] APN brings together grant-makers, foundations, academia, and CSOs, as well as individuals in the continent and the diaspora, who share of their capital, influence, and moral authority to address the structural and systematic causes of injustice and inequality. Beyond helping local organizations comply with the international aid bureaucracy and access resources, local intermediaries can help them grow on their own terms, as seen in the Pacific region.

The Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO), a regional platform present in 24 Pacific countries and territories, represents Pacific voices in promoting the decolonization paradigm, strengthening local forms of social development, and adopting accountability principles. PIANGO explored what accountability should look like in the Pacific context and, in 2021, developed an Institutional Assessment & Mapping self-assessment toolkit with the support of the Australian Council for International Development.[61] The tool invites development stakeholders, funders, and governments to accept a Pacific-driven model and vision of accountability that reflects the values, strengths, and diversity of Pacific civil society.

Domestic resource mobilization is a key part of decolonizing aid and the sine qua non of asserting power and embracing locally led development. Though domestic and international resource mobilization are not mutually exclusive (as many development issues are transnational in nature), increased availability of and access to local resources, including via local philanthropies, can be a game-changer in propelling locally led development. New sources of funding are emerging thanks to a surge in community philanthropy and social investment. New mechanisms for accessing funding are also being developed, for example participatory funding, crowd sourcing, online fundraising platforms, etc. The Generosity Report examines community giving in Uganda during the Covid-19 pandemic.[62] It highlights that the diversity of pro-social behaviors (giving of time, skills, and money) exemplified in the country challenges the deceptive idea of giving and philanthropy being the preserve of an elite class.

2.3.3 Local obstacles to the power shift

While it is true that regional, national, and community networks are asserting their roles and leadership in their local contexts, there are obstacles and pockets of resistance in the Global South too.

2.3.3.1 Navigating equity and equality

When it comes to the power shift agenda, overlooking the nuances between equity and equality is a major mistake because it masks differences of opportunity. It is equity, rather than equality, in partnerships that enables locally led development and leverages effective cooperation – because equitable partnerships are aligned with each other's strengths to achieve the best outcomes. Equity recognizes the need for differentiated approaches and acknowledges the historical imbalance of power, including colonial legacies. Equity is a prerequisite in the pursuit of equality as local actors may at times require extra support to reach their fullest potential.[63]

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60   https://africaphilanthropynetwork.org/psa-mapping/
61   PIANGO (2023). From a Pacific Development Lens – Shifting the Paradigm of Accountability, Translating Global Standards to Local Realities. https://www.forus-international.org/en/custom-page-detail/98644-from-a-pacific-development-lens-shifting-the-paradigm-of-accountability-translating-global-standards-to-local-realities
62   GFCF (2021). Taking a Second Look. Analysis of the "Generosity during the Time of Covid-19" Reports. https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2nd-look-Generosity-reports-2.pdf
63   Kuloba-Warria (2023). Implications of Istanbul Principles and DAC Recommendations. https://aidwatchcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Final-CPDE_2023_Recomendation_04_05_2023.pdf

2.3.3.2   Facing institutional pressures

National and local governments have a big role to play in the power shift agenda as more locally led approaches depend on a strong and open civil society. Repressive, corrupt, and/or weak government structures tend to limit the maneuvering space for local actors. In some cases, governments weaponize laws to stifle and limit the legitimacy and effectiveness of civil society or use restrictive administrative requirements to police groups perceived to be critical of the regime.[64]

The example of Sudan speaks loudly to this effect. The conflict that erupted in Sudan in 2023 displaced nearly 4 million people in the first three months.[65] Youth-driven volunteer networks mobilized to set up 'emergency response rooms' across the country in response to combat, the collapse of state services, and slow-moving international relief efforts. However, these grassroots groups soon started to face threats from both warring parties, which accuse the volunteers of backing their rivals and see the groups as something to control rather than support.

2.3.3.3   Addressing internalized oppression

Centuries of subjection to 'white power' and 'white gaze' have affected the self-confidence and self-image of many people and groups in the Global South. As reported by Peace Direct, structural racism is so deeply embedded that it has sometimes led local organizations or staff to look down on their own communities and look up to INGOs and donor governments.[66] In doing so, some local actors risk becoming copies of the very system that oppresses and hinders them.[67]

Khan notes the persistence in the Global South of a dependency on current systems of power.[68] There is in some corners a dependency syndrome manufactured to frame international assistance as indispensable to alleviate harsh living conditions. The benevolence of Western donors is repeatedly called on, even by Southern Heads of State, despite evidence that domestic resource mobilization is effective and in fact happening. For instance, diaspora remittances have for years been consistently greater than ODA flows, yet little has been done to leverage them in strategic ways.[69] As a result, the potential of local and diaspora actors remains underused. Further, vulnerability is sustained even when empowerment is claimed and the international cooperation system ends up perpetuating inequality and structural discrimination, robbing people of their dignity.

