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## PARTNERSHIP AND LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT (LLD)

### Locally Led & Globally Connected

« The partnership approach has built the space for both organisations – not for you to be the donor – but as partners, to be together in the missions that we have set ... So we have found common ground. »

Dr Rabina G. Rasaily, FEDO – Feminist Dalit Organisation Nepal, July 2023

Many development workers remember the slogan «farmers first» coined by Robert Chambers in the 1980ties and 90ties leading to Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools. Later in 2005, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, emphasized local ownership as a priority for development cooperation. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (Grand Bargain) furthermore stressed making humanitarian action «**as local as possible, as international as necessary**», sparking broader discussions on localization among development actors, donors and the OECD DAC.

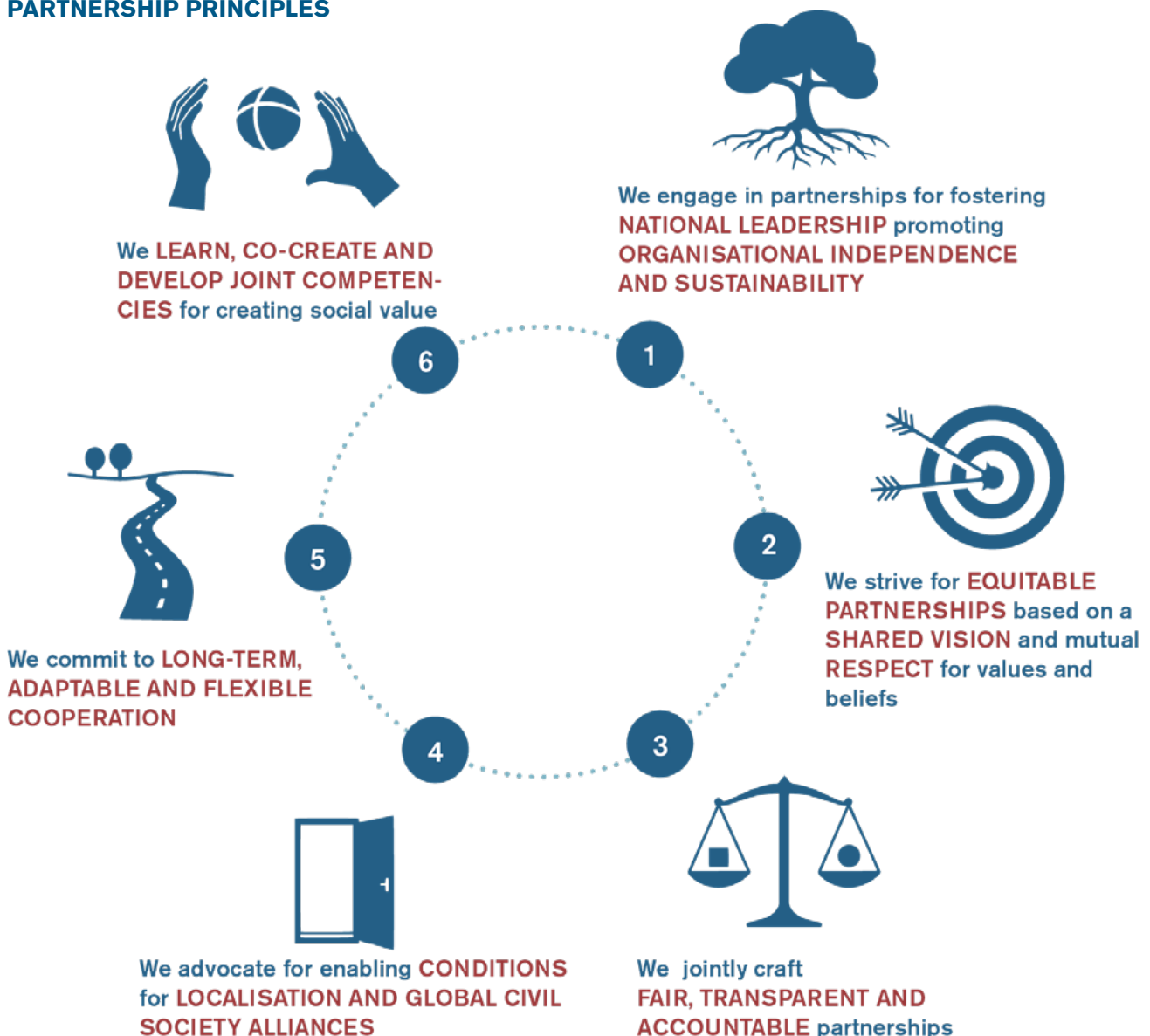
In the ongoing discussion about localization or **locally led development (LLD)**, it is acknowledged that local stakeholders possess **profound understanding of communities** and distinctive expertise and contextual insights.

