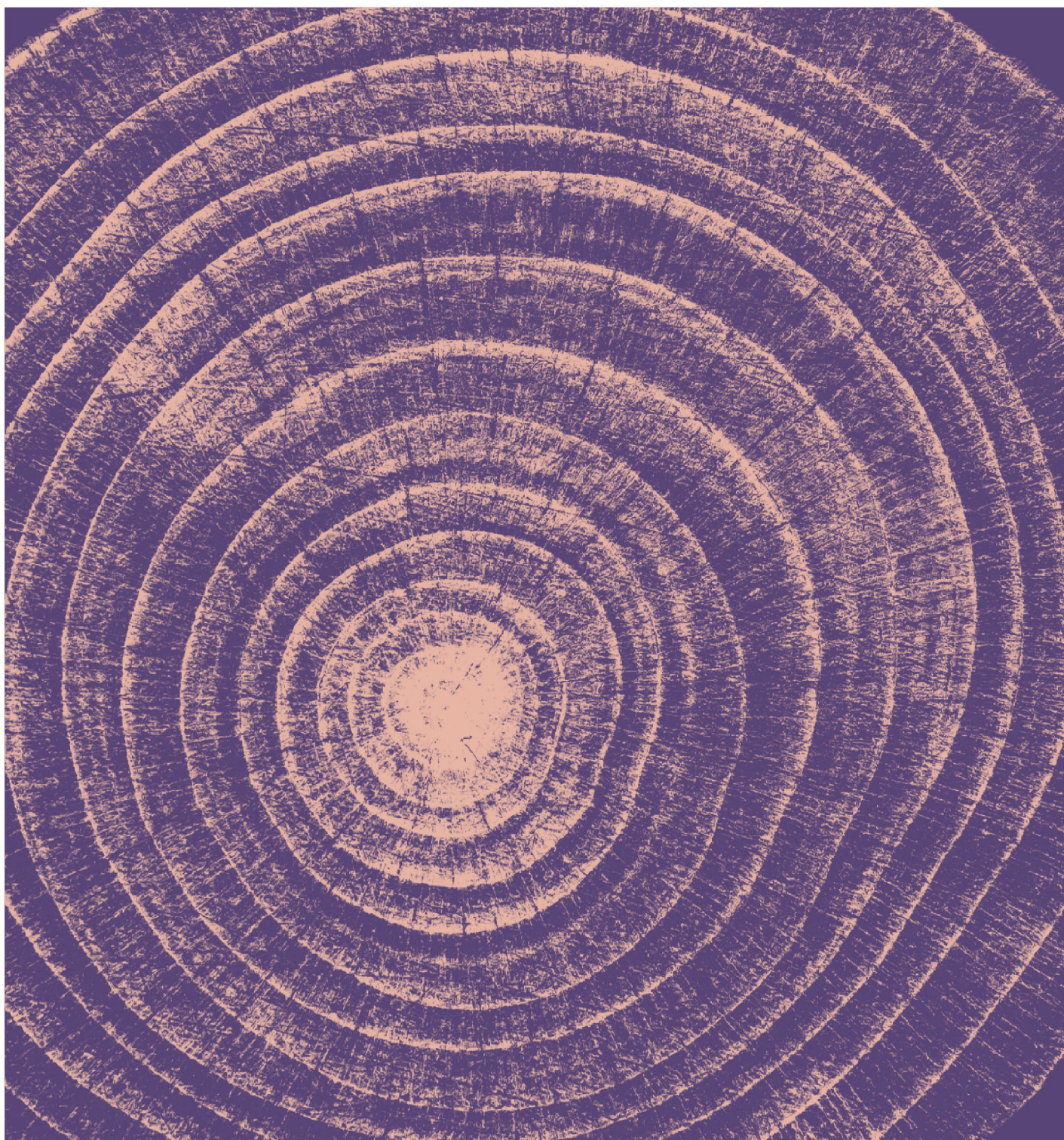




Localisation Efforts in the Development, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Fields

A Case Study of Lebanon

September 2025

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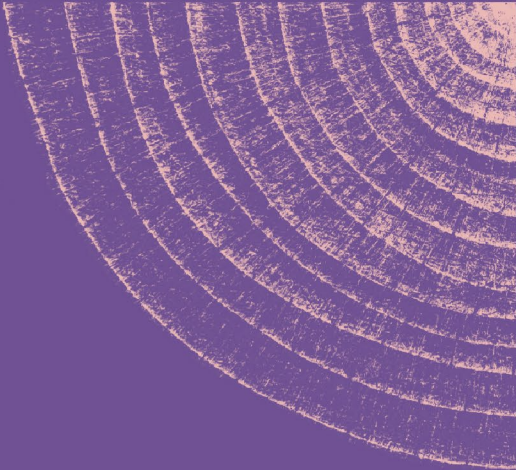
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1.

Introduction

As a result of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul, a mutual commitment was reached among state donors and humanitarian organisations, through the Grand Bargain, which reflected an agreement to reform the humanitarian sector (STGM, 2022). The Grand Bargain became a cornerstone in “localisation” efforts at the global level, currently signed by “63 signatories, 25 donor states, 11 UN agencies, 5 international organisations, including IFRC and ICRC, and 22 NGOs” (IFRC, 2021). It promotes making humanitarian action more effective, giving more power and resources to local actors, increasing transparency and accountability, and reducing the humanitarian funding gap. This was reflected in stated commitments around partnerships, capacity strengthening, financing and coordination. In relation to partnerships, commitments were made to: (1) remove barriers to partnerships, and (2) incorporate capacity strengthening into partnership agreements (IFRC, 2021). In relation to capacity strengthening, commitments were made to: (1) invest in institutional capacities, and (2) reinforce not replace (ibid). In relation to coordination, commitments were made to: (1) support & complement local mechanisms, and (2) involve local actors in international mechanisms (ibid). In relation to financing, commitments were made to: (1) channel 25% of humanitarian finance as directly as possible to local actors by 2020, and (2) to make more use of pooled funds (ibid).

As part of these commitments, many organisations started developing their own approaches, and these approaches were different. For example, OCHA, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR committed to partnering with more local groups (Global Compact on Refugees, 2024). Oxfam committed to restructuring to put more decision-making in the hands of their local staff in country and affiliate offices (Ratcliffe, 2025). The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) created a model of empowering local responders in crises (IFRC, 2022). Some governments such as Sweden and Australia created funding streams under which they can channel funds directly to local actors (SIDA, 2024; DFAT, 2023). However, a unified approach to localisation does not exist, and its practice remains dependent on many factors.

In addition to that, the Grand Bargain commitments, stated in the 2023 framework, emphasise localisation, participation of affected communities, and quality funding. It defines targets for increasing flexible funding, strengthening local leadership, and ensuring local actors’ participation in humanitarian decision-making (Grand Bargain Secretariat, 2023). These commitments were formulated as follows: (1) greater transparency, (2) more support and funding tools for local and national responders, (3) increase the use and coordination of cash based programming, (4) reduce duplication and management costs, with periodic functional reviews, (5) improve joint and impartial needs assessments, (6) a participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions, which affect their lives, (7) increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding, (8) reduce the earmarking of donor contributions, (9) harmonise and simplify reporting requirements, and (10) enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors (IASC, 2016).

The IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee), the primary international coordination mechanism for response to humanitarian emergencies, produced a template and a guide, with targets and indicators to assess local actors’ participation, leadership, and capacity-strengthening, resourcing for coordination, visibility, preparedness, response, and humanitarian development-peace collaboration (IASC, 2021). Despite these efforts, the 2024 analysis by Development Initiatives showed that localisation in humanitarian aid has not achieved its goals, set in the metrics of the Grand Bargain documents. For instance, local and national actors have only received 4.5 percent of all humanitarian funding in 2023 (Défis Humanitaires, 2024). This data shows that no major donor or UN agency were able to meet the 2020 targets. In 2025, the

IASC published a summary note titled Leveraging the ‘Bargain’ Meeting. In this note, several organisations committed to (1) agreeing concrete measures, and (2) Leveraging the GB Platform to identify parameters for structural and systemic reforms.

In the development sector, localisation has been taken for granted, as part and parcel of development initiatives. For example, a pledge to respect “country ownership” in aid was made by donor government, this pledge was meant to be translated into a commitment towards aligning aid with country-priorities (Ingram, 2024). Similarly, the 2011 Busan Partnership agreement explicitly recognised the importance of partnering with local actors, including local government and non-governmental institutions. Unlike the humanitarian sector, in the development sector there are not any global commitments, targets or metrics for how localisation could be achieved. Despite the fact that there are not global data to assess localisation in the development indicators, some scattered pieces of information can serve as indicators. For instance, in 2021 USAID set a target of directing 25 percent of its funding local partners by 2025, in 2022 it announced that it had over 10 percent of its fund channelled to local organisations. However, other analyses of data showed that the actual percentage of funds channelled to local actors were between four to seven percent (Forster & Paxton, 2023).

In the human rights sector, localisation is understood completely differently, yet like the development field it does not have global metrics or frameworks that define it. However, as human rights frameworks consist of core principles and standards, these are expected to be adopted by local organisations, with some room for “local interpretation”. A human rights-based approach to localisation revolves around the establishment of universal human rights and principles in the everyday realities of people at local levels. It is important to note that in the human rights field, it is expected for local actors to become eligible for funding to follow the universal standards of human rights. It has been noted that “99% of human rights funding by foundations is provided by funders in the Global North. Of that funding, 88% (\$3.7 billion) goes to recipients in the Global North, and 12% (\$495 million) goes to recipients in the Global South and East” (Women’s Fund Armenia, 2023). AWID (2020) highlighted that it is particularly difficult for women’s rights and feminist organisations and groups such as LGBTIQ+ persons, indigenous peoples in diverse territories, refugees, young feminists and sex workers to access human rights funding. Our research also demonstrated that feminist and women’s rights organisations working on violence against women and girls as well as economic and political empowerment confront similar challenges in relation to accessing funds.