64   Moyo, B. and Imafidon, B. (2021). Barriers to African Civil Society: Building the Society's Capacity and Potential to Build up. https://www.raceandphilanthropy.com/files/docs/Summary-Report-Barriers-to-African-Civil-Society-%E2%80%93-Vodacom-Safaricom-Vodafone-Foundation-2021.pdf

65   Nasir, R., Rhodes, T. and Kleinfield, P. (2023). How Mutual Aid Networks Are Powering Sudan's Humanitarian Response. The New Humanitarian, 2 August. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/08/02/how-mutual-aid-networks-are-powering-sudans-humanitarian-response?utm_source=The+New+Humanitarian&utm_campaign=ea292258d5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_07_28_Weekly_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d842d98289-ea292258d5-75874404

66   Peace Direct (2021). Time to Decolonise Aid.

67   Kuloba-Warria (2023). Implications of Istanbul Principles and DAC Recommendations.

68   Khan (2023). Envisioning an Alternative Ecosystem.

69   WACSI (2023). Decolonising Aid.

3   Canada and the localization agenda: What are Canadian actors doing?

'Transformation' and 'transformative' have become buzzwords in the international cooperation sector but system transformation is a painstaking process requiring extensive interventions to reform culture and mind-sets, modify policies and services, and alter the distribution of resources between the various actors in the system. Shifting power requires changing roles along the traditional business model of donor–INGO–beneficiaries. The previous chapters have covered the 'why' (ethical, political, and effectiveness arguments) and 'who' (Global South and Global North actors) of the power shift agenda. This chapter examines the 'what' and 'how,' focusing on initiatives taken by Canadian actors.

3.1   Cooperation Canada

Over the past two years, Cooperation Canada has been taking active steps to engage with international actors, member organizations, and GAC on the power shift agenda. Recognizing that racism is pervasive in the international cooperation sector and that strategic collaboration is essential to dismantle it in Canada and abroad, Cooperation Canada convened an advisory group to articulate avenues of collective action towards a more anti-racist sector. This led to the release in 2021 of the first sector baseline report on anti-racism in Canada,[70] prefaced by the then- Minister of International Development, and the Anti-Racism Framework for Canada's International Cooperation Sector.[71] Canadian organizations working in international cooperation are invited to sign up to the Framework and make progress against the commitment it outlines regarding workplaces, communication practices, and programming.

At the international level, Cooperation Canada has been consulting with sister coalitions from OECD DAC countries to exchange experiences and find ways to foster open dialogue on localization with donor governments. In April and September 2023, representatives from civil society networks and bilateral funders from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States held informal online meetings to learn from their respective localization approaches. Participating government agencies presented initiatives aimed at strengthening local intermediaries that meet donor's requirements on behalf of multiple small CSOs; simplifying grants language and translating into local languages; fostering local cost recovery and capacity-strengthening through primes or catalytic grants; providing transition grants to phase out INGO involvement in projects and transfer these projects to local organizations; and, of course, changing donor policies. The September 2023 meeting centred more the role of INGOs by inviting the Equality Fund and the African Women's Development Fund to present their business models as equity-seeking intermediaries.

Cooperation Canada also facilitates interactions and learning for its members through a Localization Working Group. Participants have had the opportunity to gain practical insights on the power shift journey of organizations based in Canada (as presented in Section 0) and abroad (see Boxes 5 to 7). The insights shared by speakers from Mexico, India, and Kenya highlight important regional differences and underscore that shifting power cannot follow a one-size-fits-all model.

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70   ARC (2021). Collective Commitment: Emerging Anti-Racist Practice for Canadian International Cooperation. https://cooperation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ARC-report-2021.pdf?_ga=2.217880918.1712957603.1697571336-1460989847.1670359353&_gl=1*13neuxb*_ga*MTQ2M-Dk4OTg0Ny4xNjcwMzU5MzUz*_ga_R8PSG77VMS*MTY5NzcyNDIwNi4yNTcuMS4xNjk3NzI0MzU4LjAuMC4w*_ga_T57QF9X2RM*MTY5NzcyNDIwNi-4yMTMuMS4xNjk3NzI0MzU4LjAuMC4w
71   Anti-Racist Framework for Canada's International Cooperation Sector (2021). https://cooperation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Antiracism-Framework-3.0-5.pdf?_ga=2.24032250.1712957603.1697571336-1460989847.1670359353&_gl=1*6vawbf*_ga*MTQ2MDk4OTg0Ny4xNjcwM-zU5MzUz*_ga_R8PSG77VMS*MTY5NzcyNDIwNi4yNTcuMC4xNjk3NzI0MjA2LjAuMC4w*_ga_T57QF9X2RM*MTY5NzcyNDIwNi4yMTMuMC4xNjk3N-zI0MjA2LjAuMC4w

Box 5. Perspective from Mexico on internal challenges for CSOs

Enrique García is originally from El Salvador but works in Mexico as Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) Regional Representative for the Latin America and Caribbean region. He previously worked with Salvadoran refugees in Mexico and Nicaragua, and in communities under guerrilla control in the mountains of El Salvador. Between 2000 and 2017, he successively worked with Oxfam GB, Oxfam America, and then Oxfam International. Drawing on his experience with grassroots organizations and national and international NGOs, Enrique offered some place-based insights about the meaning of locally led development in the Latin American context.