This has led to a shift in focus towards **partnerships that leverage the strengths of local actors** to drive active engagement in their own development processes.

For an extended period, Helvetas has been engaged in experimentation with approaches aimed at empowering local actors. These approaches include core funding to local partners. Consequently, Helvetas is profoundly committed to ensuring that communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), individuals, as well as private and public organisations, **assume leadership roles in setting agendas, developing and sharing capacities, and managing resources** in humanitarian and development cooperation projects.

Also, Helvetas has been actively involved in **civil society coalitions** concerned with development effectiveness

## PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES



(Paris Declaration 2005) which focused on national priorities, while highlighting civil society voices and concerns. Helvetas has also collaborated with organizations like the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and INTRAC to **explore partnerships and capacity development**. Since 2015 numerous workshops in program countries to discuss and develop a joint approach together with local partners and staff have taken place, relying on the inclusive systems approach as a foundation for cooperation in projects and programmes.

While the localisation agenda has gained prominence recently, the **issues of power and inequality** between donors and receivers of aid are by no means new to the development sector and the colonial past was already in the 1970s a hotly debated issue (see Box on decolonisation at the end of the document). At the same time, Helvetas has invested and reflected on power dynamics and their significance for local strategies, in its work on Voice, Inclusion and Cohesion, see also PEPA tool.

In a recent multi-country assessment, Helvetas found that, open conversations with partners **spark positive energy and an eagerness to explore how both Helvetas and partners** can further improve and make intentional efforts towards more beneficial outcomes. Also, local partners and Helvetas teams **reflected on their relationships** which often emerge organically. It also showed that the potential for Helvetas to engage in longer-term strategic partnerships with local actors relies on **strong relations developed beyond project delivery**, shared history, common perspectives, and joint values. Person-to-person relationships play a crucial role in these connections. They start to grow well before the Helvetas administrative system recognizes them. Capacity Development discussions with partners furthermore provide a solid **basis for better collaboration by identifying capacity needs on both sides**, recognizing the importance of improving partnership quality and collaboration.

## THE JOURNEY TOWARDS LOCALLY

### LED DEVELOPMENT

To achieve local ownership, Helvetas has in the past 10 years **focused on local actors**<sup>1</sup> through the «**Partnership and Capacity Development**» approach that can be found in the partnership principles, policy papers and guidelines. Recently new dimensions surfaced in the discussion, see also the Blog post on «Localizing Development: A Critical Look at Power Relations<sup>2</sup>» or the experience of Nepal with localised trail bridge building<sup>3</sup>. Helvetas also experimented with different modalities of locally led development, including supporting and working with **local offshoots** in countries such as Viet-

nam. Yet, the path to locally led development is a work in progress and many barriers must be overcome<sup>4</sup>.

The discourse surrounding localization in international development cooperation has evolved significantly in the last 5 years reflecting the need for a **profound shift of power, resources and agency** towards more inclusive and participatory approaches, now summarized as **locally led development (LLD)**.

**Local actors** are citizens and entities established in, based in and originating from a country or region on the DAC list of ODA recipients. [Link to list](#).

The locally led development agenda underscores the **importance of legitimate local actors** in decision-making processes, fostering local ownership, local capacities, and valuing cultural diversity. Moreover, the localization discourse emphasizes the significance of tailored, context-specific solutions that respond to local needs, aspirations, and capabilities. It stresses the necessity to move away from uniform approaches towards interventions customized to reflect the social, cultural, economic, and political realities of the communities being served.