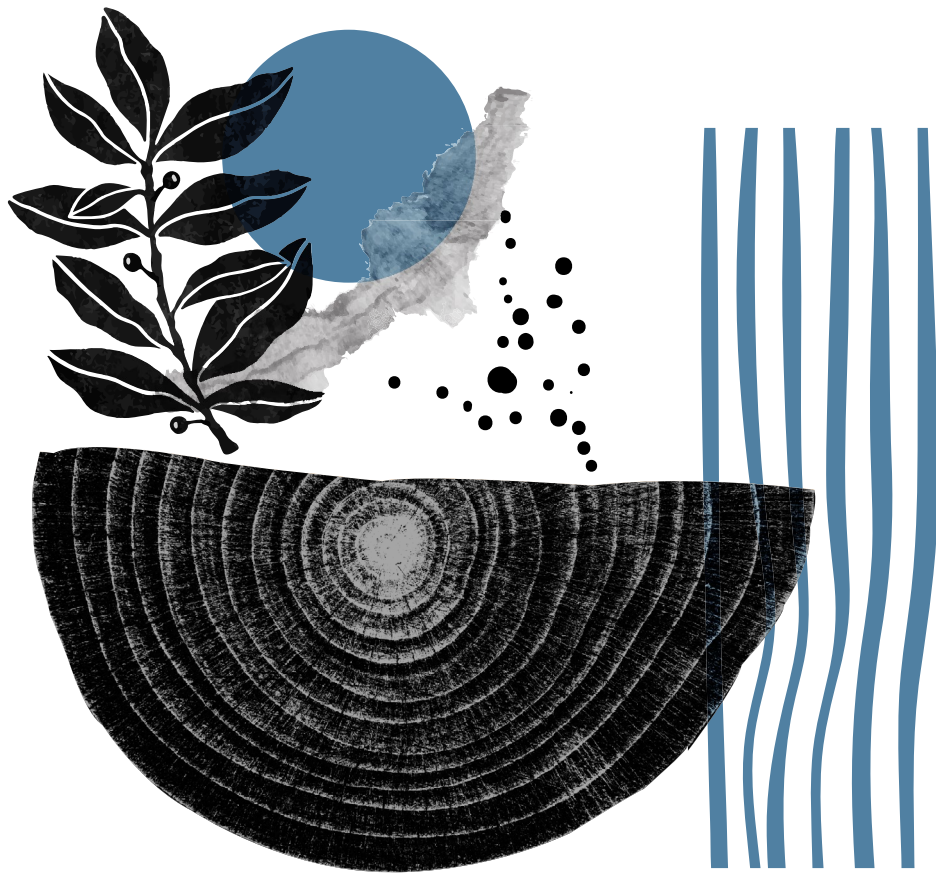
The need for this research emerged from Lebanon-based women’s rights actors, part of the FemPower programme¹, who felt that there is an urgent need to define localisation and it means from the perspectives of programme partners, as it has been used as a “buzzword” for long, yet at the same time they had not felt that it has shifted dynamics in the field. As the FemPower programme considers its model of “equal partnership and joint decision making” an objective on its own, it allowed for the space and resources for this research in response to the needs identified by its partners. Initially partner organisations, participants in this research, wanted to produce a policy brief on localisation efforts in Lebanon, with guidance and mentorship support from CTDC consultants. However, at some stage, they felt that they need to carry out more research over a longer period of time to be able to come up with policy recommendations that are evidence based and are relevant to the Lebanese context. The idea of the research has

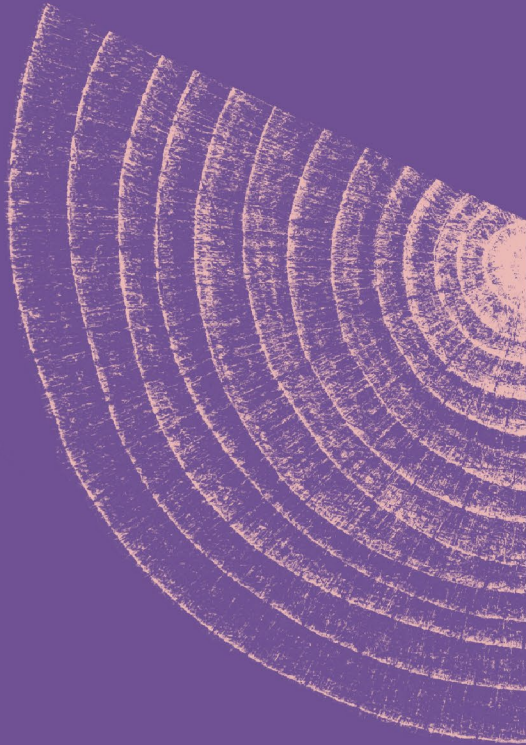
¹The *FemPower* program supports young women in Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Tunisia who face multiple forms of discrimination and economic gender-based violence. It aims to empower them as leaders of change, enabling them to hold duty bearers accountable and improve working conditions for women in the informal sector.

also come after October 7, 2023, as organisations in the Middle East broadly, and in Palestine and Lebanon more specifically, were questioning funding mechanisms, casting doubt on international human rights frameworks, and some of their funding was threatened due to their political stance or stated position condemning the genocide.

For the researchers, this research was meant to answer some of the questions they had around the feasibility of localisation efforts and its mechanisms, given the current world order. The severity of the situation in Palestine, Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen pushed many to see linkages between global politics and their everyday lives and local realities. It also made them question the intentions of international funding mechanisms. For this research, several consultations between the researchers took place around the need for this research, the research questions, the methodology and data collection tools, and investigated other concepts related to localisation including decolonisation.

While localisation efforts and commitments are different and vary across different sectors, in this research we investigate dynamics, relationalities, practices and understandings of localisation from different perspectives. With an overarching authentic and sincere question of “why are we not seeing satisfactory results from all localisation efforts?”, we thought through this with representatives from funding bodies, including governments and intermediary international organisations, as well as national and local non-governmental organisations, from across different sectors that operate in Lebanon.





2.

Methodology

With a focus on Lebanon, as a case study, this research examined how funders and donor communities approach localisation in programming and implementation, through consulting different types of funders, from intermediary organisations to government funding. The research investigated policies, dynamics and approaches of funding bodies and how they affect grassroots and local organisations, while interrogating the dynamics between different organisations operating at different levels, such as the grassroots, the local, and the national.

To do so, we adopted an intersectional decolonial analytical framework, developed by CTDC, and revolves around the following principles:

-
1. Politicisation,
 2. Historicization,
 3. Contextualisation,
 4. Language and the Politics of Translation,
 5. Intersectionality, Transnationalism and Global Politics,
 6. De-Canonisation,
 7. The Lens of Power and Relationality.
-

To kickstart this process, CTDC consultants provided six training and mentorship sessions to researchers, to sharpen the research questions, define the research goal, work through the data collection framework, and acquaint them with the decolonial framework for knowledge production. The sessions were attended by three researchers, from Impossible NGO-Akkar, Sama for Development, and Rass Baalback Club and the director of CRTDA, and FemPower's consortium coordinator, and were led by CTDC's consultants.

For this research, we adopted a qualitative approach to data collection to respond to the following research questions:

- How does the donor and funding community implement localisation in its approaches and strategies? How does it define it? And does it exert efforts to ensure localisation?
- How do the approaches and strategies adopted by funders affect dynamics and power relations between different organisations in Lebanon?
- How do local organisations define localisation? What does it mean to them?
- What are the best practices to ensure localisation in programming, funding, project implementation, and strategizing?

As the questions meant to explore dynamics, relationships, practices, and understandings, qualitative data was the most suitable to respond to them.

2.1 Data Collection

To collect the data, the researchers carried out a total of 20 consultations with representatives from funding bodies, including governments and intermediary international organisations, as well as national and local non-governmental organisations. Some of the consultations were individual, while others were collective and attended by two representatives from the same organisations. Different questions were asked to the different representatives of organisations as follows:

Questions for INGOs and Funding Bodies

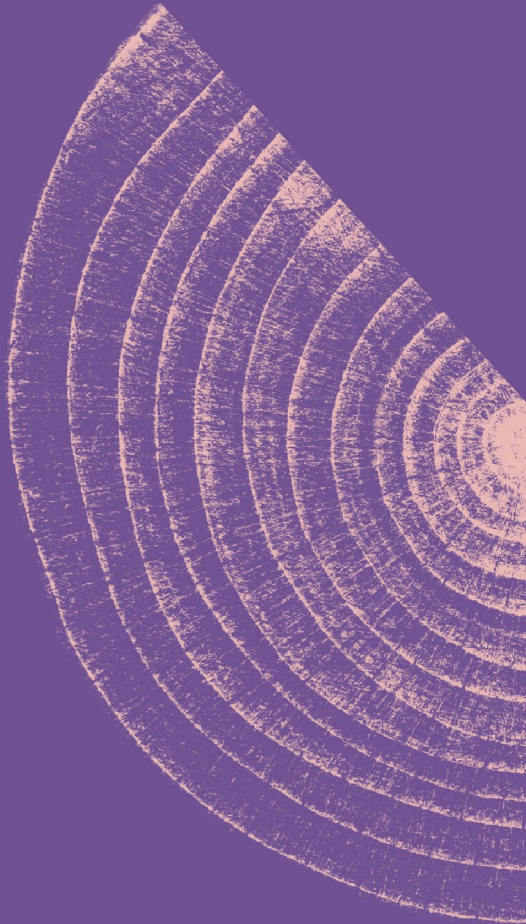
- What does “localisation” mean to you? And how can you translate the word into Arabic?
- How do you apply “localisation” in your work?
- What does “participatory approach” mean to you? And how do you apply it in your work?
- How do you deal and address power dynamics in partnerships and with partners?
- How do you ensure that your work is relevant and consistent with the context? And how do you analyse the context? {Extensive question - Do you consider these dimensions: history, local and global politics, society, natural environment?}
- How do you ensure that your work does not do harm? And how do you ensure that you respond to the lessons learned from your previous work?
- How do you choose your partners? Do you have any tools to verify partners?
- How do you ensure that you balance your work between local partners? Whether they are small or large institutions?
- How do you deal with local languages? Do you work in local languages or in your own language?
- How do you practice care with partners? Duty of care?
- How do you ensure that you apply intersectionality and “leave no one behind” in your work?
- Are there any internal operational challenges that might hinder the application of “localisation”?
- For the intermediary institution: How do you negotiate with funders regarding the conditions of the local context? And what challenges to the application of “localisation” might arise from funders?
- For funders: How do you ensure that international intermediary institutions apply “localisation” in their work?