The sector transitioned from a space of solidarity cooperation in the 1980s and 1990s (times of civil wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua) to contested localization in the 2000s. A good example is Oxfam's approach of 'stepping aside and letting the other grow.' Some staff saw this as a betrayal of the institution, giving resources away to national NGOs instead of keeping the funds for internal purposes.

Images of poverty in Latin America are often obscured by the perceptions of middle-income countries. For decades, CSOs in Latin America, unlike African CSOs, have been less turned towards the global landscape as they have enjoyed better government support. However, civic space in the region (especially Nicaragua) is shrinking, leading them to shift strategies and engage more with global actors.INGOs working in Latin America have different roles than those seen in other parts of the world. While some work very close to communities, some closer to government circles limit their localization efforts to hiring local staff.

Box 6. Perspective from India on cultural competence and intersectionality

Kirthi Jayakumar is a feminist researcher working on the areas of women, peace, and security (WPS), transitional justice, and feminist foreign policy. She founded and ran the Gender Security Project, one of the few WPS centres in the Global South. Drawing on her observations of the localization discourse in South Asia and India in particular, Kirthi notes the risk of localization benefiting only some of the locals. She offers five reflection points for Northern organizations:

- Decentralize yourself when supporting a community (avoid presumptions): it's up to the community to decide what a solution looks like for them.

- Impact over intent goes a long way, so ask yourself whether the proposed initiative is based on assessed needs and reflects people's agency.

- Intersectionality and cultural competence play important roles (for example, youth in India are concerned mainly with labour in dignity and resist government cooptation).

- Money is not the only solution; mentorship, information, access to spaces, and other resources can also go a long way.

-Centre the Global South as an active actor, not a passive beneficiary.

Box 7. Perspective from Kenya on true partnerships

Chilande Kuloba-Warria is Founder and Managing Director of the Warande Advisory Centre, based in Nairobi, Kenya. The Warande Advisory Centre is a technical support facility that helps CSOs in Africa on their journey to institutional strengthening, as well as giving advice on effective and accountable systems and practices of philanthropy.

Chilande referenced her extensive and diverse experience working in the development sector, mainly in Africa. In particular, she reflected upon recent initiatives in capacity-strengthening with African CSOs, tackling the complexities in striving for equitable partnerships and a shared collective vision. For Chilande, a true partnership:

- Is about a shared vision (not the vision of one or the other, but where visions align), equitable finance resource allocation (equitable, not necessarily equal), and shared decision-making (the most important dimension); and

- Requires an open, fair, and honest discussion, with full information, about what equitable resource allocation means in the context of the shared goals of the partnership as well as the different realities of geographic spaces of the partners.

3.2   Canadian NGOs

The members of Cooperation Canada are at different levels of engagement on the power shift agenda. The Localization Working Group has profiled the organizational journey of three of them: Equality Fund, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), and VIDEA (see Boxes 8 to 10).

Box 8. Experience of the Equality Fund

Cynthia Eyakuze, Co-Vice President of Global Programs, presented on how the Equality Fund mobilizes funds for feminist movements. Created in 2019 with a $300 million CAD grant from GAC, the Equality Fund is a civil society-managed fund that aims to 'robustly resource women's rights organizations and feminist movements worldwide by partnering with organizations, coalitions, and networks focused on building power with women, girls, and trans people, especially in the Global South. We ground our work in mutual trust, respect, and collaboration.' It is a fund that is rooted in feminist principles, moving not only money but also power. Cynthia noted that localization required Global North organizations giving up power, which is a political exercise, not only a programmatic one, which requires committing to funding differently, avoiding competition, reducing burdens, and redefining risk and capacity. See Cynthia's main recommendations below.

- Commit to flexible, unrestricted, long-term funding for supported organizations: while it is not yet possible to provide 'core funding' to organizations (in part because of Canada's Direction and Control regulations), funding starts with a minimum of a five-year relationship.

- Avoid competitive approaches: an 'ecosystems approach' allows for understanding of the needs of the whole ecosystem at a given time, with some funds deciding to step up for the first round of funding and others stepping back to wait for other funding rounds.

- Reduce burdens and structuring requirements in ways that shift agency and power: countering colonial biases requires addressing burdensome or inflexible reporting requirements in the funding relationship, through, for example, flexible reporting via voice messages, rather than transferring a requirement for written narratives according to GAC requirements.

- Redefine the notions of risk and capacities in practice: the counterpoint of risk is trust, and there is still a very large 'trust deficit' in the philanthropic and development sectors, which is strongly influenced by who holds the money. Redefining risk is connected to redefining capacity and the type of capacities being valued. The Equality Fund understands strengthening capacities with organizations in terms of their interest and where they would like to grow, not in terms of what Equality Fund programmers/finance officers may think.