## WHAT IS LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT (LLD)?

**Locally led development (LLD)** supports legitimate and value-driven local actors to design and lead interventions for effective development outcomes. Through capacity sharing as well as complementary and collaborative approaches, it ensures accountability and effective progress.

Localisation as the process leading to locally led development (LLD) reflects core values of Helvetas, mirrored in its overall commitment to local ownership as found in its vision, mission and values<sup>5</sup>.

Based on development effectiveness, the **relationship to and with our partners** is the pivotal approach to support locally led development, looked at through a systems perspective and **partnership principles**.

Helvetas believes in the central importance of strengthened locally led spaces and actors and is committed to promoting locally led development (LLD) with a focus on a systemic approach.

## KEY ELEMENTS OF LLD

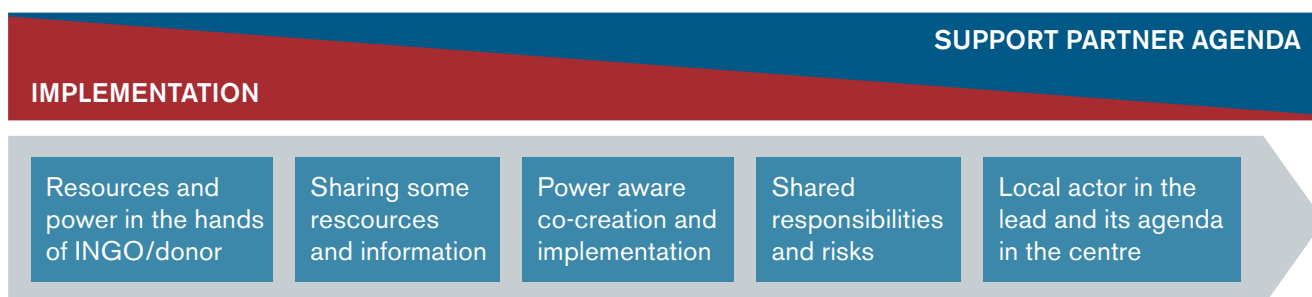
<b>RELATIONSHIP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visibility and voice of partners</li> <li>• Quality partnerships</li> <li>• Inclusive decision making</li> </ul>
<b>SYSTEMS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with local priorities</li> <li>• Integration with wider systems</li> </ul>
<b>ORGANISATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity sharing</li> <li>• Coaching, mentoring, organisation development</li> <li>• Co-creation</li> </ul>
<b>FINANCES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair share of resources</li> <li>• Risk sharing</li> </ul>

### NEW MODES OF COOPERATION, ROLES AND CHALLENGES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

As the **relationship with local partners** is crucial for LLD, it is worthwhile reflecting on the roles and relationships between local partners and Helvetas, to ultimately empower them as decision-makers in their own development processes.

Helvetas is therefore increasingly taking on the role of a **facilitator, knowledge broker or convener, connector & platform builder to leverage resources, technical expertise, and networking**, for local and international actors and change agents jointly implementing interventions to achieve co-developed goals (see also: 9 roles by peace direct<sup>6</sup>).

## ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS



## MODALITIES OF COOPERATION

Modalities	No power sharing	Sharing some resources and information	Power aware co-creation and implementation	Shared responsibilities and risks	Local actor in the lead and its agenda in the centre
Local actor	Focus on strengthening the partner (for: nascent CSOs/local partners)	Developing own org. and start to look at the outside environment (for: emergent CSOs/local partners)	Strengthening their mission (for: emergent CSOs/local partners)	Operating with both an inward and outward lens (for: mature CSOs/local partners)	Focus on transformational excellence (for: mature CSOs/local partners)
INGO*	Lead implementation, trainer/coach	Interpreter, trainer/coach	Knowledge broker, convener, connector	Convener, co-advocate, watchdog	Critical friend, watchdog

\* These INGO roles are inspired by the PEACE DIRECT typology. They are not exclusive and depending on the situation can be interchanged.