Questions for Local Organisations

- What does “localisation” mean to you? How can you translate the word “localisation”?
- What does “participatory approach” mean to you? What are the challenges of working with international intermediaries?
- What are the challenges of working with donors?
- Do you feel that donors and international intermediaries apply the concept of “localisation” in their work? Examples? Why?
- Do donors or international intermediaries use local languages in their dealings with you? (Please ask for examples)
- Do you feel that donors or international intermediaries understand and are sensitive to the context? (Please ask for examples)
- What do you think is the best way to improve funding methods and access to grants?
- From your point of view, what advice would you give to donors and international intermediaries regarding “localisation”?

2.2 Limitations

With this research, we faced different types of limitations, one of the most significant was the use and translation of the word localisation. The lack of translation for the word localisation was one of the most significant barriers, although all researchers were Arabic language speakers, we all used the term in English. In addition to this, the Israeli aggression against Lebanon during the research period significantly impacted the researchers, restricting their mobility and limiting their ability to access a broader pool of participants. It has also played a significant role in prolonging the research process by three months. It is also important to highlight that some organisations and embassies declined the invitation for an interview.



3.

Unpacking
the
Concept

One of the first challenges of this research was to find a translation to the term localisation in Arabic language, as there is not a word that literally reflects the meaning of localisation. Whereas the most dominant word across all sectors is al-tawṭīn, tawṭīn in Arabic is more associated with the “nationalisation”, rather than localisation. All Arabic-speaking research participants expressed that they do not feel that the word tawṭīn reflects the meaning of localisation. A participant expressed that “it is not comprehensive, as it does not give agency to local actors. It sounds like it is something that you do to locals.” Another participant said: “localisation does not translate into tawṭīn, because it holds political connotations related to migrants and refugees.” Other descriptors are sometimes used in Arabic to describe localisation include al-tamkīn al-maḥallī, which translates into local empowerment, and idfā’ al-ṭābi’ al-maḥalli, which translates into giving something a local touch. A participant suggested some alternatives such as al-‘amal ma’a al-mujtama’āt al-maḥalliyya, which translates into working with local communities, tamkīn al-mu’assasāt al-qā’idiyya, which translates into empowering grassroots organisations. Another participant added that the translation must reflect the needs of the context and of local communities, as well as local actors’ ability to implement.

Participants described localisation as a process rooted in engagement, adaptability, and flexibility, where setting priorities, responding to local needs, and ensuring long-term sustainability are central, and as one participant put it localisation does not mean being flexible only, as flexibility can mean that (1) donor guidelines and processes should be less rigid and demanding, and (2) being able to shift activities and focus based on local needs. It involves direct funding to local actors, strengthening capacities and agency, fostering strong partnerships and collaborations, promoting shared leadership, shared agreements, and decision-making, shifting power dynamics, enhancing accessibility, building trusting relationships, and moving away from top-down processes, and taking local knowledges and firsthand experiences into consideration. Another participant added that: “it means reinforcing interaction and exchanging capacities and experiences between international and local organisations.” **It was very interesting that most participants, and even representatives of donor bodies, expressed that the term lacks clarity and does not have a unified definition.** This echoes with Wall and Hedlund’s (2017) observation that “there is no agreed definition of the term in the literature”.

Through consulting literature and from participants perspectives, on localisation efforts in Lebanon, we were able to identify key elements of localisation:

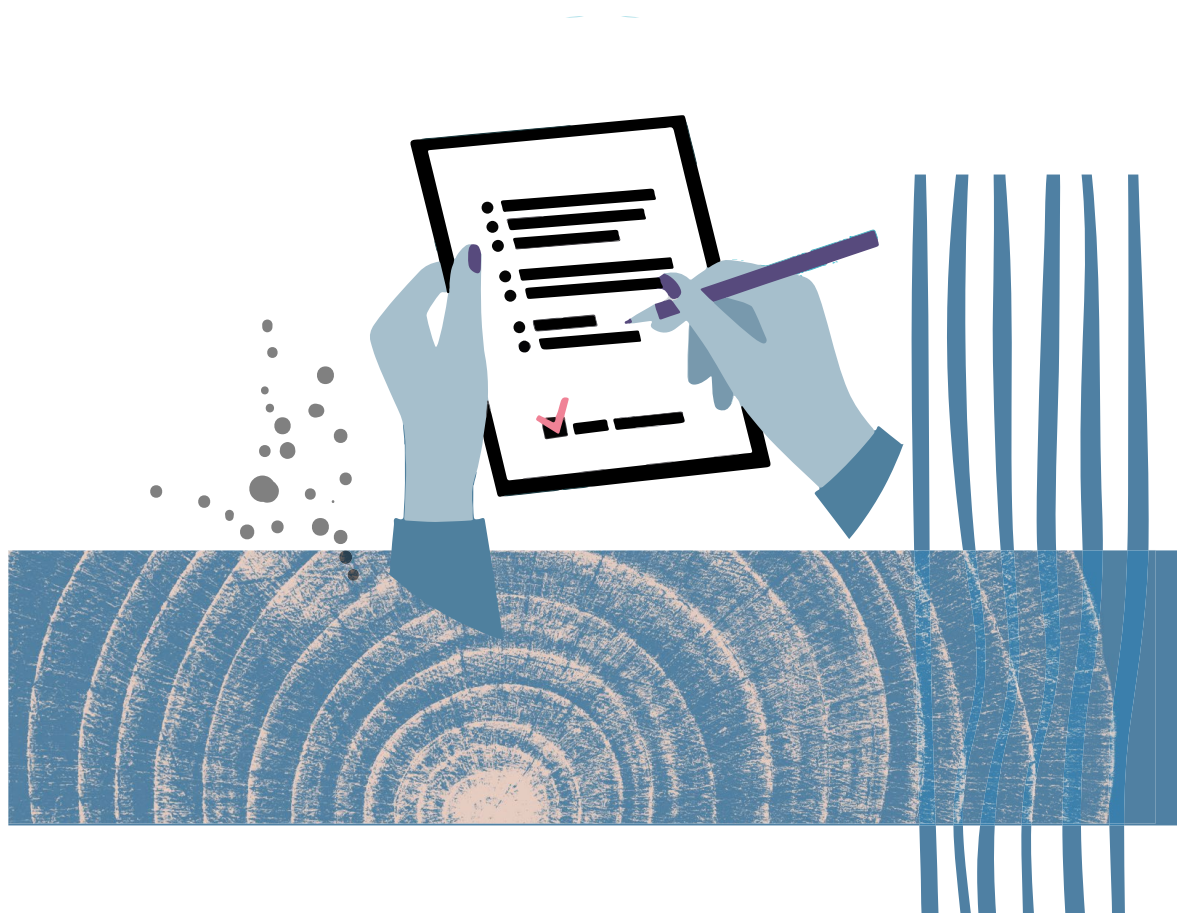
- **Engagement and Flexibility:** Responsive to local needs and priorities; flexible processes and procedures.
- **Adaptability:** Adapting projects to local needs and contexts, and adapting to changing contexts, and being able to adapt to local customs and laws.
- **Direct Funding:** Financial resources channelled directly to local actors, not only those that work at the national level, but also smaller organisations operating at local levels.

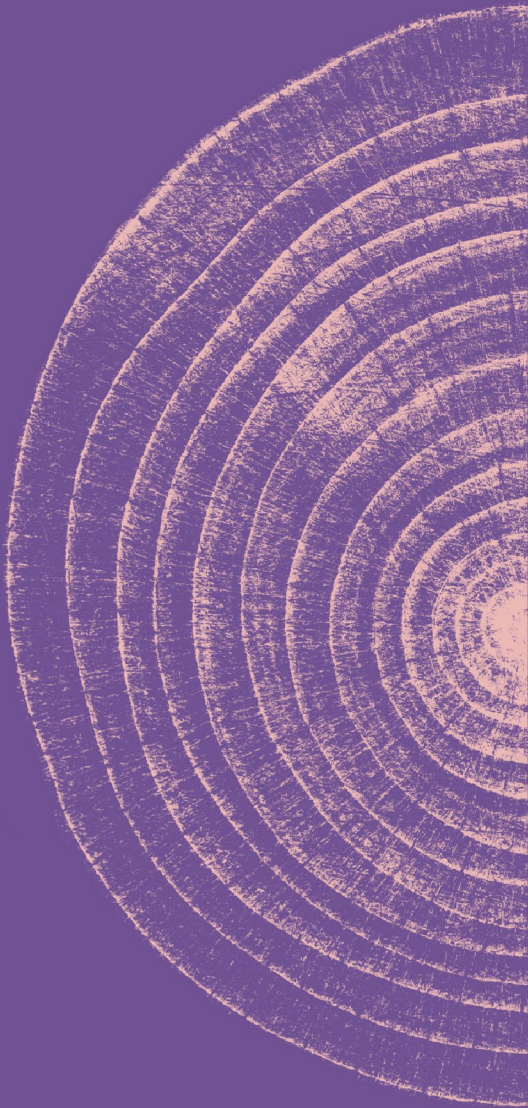
- **Capacity Strengthening and Agency:** Building skills, knowledge, and leadership among local organisations.
- **Equitable Partnerships:** Strong collaborations with shared leadership and decision-making.
- **Power Shifts:** Moving power from international to local actors; away from top-down processes, and challenging dominant narratives and power dynamics.
- **Accessibility and Trust:** Ensuring inclusive processes, and fair distribution of resources, and building long-term trusting relationships.
- **Valuing Local Knowledge:** Grounding action in local experiences and expertise.
- **Mutual Learning:** Exchanging capacities and experiences between international and local organisations, and between small and grassroots local organisations and those that operate nationally.
- **Sustainability:** Aiming for long-term local ownership and impact.

In addition to these key elements, **participatory approaches were perceived as part of localisation efforts**. Participants defined participatory approaches in different ways, including the engagement of local actors in project design and implementation. One participant highlighted that sometimes we see efforts to engage and involve local actors in project design, but this does not extend to implementation. One participant explained: “We apply a participatory approach through direct engagement with the community, organising field meetings, surveys, and roundtable discussions to understand the needs of the population before implementing projects. We also work with local experts to ensure that initiatives are aligned with the local culture and customs, thereby enhancing sustainability and increasing community ownership of the projects.”