Box 9. Experience of MEDA

Dorothy Nyambi, President and CEO, shared the journey undertaken since 2019 by [MEDA](#), an international economic development organization that develops business solutions to poverty. Acknowledging that the organization is still in 'the messy middle' of changes between old and new systems, Dorothy highlighted important lessons, summarized here under the headings of leadership, people and culture, and trust-based partnerships.

About leadership: buy-in at the highest level for the change process towards localization is critical and essential. Early on in the process, the MEDA Board adopted localization as a strategic goal against which the whole executive management and staff are held accountable. This is key because change will be intensive, and often simultaneous, affecting fundraising, communications, strategic planning, and programs in every division of the organization. A committed senior management must therefore be guiding these changes every step of the way.

About people and culture: shifting power affects people personally and challenges the assumptions and culture in which they work. The change champions must therefore be deliberate in bringing along all staff in difficult conversations, but also mindful that the organization will lose staff who are not comfortable with these changes. Further, the process should be driven by colleagues in the Global South. Localization is not just about location but also about who is at the table when decisions are made. An office in the Global South may duplicate the same ways of working so the full engagement of staff based in other countries should be ensured to reinforce their power to make decisions and challenge colonial practices.

About trust-based partnerships: partnership is where localization happens. However, there is too often a falsehood of 'kumbaya' when looking at partnerships while real power relationships are masked. Trust-based partnerships are strong relationships, with everyone bringing meaningful contributions to the table, respectful of local knowledge, priorities, and cultural context. This means redirecting accountability from focusing mainly on organizational power-holders in the North to considering those doing the work and with whom work is done. This also means challenging risk-related mindsets and assumed funders expectations.

Box 10. Experience of VIDEA

The Localization Working Group welcomed two VIDEA colleagues, Lili Coyesloiselle, Manager of Indigenous Youth Engagement and Reconciliation and Member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and Kate Herchak, an Urban Inuk with ties to Kuujjuaq, and Manager of Indigenous Governance & Decolonial Practice. VIDEA works to enable youth and communities to have access to the education, information, skills, and support necessary to take leadership in developing their own sustainable solutions to environment, Indigenous, and human rights violations and injustice. For VIDEA, decolonization is a journey of questioning roles and accepted ideas, which leads to questioning future roles in the organization and in development cooperation. VIDEA's journey can be summarized as being rooted in relationships, structure, and Indigenous ways of being.

About relationships: decolonization requires a continuous focus on relationships. This means, externally, building respect, trust, reciprocity, and solidarity, and, internally, taking time to know each other better and design collaborative approaches to work. VIDEA has also built relationships with a diversity of funding partners, working closely with many of them to demonstrate how a funding relationship might be done differently, with a more Indigenous mindset. It has brought both the government and foundations on board in its approach.

About structure: VIDEA has an internal structure symbolized by a tree, where the executive director and program operations staff are the roots that support everyone else in the organization. This is a collaborative structure encouraging collective decision-making, collaboration, and inter-changeability of staff.

About Indigenous ways of being: incorporating Indigenous ways of being means valuing all knowledge, not only formal training but also traditional and lived experience, starting with hiring practices. While VIDEA has made great progress internally, it recognizes the challenge of working in colonial spaces such as the international development sector. Resistance to shifting power can often be addressed over time through deliberate discussions. In moving from talk to action, it is important that Indigenous staff do not hold all the emotional labour in carrying out activities and engagement related to decolonization.

Some of the challenges presented above are also experienced by CSOs outside Cooperation Canada's membership. A recent study commissioned by GAC highlights the wide range of positions along the power shift journey.[72] Of the participating CSOs, 64% reported not having an operationalized strategy or policy on localization, and 52% that they did not have any tools or guides to increase localization efforts. For some CSOs, localization is just a new term for a power shift movement that started decades ago. For others, the ideas behind localization are value-based guiding principles that underpin their work in the Global South. Some participants stated that the key ideas behind localization, such as working directly with local partners, were already essential to their modus operandi and that they did not see the trend of localization changing their operations in this regard.

'It may mean that eventually, we would be obsolete. If funds flowed directly to our partners, we wouldn't be needed' (CSO, small & medium organization, Ontario, questionnaire).[73]

The study also revealed the anxiety that some CSOs can harbour, as illustrated in the quote above. According to the GAC study, 29% of participating Canadian CSOs do not envision their roles changing whereas 71% anticipate a shift from providing technical and financial oversight on project design and implementation towards playing a supporting role for their local partners. This reflects the growing debates about the future roles of CSOs in the international cooperation sector and their possible morphing into intermediaries. Intermediaries can exist in various forms (brokers, facilitators, accommodators, etc.) and may consist of consortia of international and local actors acting as full parties to a funding agreement. Intermediaries may become an important step in the power shift journey but should be part of the power shift equation only if the new arrangements do not reproduce existing power imbalances. The example of the Equality Fund, presented earlier, offers valuable lessons of what an equity-seeking intermediary could look like, particularly in a country like Canada, tagged as a feminist leader.