The extensive experience that Helvetas has accumulated in working with **local actors** provides a unique opportunity for the organization to **engage in profound and continuous reflection** on its practices, with the aim of **enhancing the quality of its collaboration with these actors**.

To improve its performance, Helvetas has engaged in a **process of reflection** and evaluation with its **staff and partners** in the program countries. This has entailed the analysis and review of the partnership practices and selected **stories** on the evolution of partnerships set out in a **practice paper**.

### THESE REFLECTIONS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED SEVERAL KEY ISSUES:

- Effective and eye-level communication with partners is crucial for trust and collaboration.
- Attention to small details and a positive attitude can significantly impact partnership quality.
- Long-term, high quality and strategic relationships with partners are important for successful practices.
- Staff engagement embracing a broader dialogue with a diverse range of local actors and collaborators promotes collaboration.
- Equitable resource allocation, including fair overheads and budget shares, fosters inclusive partnerships.
- Knowledge sharing and appreciation of individuals as well as recognizing knowledge and capacities and strengths of local actors promote localization efforts.
- Featuring and making visible the work and history of local partners is key for equitable relationships.
- Reducing bureaucracy and increasing flexibility enables better dialogue and accountability with partners.
- Fair risk-sharing promotes transparency and strengthens partnerships.
- Shifting the roles of INGOs towards facilitation empowers local actors and supports positive change.
- Embracing cultural sensitivity, making room for a discussion on decolonizing aid, and promoting local ownership are needed.

At the same time, Helvetas is in discussion with donors and development actors like SDC and OEDC DAC<sup>7</sup>, who have their own learning processes and definitions. A comprehensive exchange is underway concerning practices and regulations, particularly those related to mandates, which at times impedes our progress towards locally led development (LLD). This dialogue is taking place in various forums with the participation of other Swiss and international NGOs. (see also below: Critical reflections and Tension Fields).

### 2022 LEADERSHIP SURVEY OF INGOS:

«Many respondents expressed the idea that there was a tension between a donor narrative that was supportive of localisation and the reality of donor funding and donors' risk appetites, particularly where that funding was channelled through INGOs as intermediaries.»

See: [https://media.odi.org/documents/Localisation\\_lit\\_review\\_WEB.pdf](https://media.odi.org/documents/Localisation_lit_review_WEB.pdf)

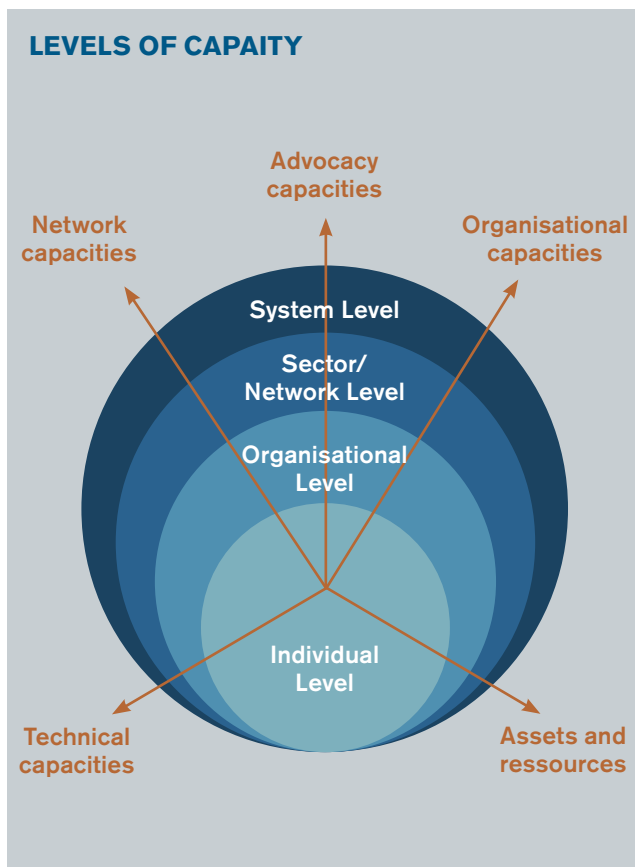
### HELVETAS GOALS FOR LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT (LLD)