Another participant from an intermediary organisation added: “participatory approaches involve engaging all stakeholders in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes, establishing working groups such as the Gender Working Group that include international and local organisations in coordination with the Lebanese state, strengthening the role of local women’s associations as co-leaders in decision-making, for example, through their participation in national policy formulation, and conducting consultations and field studies to gather community perspectives and ensure that programs align with local needs, such as interviewing rural women to identify their priorities.” Interestingly, none of the participants explained how it is possible to make participation and participatory approaches more meaningful, through ensuring it goes beyond representation.

Whereas localisation is concerned with shifting power to local actors, **decolonisation comes naturally as key element of localisation**. For instance, challenging colonial legacies, including power structures, knowledge systems, and decision-making, is essential for localisation. Structural colonial legacies are also evident in the distribution of funding. As previously mentioned, 88 percent of human rights funding remains in the Global North, with only 12 percent being channelled directly to the Global South. This requires challenging top-down approaches, as funding structures are largely dominated by Global North colonial narratives and practices. Based on research and literature, current frameworks, commitments and efforts only pay lip service to localisation, as they do not address calls for decolonising, and there are many challenges to localisation efforts that make it difficult to implement in praxis. A participant expressed: “one of the greatest challenges we face in implementing localisation is the lack of a full understanding of the concept; whether among donors or local communities. In some cases, the term is interpreted merely as the transfer of resources to local organisations without granting them full decision-making autonomy. Some communities perceive that international organisations impose certain programmes on them without taking their views into account.”





4.

Localisation in Praxis

Localisation in praxis is not merely a ‘buzzword’ concerned with shifting operations and/or responsibilities; as it involves shifting power, centring local leadership, and transforming the very structures of aid and development to be more just, equitable, and sustainable. As participants understood the concept in so many different ways, the way they described the way they practice localisation also differed. This demonstrated that the practice of localisation remains largely conditioned by organisational and individual interpretations of the term. This is largely due to the fact that localisation does not have a comprehensive coherent definition, which is also able to capture all necessary elements or localising and decolonising alike. One participant from an intermediary organisation explained: “we apply localisation by actively engaging local partners throughout the project cycle, ensuring that interventions are shaped through knowledge-sharing, consultation, and coordination. Local partners help identify priority needs, and capacity-building efforts are tailored to each sector, combining international standards with local knowledge. Through mutual exchange, we create more effective and sustainable impact.”



Participants described localisation processes in praxis to include the following components:

- 1. Conducting Thorough Context Analyses:** Beginning every project or proposal by analysing economic, social, and political conditions, especially given the constantly changing situation in countries like Lebanon. This can also include raw information and updates from project partners.
- 2. Identifying Priority Regions:** Focusing interventions on regions assessed as having greater needs, based on a combination of internal evaluations and external data (government reports, policies, research studies).
- 3. Aligning with Donor Objectives:** Designing projects that are compatible with donor funding priorities while ensuring they still address urgent local needs.
- 4. Recognising and Adapting to Changing Needs:** Understanding that needs evolve, particularly in conflict settings, and conducting ongoing assessments to update information about the situation is essential.

- 5. Conducting Market Analyses:** Analysing economic trends, such as price fluctuations and goods shortages, to design sustainable and responsive interventions.
- 6. Implementing a 360-Degree Assessment Approach:** Assessing various dimensions of the context using comprehensive tools and frameworks to get a full picture of community needs.
- 7. Revising Tools and Methodologies Regularly:** Continuously updating assessment tools to maintain accuracy and relevance (e.g., using indicators like Food Consumption Scores and Indexes).
- 8. Monitoring, Learning, and Adapting:** Continuously monitoring the impact of interventions, adapt strategies based on real-time realities, and refining approaches based on lessons learned.
- 9. Collaborating with Local Stakeholders:** Engaging local actors throughout the process to ensure that project designs reflect true community needs.
- 10. Maintaining Flexibility and Commitment to Improvement:** Staying flexible and committed to adjusting projects based on changing needs and priorities and maintaining a focus on sustainability and genuine community impact and engagement. This flexibility and commitment to improvement may translate into providing local organisations with core and operational funds or shifting the focus of project indicators.

Despite the fact that everyone agreed on the components that must be included in localising efforts, most participants from local organisations explained that this is in fact not taking place. They said:



International organisations do not truly apply participatory approaches. They create the impression that they do, but in reality, they don't. For example, they conceal the hidden theory so that intermediary organisations cannot become capable and take their place. Similarly, when it comes to financial breakdowns and full budgets, they do not discuss them or help local organisations develop policies for them, in order to retain all the financial benefits for themselves.

International organisations often retain decision-making power, limiting the autonomy of local actors. Their limited understanding of local realities leads to poorly aligned interventions. Much of the funding is absorbed by administrative costs, with only a small share reaching local communities, and transparency in partner selection and budget distribution is often lacking.





Donors live on Mars — they don't understand the Lebanese context well. They implement their own agendas and are disconnected from the local reality. What matters to them is the final report they receive from intermediary organisations.

The main challenge to the sustainability of civil society organisations in Lebanon is the lack of sufficient and direct funding. Available funding often limits local organisations to short-term implementation roles with small budgets that do not cover essential indirect costs. While the economic crisis has worsened these challenges, political crises have sometimes led to increased funding opportunities. There has been slight improvement in recognising the role of local organisations, particularly regarding indirect cost coverage, but fundamental barriers remain.



Localisation remains unclear to many implementers. Donors advocate for it without clear strategies, while imposing obstacles such as heavy administrative demands without funding, strict 10% overhead limits, unrealistic policy requirements for small Lebanese organisations, and a lack of genuine consideration for the local contexts.



We face several internal challenges when applying localisation, and they include: administrative and bureaucratic complexities imposed by some donors, the lack of human resources and technical capacities among some local partners, disparities in expertise levels between local and international organisations, adapting to local laws and regulations in the country, and balancing donor requirements with local needs.

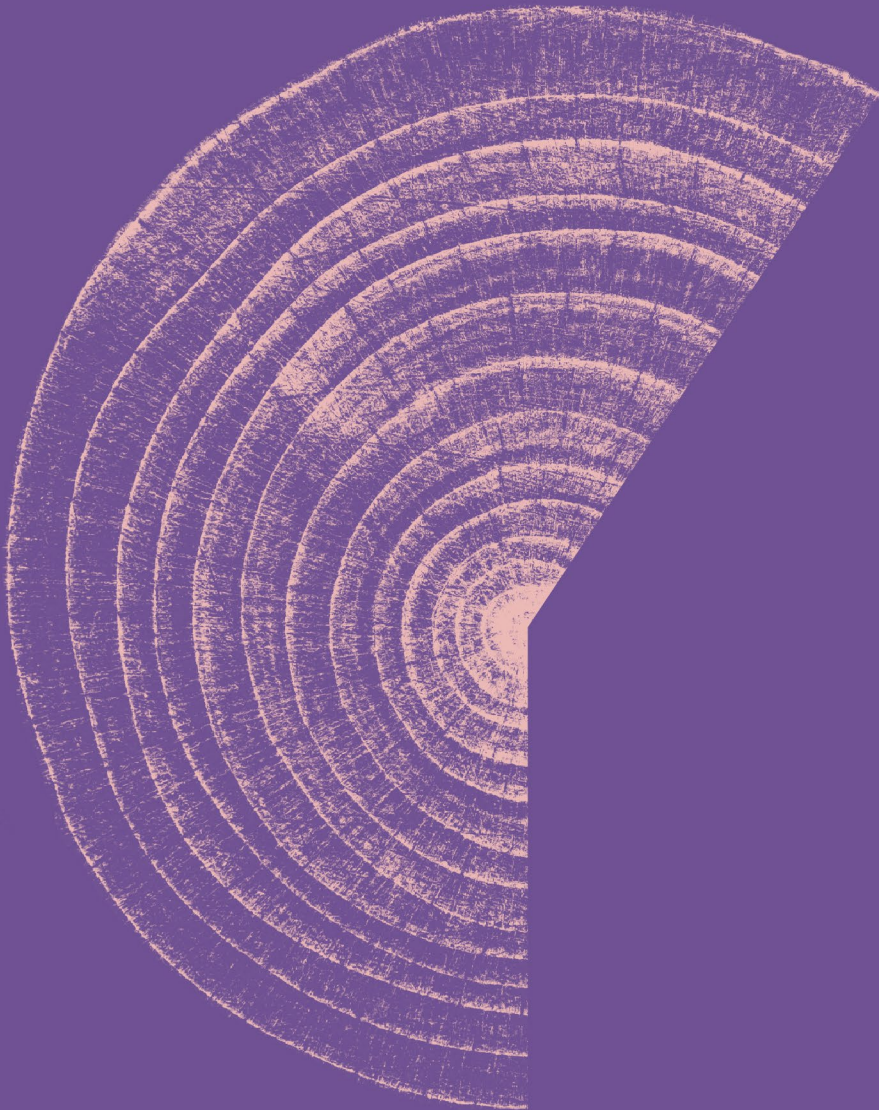
Funders must take into account local complexities, as they do not fully comprehend that working in one area differs from working in another, even within the same country. Donors do not understand this and insist on a one-size-fits-all approach — donors work strictly 'by the book.



Representatives of local organisations identified **three types of barriers to the implementation of meaningful localisation efforts, at the levels of funding, operations and relationships and power dynamics**. At the level of funding barriers, participants highlighted that limited and indirect funding, intermediaries taking the lion's share of funds, the strict overhead costs limits, and the unrealistic compliance requirements all undermine localisation efforts in praxis. A participant explained that even complex procurement, MEAL systems, and financial audits are modelled on Global North standards. At the level of operations, local organisations explained that the heavy administrative burdens required by donors, internal capacity challenges, such as limited human resources and technical capacities, balancing donor demands with local needs and adapting to local laws and legal frameworks also undermine localisation efforts. In addition to funding and operational barriers, **participants also identified relationship and power barriers, which include the use of superficial participatory approaches, control over finance and lack of financial transparency, disconnection from local realities, and the use of a one-size-fits-all approach**.