3.3   The Canadian government

Canada endorsed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 (alongside Cooperation Canada, formerly the Canadian Council for International Cooperation), committing to respecting partner country leadership, and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation in 2011, reaffirming the principle of country ownership of development priorities. By endorsing the 2016 Grand Bargain, Canada signalled its intention to get more resources into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.

The adoption in 2017 of the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) was a milestone and placed Canada in the ranks of feminist global leaders. The FIAP's primary objective is to contribute to global efforts to eradicate poverty around the world by addressing inequality and advancing human rights. The Policy is meant to reflect Canadian values, leverage Canada's expertise and comparative advantage, and contribute to building local capacity. The Policy also emphatically places gender equality at the centre of poverty eradication and peacebuilding efforts, recognizing that the empowerment of women and girls requires the transformation of social norms and power relations. The FIAP uses the term 'empower' 64 times and the word 'local' 33 times; it uses 'shift' 6 times in reference to feminist policy, focus populations, financial targets, and ways of working.

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72   Rao (2023). Report on the Findings from the Study.
73   Ibid.

However, the FIAP text makes no reference to 'localization' or power shift. It may just be that the FIAP was adopted to serve a different purpose but the Auditor General's Report on bilateral development assistance gives reason to pause.[74] Canada's Auditor General assessed the assistance provided by GAC under the FIAP between 2017 and 2022 and reported that, while the department was able to apply gender-based analysis principles, there is limited evidence of intervention outcomes or progress towards policy goals. This begs an important question about the potential of the FIAP or the current articulation of Canada's feminist leadership to catalyze the power shift agenda.

Among traditional aid providers (i.e., countries that are members of the OECD DAC), a recurrent factor standing in the way of granting more power and agency to local actors is the low appetite for risk. Canada is no different. This risk aversion is closely connected to a paternalist assessment of local capacities and assumptions that INGOs are better qualified than local organizations to meet donors' requirements and ensure accountability to Canadian taxpayers. It took years and intense civil society activism before the government agreed to alter the legislation governing charitable activities and the corresponding 'direction and control' regime, a Canadian exception requiring Canadian charitable organizations to maintain control over projects implemented with non-charities at home and abroad. A draft guidance released in 2022 by the federal Revenue Agency reflects the persistent risk-averse attitude among Canadian bureaucrats.[75] Some in the charitable sector are concerned that the long-sought legislative change may not end up promoting a culture of ethical relationships and respectful collaboration in the regime governing the activities of charities alongside partner organizations in Canada and abroad.[76]

Addressing the bureaucratic challenges involved in funding international assistance initiatives is also the driver behind the Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative.[77] In 2022, the Canadian government announced this major five-year initiative (2023–2028) to align with the commitments made in the FIAP but also, and possibly more importantly, with the ambition of the Future of Diplomacy initiative, which aims to revitalize Global Affairs Canada.[78] The stated focus of the Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative is to minimize the administrative burden linked to funding applications, improve risk assessments, and make performance data more current and easier to share. Given that localization is not an explicit program objective, many in the sector affirm that a transformation initiative that does not embed shifting power in international cooperation would be a failed opportunity.

A less discussed area of Canada's federal engagement with the power shift agenda is that of research cooperation. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has the mandate to support Southern research partners as they identify their priorities and develop workable, legitimate, and sustainable solutions to local challenges. IDRC's localization practice rests on the principle of localizing knowledge by shifting power and decision-making to those who are close to the reality on the ground.[79] This implies, among other things, working with the non-usual suspects, finding different ways to measure and track success, investing in the whole ecosystem of knowledge production, and valuing different languages and forms of knowledge. For IDRC, localization is about building synergies and leveraging each other's efforts, while acknowledging the stark power imbalances and hierarchies in the research sector.

74   Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2023). International Assistance in Support of Gender Equality-Global Affairs Canada. https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/docs/parl_oag_202303_04_e.pdf
75   Draft Guidance for Registered Charities Making Grants to Non-Qualified Donees (2022). https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities/policies-guidance/charities-making-grants-non-qualified-donees.html
76   Carter, T., Man, T. and Westerhof, L. (2023). Draft Qualifying Disbursement Guidance Poses Practical Challenges for Charities. Law Bulletin 519. https://www.carters.ca/pub/bulletin/charity/2023/chylb519.pdf
77   GAC Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative. www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/grants-contributions-subventions-contributions.aspx?lang=eng
78   GAC (2023). Future of Diplomacy, Transforming Global Affairs Canada. Discussion Paper. www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/assets/pdfs/future-diplomacy-avenir-diplomatie/06-2023-future-diplomacy-avenir-diplomatie-en.pdf
79   El-Rifai, R. (2023). Localization: A Journey out of a Research Funder's Comfort Zone. https://idrc-crdi.ca/en/perspectives/localization-journey-out-research-funders-comfort-zone

4 What's next for Canadian actors?

When it comes to shifting power in international cooperation, if the destination is equitable partnerships to achieve locally led development, then the tricky part is: how do we get there? How to turn localization conversations into action?