- Increase the allocations and channelling of funding to local partners.
- Upscale and institutionalize co-designing of projects.
- Increase the investment in systematic capacity sharing with and strengthening of local actors, including organisational development, particularly but not exclusively of civil society actors.
- Increase the number of consortia where the local actors/partners are the official consortium lead agency.
- Further invest in developing selected high-quality strategic partnerships in program countries.
- Maintain and prioritize donor dialog to reduce structural barriers to localisation.
- Include overheads for local partners in the project design and budgets.

## CAPACITY SHARING

Capacity development refers to the process of **transferring knowledge, skills, resources, and expertise** between individuals, organizations, or communities to strengthen their capacity and enable them to effectively address challenges and achieve their development goals. Yet, the term «capacity development» comes with a legacy. In the past, capacity development was the procedure, resp. mechanism through which organisations of the global North supported organisations of the global South to increase their competences and capabilities to «do things better». There is nowadays a common agreement that capacity development should be a mutual learning process leading to **capacity sharing**, where north/south led CSOs are acknowledged as equals, which is hopefully also leading to more south-south capacity sharing.

With its interventions, Helvetas builds on a collaborative approach that acknowledges the value of mutual learning and the pooling of resources to build and enhance capacities for inclusive social change in existing systems. Helvetas is therefore poised to move towards **capacity sharing** in the sense of mutual learning and improving as an organisation according to its approach to **Learning and Innovation**.



**Capacity sharing** goes beyond traditional forms of capacity building, where knowledge and expertise are often provided from external sources. It recognizes the importance of knowledge exchange and mutual learning from diverse stakeholders, including local actors, international organizations, governments, civil society, and other development partners.

## SHRINKING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY, AND ADDED VALUE OF INGO ROLE

In an environment where space and **support for civil society is declining**, the following specific points need to be considered when working for locally led development:

Recognized (I)NGOs remain **crucial to national and global politics**. They shape public opinion and drive social and political movements through their expertise, outreach, and access to decision-makers. (I)NGOs work closely with local decision-makers to **address large-scale challenges like climate change, migration, and gender equality**. They also focus on transforming governance systems and donor collaboration models, serving as **role models** for leadership, diversity, and collaboration. That being said, it is noteworthy, that investing in a **conductive business environment and sharing capacities with private sector actors** is also important for sustainable development.

## HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS

In Humanitarian Response, Helvetas is currently embarking on some new key approaches. In Ukraine, it has been contributing to the **«Humanitarian Localization Baseline for Ukraine»** by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). The findings from these exercises indicate some success in participation and capacity sharing or strengthening but leave room for improvement in other defined areas. Helvetas and its local partners are currently focusing on high quality partnerships, with joint design and co-ordination of all project-related activities. The approach is characterized by a focus on complementarity and synergies to ultimately reach more people and make the best use of available funds. This approach also has a very conducive impact on the participation of all actors in policy discourse.

Especially in fragile contexts, it is wise to pay extra attention to who we partner with, and how, partnerships are different in fragile contexts.



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Skilled farmer Fatuma Juma organises weekly vegetable growing training sessions with the group in Tanzania

## BUILDING BLOCKS FOR ADVANCING LOCALIZATION IN HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS:

- **Relationships:** We aim for partnerships where all parties share input and influence in the conceptualization, design, planning and adaptive management of a joint action, and take full part in reflections, reviews, and learning.
- **Visibility:** The roles, work, risks taken, and contributions of local partners are rendered visible.
- **Capacity Enhancement:** An important underlying goal in a partnership is capacity-sharing with local partners and their further qualification.

### CRITICAL REFLECTIONS AND

### TENSION FIELDS

Despite the broad consensus to advance locally led development, there are also critical reflections and tension fields. These arise from the **complexities of balancing diverse priorities, power dynamics and cultural contexts** and offer opportunities for dialogue and reflection.