Funding Barriers	Relationship and Power Barriers
Limited and Indirect Funding	Superficial Participatory Approaches
Absorption of Funds by Intermediaries	Control Over Financial Transparency
Strict Overhead Limits	Disconnection from Local Realities
Unrealistic Compliance Requirements	One-Size-Fits-All Approach
	Incremental but Insufficient Improvements
Operational Barriers	
Heavy Administrative Burdens	
Internal Capacity Challenges	
Balancing Donor Demands and Local Needs	
Adapting to Local Laws	

In addition to these challenges other challenges can be identified in relation to the language used.



5.

Localisation and Language

The politics of language and translation are central to genuine localisation efforts across the development, humanitarian, and human rights fields. As highlighted by scholars such as Kumaravadivelu (2003) and Phillipson (1992), addressing linguistic hegemony, particularly the dominance of English and other colonial languages, is inseparable from the broader project of decolonising and shifting power. Addressing linguistic hegemony is very important for localisation, as language is a tool of power that shapes cultures, material realities, cognitive processes, and worldviews. In the context of localisation, failing to confront linguistic imperialism risks reproducing the very hierarchies that localisation aims to dismantle. Localisation, therefore, cannot be meaningfully achieved without critically engaging with language itself. This means encouraging the use of local languages to explore social phenomena and practices, as transformative localisation necessitates ensuring that local actors define their realities on their own terms.

Most participants from intermediary organisations expressed that they do their best to use local languages; however, the experiences of local organisations show that they still fall short, and that linguistic hegemony of English, French and Spanish still largely dominate the funding scene. In addition, the majority expressed that the end donor decides what language is used to communicate about the project. As one participant said: “the language we use depends on the requirements of each project. Reports and documents for donors must be prepared in the donor’s language, in line with our agreements. We offer translation support when needed to ensure clarity and compliance.” Another participant expressed: “to some extent, certain donors and intermediary international organisations use local languages when dealing with local organisations, reflecting an effort to facilitate communication and clarify instructions, especially in documents and programmes directed at local communities. However, disparities in this practice remain, as some entities insist on using foreign languages for most correspondence and documentation, limiting the ability of local staff who are not proficient in those languages to participate effectively.” Another participant added that language remain a massive problem in localisation efforts by giving examples of working groups, she said: “most discussions are conducted in English without interpretation, and even concepts are not standardised across topics, with each organisation attributing different meanings to the same terms.”

A participant from a local organisation explained that most correspondence and calls for proposals are issued in English, creating barriers for local organisations that lack specialised translation or proposal writing staff. They noted that some international organisations do not provide executive summaries or guidance documents in Arabic, and that meetings, workshops, reports, evaluations, and even key capacity assessments are often conducted in English and/or French, despite local staff expressing a preference to communicate in Arabic. The dominance of English and French emerged as a significant barrier to meaningful localisation. Consultation participants from local NGOs in Lebanon highlighted that donor processes, reporting requirements, and project communications were overwhelmingly conducted in English, excluding grassroots organisations that were otherwise deeply embedded in their communities.

This linguistic barrier was seen to privilege internationally trained elites and reinforce unequal power dynamics between international organisations and local actors.

As Shuyab (2022) notes the “locals” invited into global forums are often those with globalized educational or work credentials who can fill performative requests to act as storytellers, rather than being recognized as experts on an equal footing with global counterparts” (Shuayb 2022).

Similarly, secondary sources noted that compliance requirements and formal reporting standards, often accessible only to those proficient in donor-centric languages, limited equitable participation and agency for smaller organisations (Forster & Paxton, 2023). **These practices were seen as part of broader colonial continuities in the aid system, where language served as a hidden mechanism of exclusion, impeding the realisation of genuine, community-driven localisation** (Ingram, 2023). The need for multilingual accessibility and valuing local languages was implied as a critical, yet often overlooked, component of decolonising aid, development and human rights relationships.

Linguistic barriers to localisation can be summarised as follows:

1. Linguistic Hegemony as a Barrier to Localisation

- International organisations often operate exclusively in colonial languages (mainly English and French), which creates barriers for many local organisations and grassroots actors.
- This language dominance privileges internationally trained personnel and creates an elitist culture that excludes community-based organisations and smaller local NGOs.
- Language was framed as a power dynamic, where fluency in colonial languages became a proxy for “professionalism” or “capacity”, marginalising many local actors.

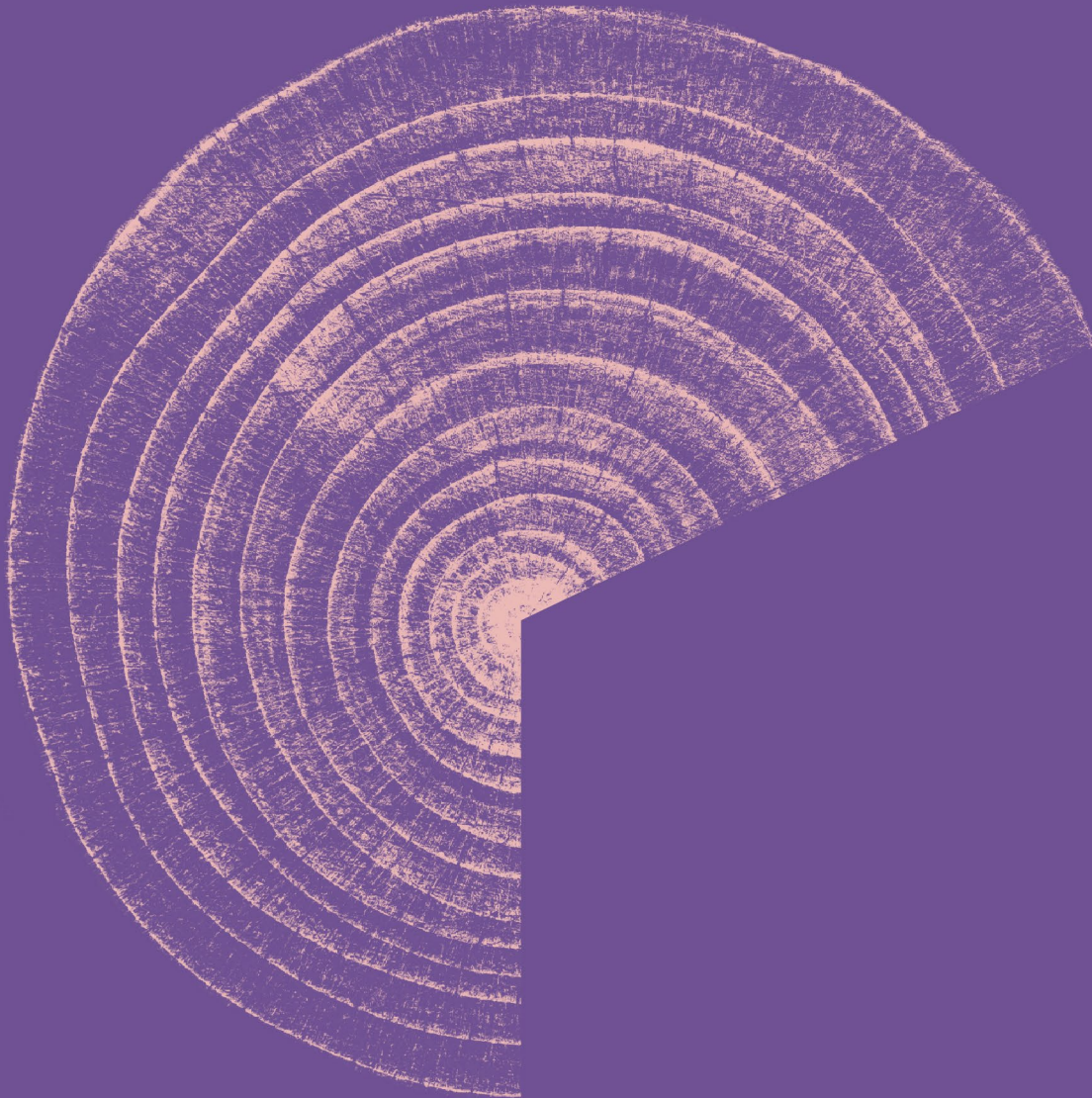
2. Colonial Linguistic Legacies

- The use of English/French without adaptation or meaningful translation is part of the broader colonial legacy in international aid and development.
- The lack of translation or the imposition of English/French documentation is a contributing to top-down decision-making processes and reinforcing hierarchies between donors/international organisations and local actors.
- Even when international organisations claim to apply participatory approaches, the language they use is exclusionary, limiting meaningful participation of communities.

3. Translation and Interpretation Gaps

- Interpretation services, translated documents, and multilingual communications are often underfunded, further entrenching inequalities.
- When translation is done, it is often literal and misses cultural nuances, which distorts community voices rather than amplifying them.

The dominance of hegemonic languages also reflects unequal relationships, and this further undermines localisation efforts.



6.

Relational Dynamics

At the heart of the idea of localisation is transforming power dynamics and relationships between different actors within the field. To understand localisations, and its practice, it is important to understand relational dynamics between different stakeholders, such as relationships between donor governments, intermediaries (national and international), and local organisations. We found that donor governments often channel funding to intermediaries; intermediary organisations, whether national or international channel funding to smaller local and national organisations, and consortiums are formed between local and national organisations, as well as intermediaries (whether national or international).

Stakeholder Relationship	Relationship Description	Purpose
Donor Governments → Intermediaries	Donor governments primarily channel funding to intermediary organisations.	Types of Intermediaries: Well-Established National Organisations International intermediaries.
Intermediaries → Local and National Organisations	Intermediary organisations (both national and international) further channel funding to smaller local and national organisations.	Functions: Financial mediation; Compliance and reporting on behalf of local and/or smaller national actors.
Local and National Organisations ↔ Serving as Intermediaries → Local Organisations	Consortiums are sometimes formed between well-established national and international organisations, which in turn channel funding to smaller local organisations.	Functions: Collaborative project implementation; Pooling capacities and resources; Meeting donor compliance and requirements through collective governance structures.