At the moment, much of the discussion is stuck on the funding side and, as is the case for most countries, Canada is building while driving.

4.1 Paving the way forward

Canada's power shift agenda seems to be caught in a chicken-and-egg situation, with actors waiting on each other to make the first move. As noted above, GAC is cautiously stepping out of its risk-averse shell, taking what seems to be a very long time to move. Canadian NGOs often blame the government for its outdated practices yet sometimes overlook their freedom to reimagine their role as system actors that can harness existing knowledge and distribute leadership within the international talent pool available to them.[80] Shifting power is a system-wide transformation involving every actor in the system, and there are various and non-exclusive approaches to ignite this transformation. We focus here on three approaches fitting to the Canadian context (and already budding) that could be expanded: enabling policy, setting targets, and prototyping.

4.1.1 The policy route

Canada's foreign policy arsenal already includes instruments that could be used to advance the power shift agenda but that are not always deployed to their fullest extent or are hamstrung by incoherence and diverging agendas. In addition to its internal work through the Anti-Racism Secretariat,[81] GAC is the custodian of the Inclusive Approach to Trade,[82] the 2020–2023 Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy,[83] and the 2021–2025 Action Plan on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples,[84] all couched on the feminist vision to build a more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous world. However, though this vision is entrenched in the FIAP's ambition to do international cooperation differently, domestic policy, diplomacy, and development objectives often diverge, and the FIAP ambition is matched with shrinking development assistance budget lines.

The Canadian government is yet to demonstrate its ability to think more broadly about the possibilities of a creative development agenda, something that Australia attempted in its latest international policy by emphasizing partnerships and centring First Nations perspectives.[85] In a working paper on the Future of Diplomacy, GAC acknowledges that Canada's international presence and influence have not kept pace with evolving global realities and that the country faces the risk of losing ground to partners and competitors.[86]

In this inward-looking assessment, GAC also recognizes that its locally engaged workforce is increasingly sophisticated and skilled, and serving loyally and courageously, often in very difficult locales. As the paper states, the 'local staff […] are the eyes, ears and legs of Canada overseas. They are the first responders when

80   Lay (2023). It's Time for INGOs.
81   GAC Letter on Implementation of the Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion, Summer 2021 Update. www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/corporate/clerk/call-to-action-anti-racism-equity-inclusion-federal-public-service/letters-implementation/3/global-affairs-canada.html
82   Canada's Inclusive Approach to Trade. www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/campaign-campagne/inclusive_trade/index.aspx?lang=eng
83   Global Affairs Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy (2020–2023). www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/sustainable-development-developpement-durable/2020-2023-update-mises-a-jour-2020-10-07.aspx?lang=eng
84   GAC Action Plan on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (2021–2025). www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/indigenous-reconciliation-autochtones/index.aspx?lang=eng
85   Australia's International Development Policy (2023). www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf
86   GAC (2023). Future of Diplomacy.

things go wrong.'[87] This acknowledgement should prompt a wider reflection on local CSOs and the urgency of using policy instruments to reframe Canada's development practice to flip power dynamics and foster meaningful relationships abroad.

4.1.2 The target route

Besides the policy route, Canada could be adopting targets to accelerate the power shift. The country endorsed the Grand Bargain, which aimed to transfer 25% of global humanitarian funds to local and national actors by 2020 but has not yet taken any robust steps to act on this commitment. It is not clear whether the Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative will lead to any funding target, such as those USAID has announced.

The closest Canada has to a localization target is seen in the Partnering for Climate initiative. In 2020, the Government of Canada reached out to partners around the world, soliciting views on Canada's climate commitment. The consultation informed Canada's decision to establish Partnering for Climate, which allocates $315 million CAD to climate change adaptation projects from civil society, Indigenous Peoples, and other organizations in Canada, Sub-Saharan Africa, and other parts of the world. In addition to the overall program eligibility criteria, GAC states that it may give preference to submitted projects that embed collaboration with non-traditional development partners and localized approaches, which means projects that support local involvement, knowledge, ownership, and control over resources. That stated preference is unfortunately the closest it gets to a quantitative target.

4.1.3 The prototype route

A third approach that could help operationalize the power shift is prototyping or testing models. In Canada, there are two examples worth mentioning, though they are not called prototypes: the Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) Program and the Equality Fund.

Canada launched the WVL Program in 2017 as a flagship initiative under the FIAP, allocating $150 million CAD over five years for core funding, fast and responsive financing to urgent needs, and capacity- and alliance-building support. By the end of March 2022, the program had reached about 1,500 women's rights organizations (WROs) in developing countries. A 2021 program evaluation revealed that, while the WVL was highly relevant to local WROs' needs, it struggled to reach informal organizations.[88]

Despite early progress towards strengthening the organizational capacity of supported WROs, it is not clear whether this will lead to more financially sustainable WROs. In 2023, the government announced an expansion of the program, committing to $195 million CAD over five years and $43.3 million annually thereafter to provide flexible and responsive programming to WROs across the globe.