**Critical reflections** include issues such as the danger that localisation could lead to a **loss of the global perspective** in international cooperation and **disunite or split civil society** organisations across the globe, rather than uniting them in tackling complex challenges like climate change and the rise of authoritarian political systems. A purely local approach would miss the benefit coming from the **cross-fertilisation with an outside perspective** brought in by external actors. Also, there is a concern that localisation **could favour large local organisations**, and inadvertently ignore smaller less experienced organisations and marginalized groups or contribute to intra-community disparities. As the number of fragile contexts/countries increases, the **specific challenges in these situations** need to be considered in the pursuit of localisation, see also: [Fit for Fragility](#). In fragile contexts, partnerships between local and international organisations are often conducive to impartiality, protection, and effectiveness.

In some contexts, funds are channelled to **government- or private sector led NGOs** (GONGOs and PONGOs<sup>8</sup>), which is not per se a problem, but must be done transparently. Especially in more authoritarian situations, a concern exists that **political interference or fraud and corruption** could compromise the impartiality and transparency of local organisations. Commentators have argued that there is furthermore a risk, that localisation could expand cultural relativism and **undermine global values or practices** such as human rights, diversity and «do no harm».

«I think that quality partnerships are the key for good (humanitarian) response going forward. Quality partnerships are, where you actually share data, where you actually work as equal partners within projects, where there is knowledge sharing in both directions.»

Frederic Larsson from the NGO Resource Center in Ukraine, March 2024



Members from Aparajita forum take a meeting with local political leaders in Birampur Upazila, Dinajpur on 25 July 2022, Bangladesh.

With regards to risks, less experienced or value-aligned local organisations may be overwhelmed with the management of large funds, which bears some danger of **voluntary or involuntary mismanagement**, eventually backfiring on the whole sector.

INGOs are often finding themselves between bilateral, multilateral as well as private donors on one hand and long-standing relationships with local partners on the other hand and frequently are **interpreters between the different actors including donors**, considering both perspectives.

This role allows INGOs to analyse and highlight **practices conducive to LLD** and embedded **structural blocks**, like funding modalities and other detrimental practices affecting the progress towards LLD in the ODA system.

### LIST OF GOOD PRACTICES AND STRUCTURAL BLOCKS RELATED TO LLD

**Include change agents as partners (e.g.: movements, alliances, coalitions)** ◀▶ **The focus of current projects and mandates is often on tangible and easily measurable results, which is more difficult to achieve if working with such partners.**

**Enable co-creation of new projects** ◀▶ **Rigid donor frameworks inhibiting early involvement of local actors (e.g.: due to pre-defined budget structures, small margins and how bids are evaluated).**

**Invest in organisational development of local partners** ◀▶ **Exclusive focus of capacity development towards project goals and hardly any organisational development.**

**Local NGOs and INGOs as CS actors in their own right** ◀▶ **Due to current funding structures, civil society organisations are often rather perceived as «intermediaries», service providers or subcontractors.**

**Respecting, appreciating, and integrating local culture** ◀▶ **Local practices can differ from international norms creating conflict and misunderstanding and local cultural norms can be in conflict with global charters and standards (Human Rights, non-discrimination).**

**Appreciating that local actors align with and manoeuvre in the local context** ◀▶ **Politicized environments can mean that local actors are driven to align with local power structures rather than defending minority rights.**

**Reduced compliance, admin and reporting for INGOs and NNGOs and more free funds in the form of core funding and indirect costs for all partners to pursue their agenda and develop their own organisations** ◀▶ **Ever increasing compliance and due diligence requirements and diminishing allocations of indirect costs (overheads / margins) and hardly any core funding available.**

Finally, as an active member of the Swiss civil society, Helvetas has a role in **conveying complex content about the challenges in partner countries and advocating for fair international framework conditions**, relevant for the Swiss context and taxpayers.

However, making truly equal partnerships work is not an easy goal since a partnership of equals **can still entail various degrees of power imbalances** especially over an extended period and throughout the different phases of a partnership. By building up relationships, it is therefore also important to **stay realistic**, manage expectation and focus on shared interests, agreed frameworks or systems of decision making as well as negotiated solutions on what is the right way to do things.