The different levels of relationships created through the different funding streams also create hierarchies and dynamics of power that need to be addressed to ensure that localisation efforts are meaningful. Localisation demands transforming funding flows and project management processes, as well as the very relationships that structure international aid, development, and human rights sectors. For example, many local organisations expressed that the majority of funds is poured into old well-established and compliance-ready national organisations, which creates a power imbalance between the different national organisations. Some pointed that smaller organisations feel exploited by the larger ones, who resort to them to implement their activities, for very cheap prices and at very low costs, leaving the smaller ones without much access to resources and unable to retain their human resources. As international donors' compliance, financial management and reporting systems are designed for large well-resourced and well-established organisations, this indirectly creates a barrier to the autonomy of local organisations. Such requirements weaken innovation, flexibility and responsiveness of local actors, who find themselves operating within rigid frameworks rather than focusing on responding to local needs.

However, it is important to note, when thinking of these dynamics, that these actors do not have the same or similar behaviours, and that dynamics might shift based on different factors. In fact, we found that the nature of the relationship between a local organisation and an intermediary might be different, if the representatives of the intermediary organisations are from the same national context. It has become clear that some local staff in international organisations negotiate with the structures to ensure the work is localised. A local staff member in an intermediary organisation said: “when donors see that we are able to say no without fear, justify our positions, and present valid reasons, they start to accept what we say and listen to us. Often, as local staff, our opinions differ from the regional director, and we try to hold meetings to reach a solution; otherwise, it is their decision that prevails.”

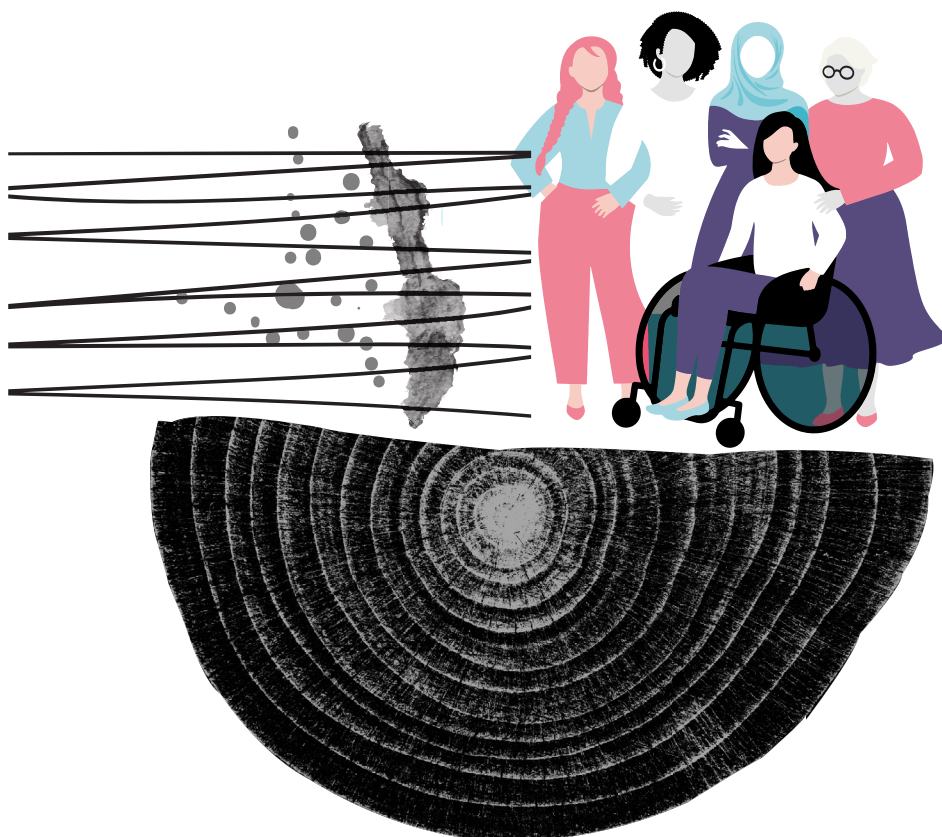
Other participants pointed that accountability within these relationships is “one-way”, and that relationships between different donors, intermediaries, and local organisations are not “reciprocal”. For example, a participant said: “they [funders] claim to uphold shared values and ethics, but in reality, if we submit a complaint, we often receive no feedback, while we are required to provide feedback, even for the smallest complaint made against any member of our team.” A participant expressed that there is a need for local organisations to exercise their power and push back and request that accountability is reciprocal. She added: “local organisations must create a mechanism for the monitoring of international organisations, so that they are able to hold them accountable if harm is done.”

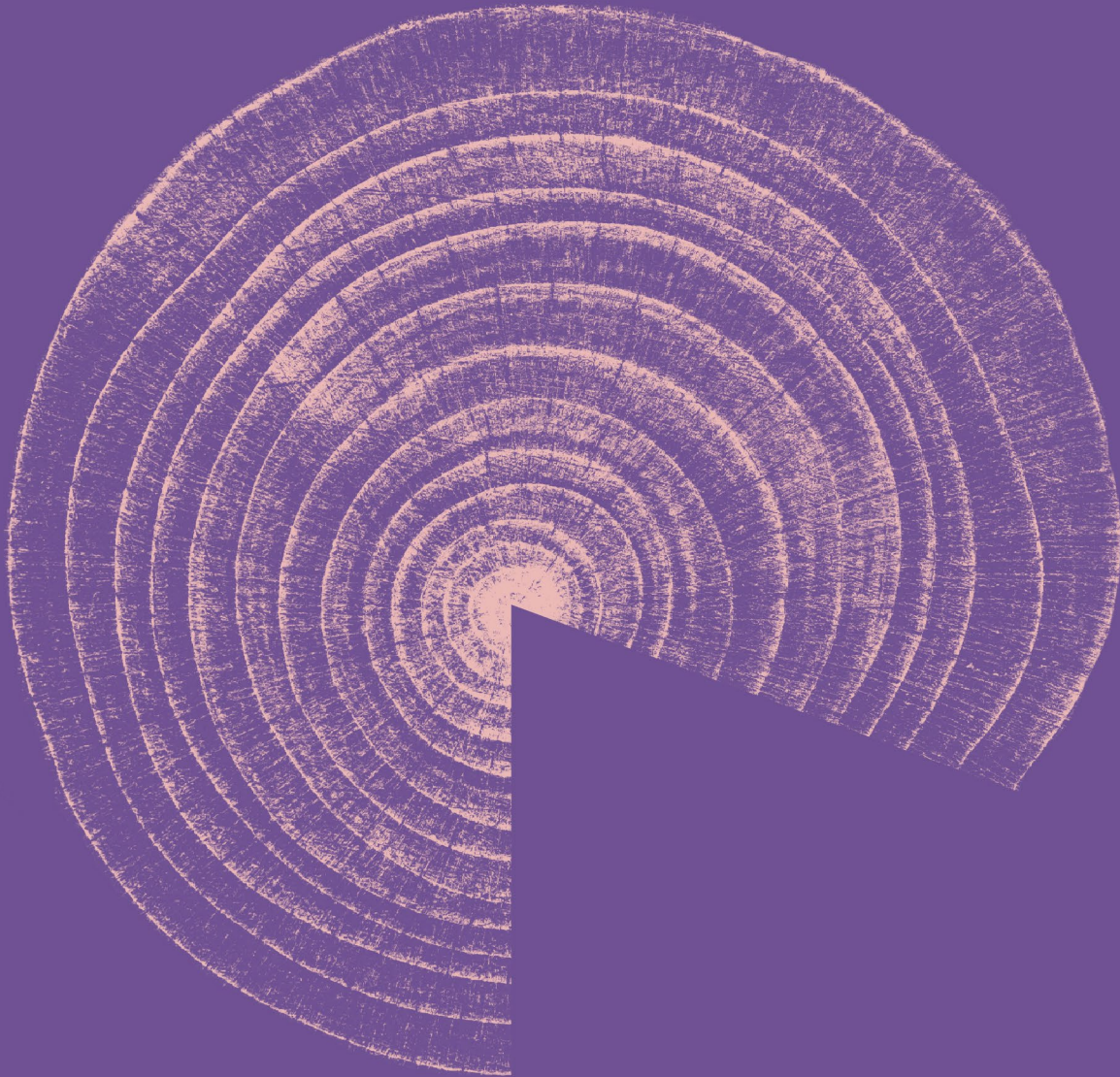
Another problem pointed out by participants was the migration of human resources from local organisations to larger national and international organisations for better pay. For instance, a participant said: “the departure of our staff to join other organisations that can pay better, undermines the sustainability of local organisations.” International organisations also perceive themselves as having “more expertise” due to having more access to financial resources. In addition to the low pay, another reason why many people leave local organisations in Lebanon is the lack of proper job contracts and the failure to register employees with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF); as local organisations often hire staff as consultants or without contracts to avoid providing benefits like health insurance and paid leave, whereas international organisations are typically registered and comply with labour laws. For example, a participant from an international organisation said: “International organisations have more experience because they have greater resources, higher salaries, and specialised departments. Local associations, working directly on the ground, apply for grants out of necessity and face intense competition. As international organisations, we can teach them, so they build their capacities, but that takes time.” In addition to accountability being one-way with funders and international organisations that meet donor government requirements, capacity building and learning is also one-way, with local organisations being perceived as “less capable”, simply because they do not meet the compliance requirements of Global North countries. A participant from a local organisation expressed her frustration with donor requirements, as she said: “to get funding, they ask us to have and provide them with policies we never heard of.”

The research with organisations in Lebanon revealed that trust and accountability dynamics in localisation efforts reveal significant tensions between international actors and local organisations. It has become clear that whomever holds the money, whether international donors, INGOs, and even national NGOs display a persistent lack of genuine trust in local actors’ capabilities, often imposing rigid compliance and reporting frameworks that prioritise donor assurance over flexibility, impeding adaptation and localisation efforts. A participant explained: “although we need

to be responsive to changing needs and conditions, we cannot do so due to donor compliance requirements and bureaucracies that seriously undermine our response to emergencies.” It is also important to note that international organisations and donor bodies often design “accountability” frameworks that are top-down (towards donors) rather than bottom-up (towards communities), making local actors accountable to donors, while donors themselves are rarely held accountable to local communities. Such lack of trust usually manifests in reduced opportunities for accessing core funds by small local organisations, who within such relational dynamics end up receiving funds only to cover activity costs. We can see that this lack of trust can manifest on different levels, at the level of not trusting the policies and procedures of small local organisations, not trusting their vision and direction, and not trusting that this will result in value for money. In addition, although partnerships and collaborations with local actors are encouraged to ensure localisations, partnerships are often unequal and nominal, as local organisations are used for implementation but excluded from strategic planning or leadership.