Another FIAP flagship initiative was launched in 2019 to provide sustainable funding for women's movements globally. The Equality Fund started with a $300 million CAD contribution, which is the largest single investment ever made by a government in global feminist movements. The Equality Fund model is to resource WROs and feminist movements worldwide by providing direct support to WROs, supporting women's and feminist funds, and providing flexible and urgent emergency funding in natural disasters and conflict zones.[89] The Equality Fund insists that transformative grant-making is about much more than shifting resources: it is about shifting power. The Fund challenges traditional risk analysis frameworks and focuses on understanding the

87   Ibid. (p. 5).
88   GAC (2022). Women's Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation. www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/audit-evaluation-verification/2022/2022-05-wvl-vlf.aspx?lang=eng
89   The Equality Fund (2022). Step Up, Step Back: Reimagining Non-Competitive Grantmaking in Community. https://equalityfund.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Activate-Report-ENGLISH-.pdf

risk of not being able to fund feminist agents of change. It is currently testing harmonized donor reporting for funding allocations jointly supported by several donor countries.

It is worth mentioning that INGOs are also exploring the prototyping approach. An example is that of RINGO, the first globally coordinated cross-sectoral effort to revolutionize the sector by interrogating the purpose, structures, power, and positioning of INGOs.[90] Since its launch in 2020, eight prototypes have been developed to build solutions to support INGOs in changing their operating systems.

4.2   Embracing new roles

If shifting power means transforming the international cooperation system so that local actors (governments and CSOs) are the ones to define the problems, design appropriate solutions, and lead program monitoring and evaluation, then what should and could be the future role of traditional aid providers? Should the new role of donor governments be limited to supporting enabling environments and providing financial resources? A recent report by Peace Direct addresses the question of new roles for INGOs.[91]

Peace Direct prefaces the report with two main observations: 1) the dominant role of INGOs as implementers of international cooperation programs is giving way to alternative models; and 2) there are many ways INGOs can act as intermediaries, beyond just managing donor funds. The report goes on to elaborate on possible roles (see Figure 7) of interpreter, knowledge broker, ecosystem builder, etc.

Figure 7. Nine roles for INGOs as intermediaries[92]

1 INTERPRETER — INTERPRETER
2 KNOWLEDGE BROKER — AND PRODUCER
3 TRAINER, COACH — AND CO-LEARNER
4 CONVENOR — CONVENOR
5 CONNECTOR — AND ECO-SYSTEM BUILDER
6 ADVOCATE — AND AMPLIFIER
7 WATCHDOG — WATCHDOG
8 CRITICAL — FRIEND
9 SIDEKICK — SIDEKICK

90   Richmond, J. and Kojo Vandyck, C. (2022). RINGO Phase 2: The What, How, Why and Who. https://rightscolab.org/ringo-phase-2-the-what-how-why-and-who/
91   Peace Direct (2023). The Nine Roles that Intermediaries Can Play in International Cooperation. www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation-2.pdf
92   Ibid.

Some fundamental questions remain and need to be answered, regardless of new roles:

- How far is it possible to go in decolonizing the international cooperation sector?
- Are there cases where the best way to shift power is for INGOs to step away? If so, which cases?
- If INGOs have their place in a decolonized sector, how do they reinvent themselves to be fit for transformed partnerships?
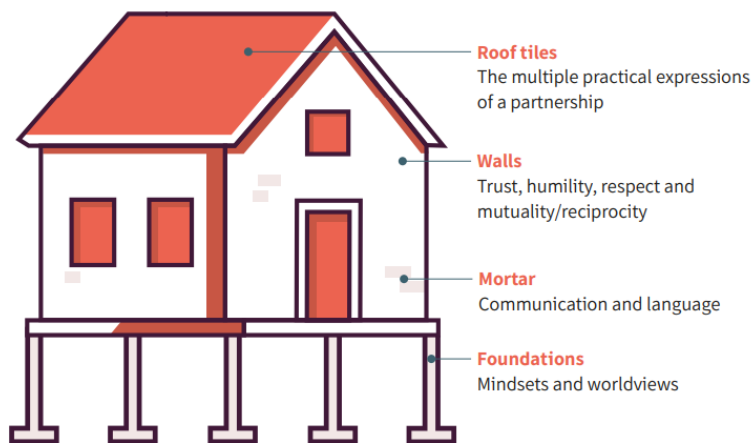
It is to the latter question that we turn next, focusing on how Canadian CSOs can prepare themselves for new types of partnerships with local actors.

4.3   Building muscle for decolonized partnerships

Building a sustainable muscle mass requires dedication, effort, and the right nutrients. Without adherence to these basic principles, it's unlikely that any amount of training will be successful, and atrophy will inevitably follow. As Section 3.2 showed with the examples of the Equality Fund, MEDA, and VIDEA, for Canadian NGOs to build muscle in shifting power and developing new forms of partnerships with local partners, they need to be committed, invest effort and time (which requires bracing for tears and growing pains), and adopt the appropriate tools. Peace Direct stresses that equitable and decolonized are different terms, not to be used interchangeably.[93] While it could be argued that decolonized partnerships aspire to equity, equitable partnerships can unfortunately be brokered without attention to colonial legacies and racial prejudice.