## CONCLUSIONS, KEY TAKE AWAYS

As an organisation Helvetas is on a journey and can **build on good practices and experiences** and is **fully dedicated to pursuing a local led development approach**.

The localization debate is evolving amidst reduced funding for development cooperation and fierce discussions on decolonizing aid (see box at the end). This requires **finding practical solutions and new modalities, including from the donor side to transfer power, resources and agency** to local partners. While often operating in a narrow framework given by the legal and regulatory environment in donor and recipient countries, Helvetas is aligned with the requirement to rethink development cooperation.

In this sense Helvetas is fully dedicated to **shifting its role** further towards **facilitation** and **pursue knowledge sharing**, ultimately to entirely support partners' agendas for driving positive change

In this sense Helvetas is fully dedicated to **shifting its role** further towards **facilitation** and **knowledge sharing**, ultimately to fully support partners' agendas for driving positive change. This requires **reducing bureaucracy** and **implementing fairer risk-sharing**, along with new funding models like **core funding for long-term local partners**. This shift will enable sustainable, long-term collaboration with local partners that go beyond project-specific grants, supporting local partners to **pursue broader goals and co-create innovative solutions to complex challenges** as well as to engage in sustained advocacy, ensuring marginalized voices are heard and fostering stronger collaboration and networking among stakeholders.

It is also important that there is a common understanding and **vision about the (future) role of INGOs**, since this role is distinct from that of an «intermediary». INGOs are **complementary, often long-term, and strategic partners of local actors and communities**, with a mandate to cooperate and develop joint solutions based on the unique strengths and contributions of each partner. Yet bureaucracy, administrative procedures, and risk arrangements often hinder effective locally led development. At the same time, it is vital to recognize **possible weaknesses and shortcomings** in skills and capacities of all partners and address it in a realistic manner.

Advancing on localisation should be considered for all funding modalities, be it philanthropic grants, mandates, or core contributions.

LLD, by nature, **requires an open and less prescriptive approach**, allowing for joint analysis, project identification, and co-creation among INGOs and local partners, seizing the opportunity to foster local leadership. In light of the above, and as stated repeatedly in the 2024 [OECD «Pathways Towards Effective Locally Led Development Co-Operation»](#), a reciprocal way of working together is most promising.

While challenges and tension fields persist, the evolution of the localization discourse highlights a collective **commitment to rebalancing power dynamics, fostering meaningful participation as well as agency, and advancing locally led development processes**. By embracing localization, the impacts of development cooperation can achieve more effective, sustainable, and inclusive outcomes, thereby unlocking the full potential of communities and promoting transformative change towards a more equitable world.

## PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS FOR BUILDING ON CURRENT PRACTICES:

- Invest in **long-term and quality relationships** with partners including in-depth dialogue and strategic cooperation beyond project frames with local partners.
- Upscale attention to **respectful and equity-based attitude** among all partners and allies.
- Upscale **joint identification, co-creation** and planning of projects – and the implementation ensured by local partners.
- Systematically **strive for fair overheads<sup>9</sup> and budget shares** for all partners to increase just treatment in compensation and make sure partners are provided with enough funding to cover indirect costs including administration, fundraising, organisational as well as capacity development.
- Keep advocating towards **less bureaucracy and fair risk sharing** in all partnerships.

- Upscale empowering local people to **tell their own stories** and give partners more visibility.
- Support the investments in **local certification and shared Due Diligence**.
- Continue to face the discussions on **cultural and historical sensitivity** with a link to decolonisation of aid-debate (see box at the end of the document).

## NEW OPPORTUNITIES:

- **Re-definition of role and modes of cooperation:** Further transform INGO/Helvetas role towards acting as facilitator, co-advocate, knowledge broker and convener (see also: peace direct<sup>10</sup>) as well as **RE-granting**.
- **Nurture strategic partnerships with local partners:** Find a way to make the evolution, overlapping interests, shared visions, and growing trust between Helvetas and local partners visible and appreciated as an achievement.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Learning to develop capacities of all actors:** Investment in capacity sharing, based on a systems perspective (partners have an existence outside Helvetas projects) for co-creation, between local actors, international organizations, governments, and other stakeholders.