Local actors in Lebanon, and beyond, find themselves exerting emotional and relational labour as they navigate unequal partnerships, manage the expectations of their communities, and respond to the demands of donors. This type of work, which includes building trust with communities, bridging the gap between international frameworks and local realities, and sustaining grassroots movements, remains invisible, unfunded, and undervalued within the power structures that operate in relational dynamics between the different funding stakeholders. However, local actors also resist and exercise their agency, through negotiation and adaptation, and challenging imposed structures.





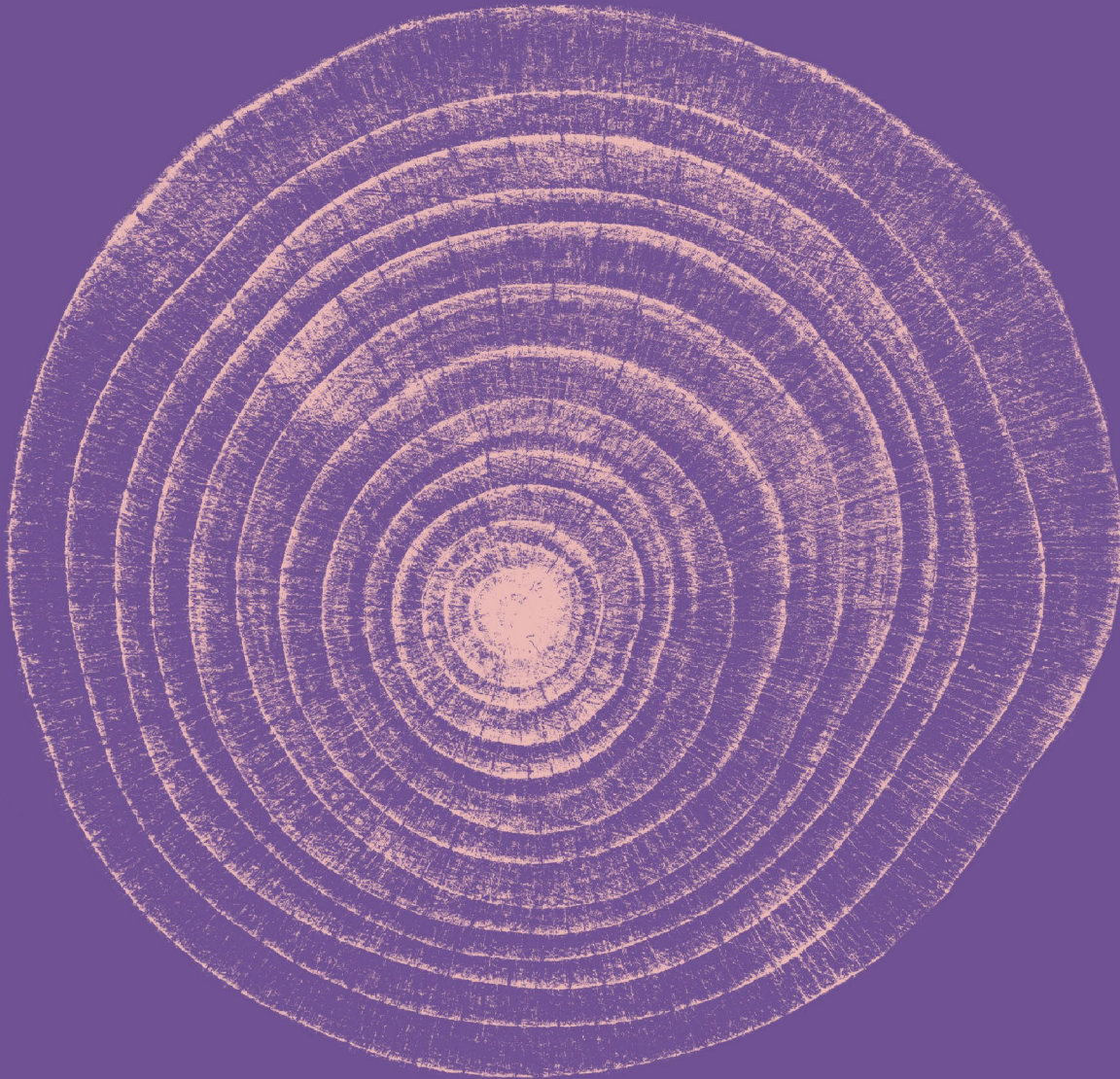
7.

Localisation and Global Politics

Localisation, defined as the transfer of leadership, decision-making authority, and resources to local and national actors, inherently requires profound political transformation. This necessity is underscored by the assertion that “outsider led initiatives... cannot fundamentally reshape global local power relations, identities, and behaviours because global agents cannot be architects of local ideas and solutions” (Kochanski, et al, 2025), highlighting the limitations of externally driven interventions in achieving sustainable, locally owned change. As localisation is a process embedded in global political dynamics, including colonialism and its legacies, political donor agendas, global north governance, and global north political parties’ dynamics, to mention a few. Some research participants shed light on the fact that global political agendas may create barriers and/or opportunities for localisation efforts. For instance, one participant from a funding body said: “with the change in government, our approach will be set by those who take control after the elections, and they will eventually be setting the agenda.” It has become clear through research that changes in global political leadership — such as U.S. or European elections — directly impact the availability, focus, and restrictions of funding. If, and when, those who set the agenda decide that they no longer wish to dedicate funding for localisation, then localisation efforts will stop. The global political atmosphere, during which this research was carried out, is currently leaning towards right-wing ideologies, and this is consequently resulting in funding cuts, many partner organisations are confronting. When geopolitical tensions shift, for instance, after changes in U.S. administrations or conflicts like the Ukraine war or the Gaza genocide, funding priorities shift, destabilising local organisations’ sustainability.

In addition to that, many participants expressed that their funding became unstable after the Israeli genocide against Gaza, which expanded to the region including Lebanon. They explained that their funding was threatened if they condemned the genocide. In response to the question whether they feel that donors or international intermediaries understand and are sensitive to the context, a participant said: “It’s not always the case. Sometimes, grant proposals are designed based on foreign policy agendas or the priorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”

Data from across all consultations indicated that donors and some intermediary organisations often prioritise their foreign policy agendas, their decisions are made based on political loyalties, and much of their programming is shaped by the agendas of donor states. This places local actors in critical situations trying to balance between donor agendas and local priorities, as many of them find themselves adjusting their proposals and operations to fit donor language and political sensitivities. This demonstrates that local and global dynamics do not operate in isolation, and they cannot be viewed as a simple binary of external and internal actors. Thus, dynamics between the local and the global are relational, constantly influencing and reshaping each other, with various factors at play, such as power, resources, norms, and political agendas. Despite the fact that the concept of localisation is rooted in community agency and local ownership, the praxis is still fundamentally shaped, restricted, and conditioned, by global politics and global power dynamics. This relational process means that genuine localisation cannot occur without transforming the asymmetries of global power, which continue to impede local leadership, limit access to resources, and impose externally driven theories of change.



8.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite broad commitments to localisation, efforts in Lebanon remain largely symbolic and tokenistic rather than transformative, with many local organisations often treated as subcontractors rather than genuine leaders in humanitarian and development work. Power imbalances persist, with decision-making, control over funding, and agenda-setting largely affected by global politics. Funding structures continue to favour international intermediaries, leaving local and grassroots organisations under-resourced and overburdened by rigid compliance demands. Direct, flexible, core, and long-term funding remains rare, while complex application procedures and a lack of overhead support exclude smaller local organisations. Language barriers also persist, as English dominates formal funding processes, limiting accessibility for many local actors. Accountability is still largely practised from a top-down approach, with almost no mechanisms for communities and local organisations to hold international actors accountable.

Operational and bureaucratic obstacles, including rigid compliance requirements, short project cycles, and administrative burdens, impede localisation efforts, and local organisations often bear emotional, financial, and operational risks. Relational dynamics are shaped by entrenched power hierarchies, with accountability flowing upwards to donors rather than towards the communities served. Global political shifts, including foreign policy agendas, conflicts, and colonialism, directly undermine localisation efforts. Despite the negotiations efforts exerted by different actors, structural barriers remain deeply embedded in global politics. Achieving meaningful localisation requires transforming funding practices, accountability systems, and power relations.

Based on this research, we provide the following recommendations:

- 1 **Clarify the Meaning of Localisation:** To appropriately address gaps in the way localisation is defined and practised, there is an urgent need to produce a unified definition of localisation and its application in practice.
- 2 **Power Shifts and True Localisation:** To transform power, efforts need to be exerted for the transfer leadership, decision-making, and funding directly to local actors, including grassroots and small local organisations, to enable communities to set their priorities, not just implement externally designed projects.
- 3 **Funding Reform:** To localise, there is an urgent need for funding reform, which could entail increasing direct multi-year and flexible funding to local organisations, and providing adequate overhead, as well as core and indirect costs. Such efforts should include simplifying applications and ensuring grants are accessible to organisations that are not only skilled in donor language.
- 4 **Inclusive and Participatory Approaches:** Such approaches must engage communities at all stages, from design to evaluation, embed participatory methodologies systematically rather than treating them as mere consultations, and elevate local voices in decision-making spaces, including national-level planning and international advocacy.