The reconciliation project in Canada is fraught with numerous imperfections but it does offer a framework of reference for Canadian institutions, organizations, and citizens to reflect on societal injustices inherited from settler colonization. This should offer Canadian CSOs a bit of an edge on the international cooperation stage to focus on and train the right muscle groups, for example to move from local delivery to joint interventions, design programs instead of projects, replace donor-down transaction with needs-up transformation, etc. Expanding the building analogy from a muscle to a house, there is much to be gleaned from Peace Direct's metaphor describing the building blocks required to cultivate equitable and decolonized partnerships (see Figure 8).[94]

Figure 8. Four building blocks of equitable and decolonized partnerships[95]

Roof tiles
The multiple practical expressions of a partnership

Walls
Trust, humility, respect and mutuality/reciprocity

Mortar
Communication and language

Foundations
Mindsets and worldviews

93   Peace Direct (2023). Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation. www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Peace-Direct-Transforming-Partnerships-Report-English.pdf
94   Ibid.
95   Ibid.

There is an opportunity for Canadian CSOs to work together on each of the proposed building blocks. One way to do so would be to join forces around a Canadian power shift centre of excellence or community of practice, a dedicated structure that Cooperation Canada is well positioned to facilitate. Such a structure would allow Canadian CSOs to gradually strengthen their organizational capacities, mutualize resources to genuinely shift power in the sector, and jointly assess progress.

5 Conclusion

The idea of localization has a long history, with roots in the 1960s with participatory approaches, the aid effectiveness principles of the early 2000s, and subsequent Grand Bargain commitments in 2016. Shifting power in international cooperation calls for more than localization, though. It compels a systems transformation that must be intentional and collaborative. It is also necessarily a painstaking process requiring different interventions to reform culture and mindsets, modify policies and services, and alter the distribution of resources between various actors in the system. While some innovative practices and locally led initiatives are already happening, it is important to remain aware that lock-ins prevent the needed transformation and sustain a 'functioning inertia' in the international cooperation sector held back by colonial weights.[96] The paper has sought to shed light on this inertia and elevate the difficult questions that need addressing, some of which are raised in the quote below about shifting power.

> **'Has this topic now started being used for some Westerners to view themselves as standing for the oppressed, such that what matters now is not the result but the public posture which such a conversation offers? Is it now becoming just a sexy word and a progressive posture conversation, where we see romanticizing with the words/terminologies rather than the transformation it causes. Will we be able to look behind and not regret this opportunity that we lost such a great window for a real global human transformation?' Rowlands Kaotcha, Malawi[97]**

Cynics may be tempted to say that, as long as one side is responsible for putting power into the hands of another, power will not really shift. However, at Cooperation Canada we believe that shifting power offers the opportunity to bring global justice through international cooperation. While few dispute that, for ethical and effective international cooperation, the power shift agenda is critical, its operationalization is complicated by partial pictures and contradictory messages, including in Canada. This paper has highlighted the contextual realities and opportunities in Canada and suggests that establishing a dedicated structure may help Canadian CSOs meaningfully engage in and accelerate the power shift agenda.

As a national convenor, Cooperation Canada recognizes that flipping power dynamics in the international cooperation sector requires courageous leaders who step out of their comfort zones and onto a difficult journey. This journey is not towards an either-or future where either the status quo is maintained or INGOs are shut down. Rather, the journey is about fostering greater equity in our global society, recognizing that power and the shift thereof are at the core of this journey.

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96   Mitchell, J. (2021). Decolonisation and Localisation: New Dawn or Old History? ALNAP, 27 April. www.alnap.org/blogs/decolonisation-and-localisation-new-dawn-or-old-history
97   Djohossou, P., Bulbul, S. and Hendrix-James, A. (2023). Creating Spaces for Knowledge Decolonization: Changing Relationships and Shifting Power Dynamics for Co-Creation across the Movement for Community-Led Development. Knowledge Management for Development Journal 17(1/2): 107–126. www.km4djournal.org/index.php/km4dj/article/view/540/662

COOPÉRATION CANADA

About Cooperation Canada

Cooperation Canada brings together Canada's international development and humanitarian organizations and advocates for them by convening sector leaders, influencing policy and building capacity. Together, we work with partners both inside and outside Canada to build a world that's fair, safe and sustainable for all.

Land Acknowledgement

Cooperation Canada acknowledges the historical and ongoing oppression and colonization of all Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and lands in what we now know as Canada. The land on which Cooperation Canada's office is located is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabe People. We believe that social justice in Canada and globally depends on reconciliation with all Indigenous peoples, including the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, who are the original guardians of the land we are grateful to be sharing.