- 5 **Contextualisation:** To adapt work to contexts, there is a need to inform interventions thorough context analysis, considering history, politics, society, economy, and environment, and to avoid the use of one-size-fits-all models, in order to ensure that projects are adapted to local realities.
- 6 **Language and Communication:** Language is an essential component of local culture, and for this reason the use local languages in all community-facing activities are highly recommended. In addition to that, simplifying technical language, and translate key documents like calls for proposals, guidelines, and reporting tools, can massively improve localisation efforts.
- 7 **Addressing Power Dynamics:** Even though a power reform is needed at a global level, partnerships can become more balanced, with differentiated support provided to small and large local organisations. Balancing partnership can also entail financial transparency and transparency around decision making, in addition to ensuring that accountability is reciprocal.
- 8 **Strengthen Accountability:** It is essential for localisation efforts to be more meaningful in all aspects to address the accountability of international actors, this could include the creation of independent monitoring platforms led by local actors to track localisation progress.
- 9 **Political and Structural Reforms:** There is a need to challenge donor-agendas that impede localisation, and there is a need for advocacy work around reforming funding structures and reducing dependence on intermediaries and international organisations. Such work must acknowledge the agency of local actors and ensure that their involvement is meaningful rather than tokenistic.

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Annex: Localisation in Action

Guiding Principles

- **Contextualised Power Shifts:** Move decision-making, funding, and leadership to local actors.
- **Decolonial Praxis:** Address global power asymmetries, linguistic hegemony, colonial legacies, and other structures of oppression.
- **Reciprocal Accountability:** Ensure mutual responsibility and monitoring across relationships and engage in continuous self-reflective exercises.
- **Transparent, Participatory Practice:** Embed meaningful, non-tokenistic participation at all levels.
- **Linguistic and Cultural Relevance:** Operate in local languages and align with contextual priorities.

Organisational Relationship Dimensions

Relationship Type	Localisation Action (<i>Informed by Research Findings</i>)
Organisation ↔ Community	• Disseminate information in local languages. • Share strategies, policies and procedures, as well as complaints procedures, and reports transparently. • Involve communities in strategic planning through consultations. • Design platforms (digital/physical) that facilitate two-way communication and trust-building.
Organisation ↔ Donors	• Negotiate equal, clear, and detailed MoUs including complaints mechanisms. • Share safeguarding, financial, and accountability policies of both parties. • Resist top-down donor agendas; contextualise work through joint analysis. • Advocate for multi-year, core, and accessible funding with simplified applications. • Push for reciprocal accountability and community-responsive indicators.
Organisation ↔ State Institutions	• Establish transparent protocols for engagement, taxes, and registration. • Define procedures for cooperation (referrals, updates, risk management).

Organisation ↔ State Institutions (cont'd)	• Conduct risk assessments when missions clash with state agendas. • Document power analysis around state–civil society relations.
Organisation ↔ Personnel	• Provide legally binding contracts inclusive of NSSF registration (in Lebanon). • Ensure policies on anti-harassment, corruption, exploitation are clear and public. • Offer training on power, safeguarding, and accountability. • Publish and explain organisational structures and salary scales. • Value emotional labour and ensure well-being support and care policies.
Organisation ↔ Beneficiaries	• Clarify selection criteria and ensure inclusive outreach. • Enable multi-channel access to complaints mechanisms (in local languages). • Engage in participatory design, monitoring, and evaluation processes. • Prioritise transparency and long-term relationship-building over extractive data collection.
Organisation ↔ Partners	• Define partnership selection criteria rooted in justice and alignment. • Formalise collaboration through equitable MoUs and clear roles. • Ensure complaints procedures are reciprocal. • Enable shared decision-making, resource allocation, and visibility. • Avoid subcontracting models that exploit grassroots partners.

Localisation Framework: Organisational Self-Assessment Questions

A. Organisation and the General Community

1. Is all key information about your organisation (mission, vision, policies, reports) publicly available in the local language(s)?
2. Do you use accessible formats (digital and physical) to communicate with community members?
3. Do your feedback and complaints mechanisms ensure safe, anonymous, and culturally appropriate access for all community members?
4. How are community members involved in shaping your strategies, programmes, and events?
5. Do you ensure ongoing, two-way communication with the community beyond project cycles?

B. Organisation and its Donors

6. Do your contracts with donors clearly outline mutual roles, responsibilities, and complaint mechanisms?

7. Have you discussed and agreed upon safe and context-sensitive communication protocols with each donor?
8. Are donor requirements adapted to your context, capacities, and language? If not, have you advocated for such adaptations?
9. Do you receive flexible, core, and/or long-term funding? If not, do you advocate for it?
10. Are accountability mechanisms with donors reciprocal and locally led?

C. Organisation and State Institutions

11. Have you established clear procedures for engaging with state bodies on legal, financial, and operational matters?
12. Is there a designated focal point responsible for state communication and compliance?
13. Have you conducted a risk assessment regarding potential state interference or violence affecting your work?
14. Do you have documented strategies to respond to political or legal risks associated with your mandate?
15. Are referral and service coordination processes with state institutions transparent and locally adapted?

D. Organisation and its Personnel

16. Are all personnel provided with clear, legally compliant contracts including social security registration (e.g., NSSF in Lebanon)?
17. Are there institutionalised safeguarding and anti-abuse policies known to all personnel and regularly updated?
18. Are roles, responsibilities, and organisational structures clearly defined and accessible to all personnel?
19. Do you provide regular training on accountability, protection, and power dynamics?
20. Are recruitment, salary scales, promotion and dismissal procedures transparent and non-exploitative?

E. Organisation and its Beneficiaries

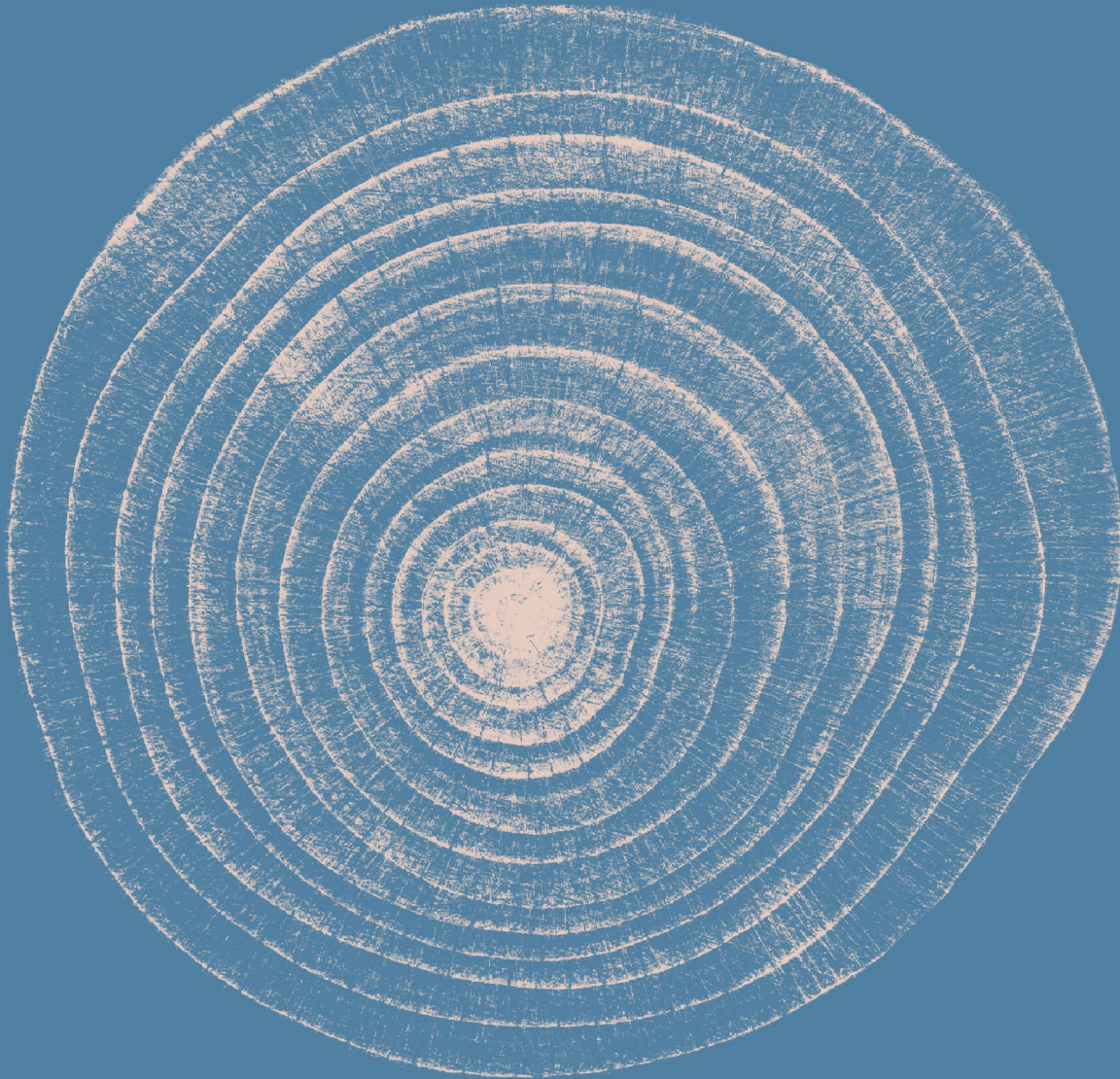
21. Do you use clear and fair criteria for beneficiary selection and share them publicly?
22. Are beneficiaries informed of how to file complaints in a language and format they understand?
23. Are beneficiaries consulted in programme design, implementation, and evaluation?
24. Do you have procedures for inclusive outreach that go beyond token representation?
25. Are communications with beneficiaries culturally sensitive, multilingual, and consistent?

F. Organisation and its Partners

26. Do you have clear and just criteria for selecting and vetting partner organisations?
27. Are MoUs and contracts with partners co-developed and equitable?
28. Are financial responsibilities, reporting obligations, and decision-making processes shared transparently?
29. Do you practice co-leadership in joint projects or only delegate implementation?
30. Are there accessible, two-way complaints and feedback mechanisms between partners?

Cross-Cutting Reflection

31. Are your organisational documents, trainings, and project materials accessible in local languages?
32. Do you critically assess how global funding structures and compliance expectations shape your relationships and practices?
33. Have you adopted participatory methods that go beyond consultation to shared decision-making and implementation?
34. Do you value and integrate local knowledge and lived experiences as expertise?
35. Do you have systems in place to track and challenge power imbalances across your organisational relationships?



Localisation Efforts in the Development, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Fields

September 2025