- **Leverage the power of INGOs relationship-system of partners:** Broader dialogue with a diverse range of local actors and collaborators for more flexibility and responsiveness. Especially supporting south-south cooperation, such as the Nepal bridge building unit as well as supporting south-south alliances and coalition building offers opportunities.
- **Invest in organisational development (OD)** to jointly assess and build on what organisations do best.
- **Local Resource Mobilization:** Together with local partners facilitate local resource mobilization and enhancing economic opportunities at the local level.
- **Strengthening Local Governance:** Jointly encouraging and advocating for participatory and inclusive decision-making processes at the local level, promoting local ownership and (downward/social) accountability.
- **Empowerment of Local Communities:** Recognizing and promoting the agency and capabilities of local communities for accountability including downward accountability.

<sup>1</sup> «Local actors can include government (national and subnational entities), parliaments, non-government organisations, grassroots associations, community-based organisations, traditional and spiritual leaders, academia, media, and the private sector. They can also include regional organisations, confederations, coalitions, and networks if member organisations maintain independent fundraising and governance systems. Internationally affiliated organisations, international NGOs, multilaterals, and international private sectors organisations are excluded from the definition». (See: OECD Pathways Towards Effective Locally Led Development Co-operation)

<sup>2</sup> [www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/how-you-can-help/follow-us/blog/governance-and-civic-space/Rethinking-Power-Relations-to-Achieve-Localization](http://www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/how-you-can-help/follow-us/blog/governance-and-civic-space/Rethinking-Power-Relations-to-Achieve-Localization)

<sup>3</sup> [www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/how-you-can-help/follow-us/blog/rural-access/10000-Bridges-in-Nepal-A-Model-for-Localization](http://www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/how-you-can-help/follow-us/blog/rural-access/10000-Bridges-in-Nepal-A-Model-for-Localization)

<sup>4</sup> «No one has produced a figure for the wider development sector, but data collected by the U.S. Agency for International Development – the world's biggest bilateral donor – showed that just \$ 1.6 billion out of its \$36 billion budget went to local organizations in 2022». <https://devex.shorthandstories.com/the-localization-agenda-2-0/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> [www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/who-we-are/vision-mission](http://www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/who-we-are/vision-mission)

<sup>6</sup> [www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation/](http://www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation/)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pathways-towards-effective-locally-led-development-co-operation\\_51079bba-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pathways-towards-effective-locally-led-development-co-operation_51079bba-en.html)

<sup>8</sup> (Social) enterprises, consultancy firms, charity/development arms of companies

<sup>9</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/indirect-costs-local-and-national-partners-mapping-current-policies-and-practices-un-agencies-and-ingos-june-2023>

<sup>10</sup> [www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation/](http://www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation/)

## THE ROLE OF COLONIALISM

For many decades, there has been a power imbalance that has divided the world into richer and poorer, «the West» and «the rest». This division is rooted in Europe's colonial history and the ensuing economic and political structures that have become entrenched. These power structures have contributed to one-sided economic dependency and the dominance of the Western narrative. While eighteenth century colonialism played a big role in Western prosperity, the following division into modern/developed and developing countries followed the European industrialisation. It differentiated between «advanced»/«modern» and «backward»/«traditional» societies. Today many women and men in the in developing countries are furthermore disproportionately affected by a global economic model that has already exceeded planetary boundaries many times over, for example in the form of devastating climate-related destruction. In some developing countries, there is an accumulation of problems, some of

which are home-made and can be explained by a lack of functioning institutions as well as democratic structures and practices leading to abuse of power and corruption. The political science movement of post-colonialism stresses that many of these dysfunctions are a result of world history and protracted, tense and often violent independence processes in the middle of the last century did not lead to the end of exploitative systems. It is therefore highlighting colonial continuities: while the colonies were liberated in terms of state policy, they continued to be politically, economically, socially and culturally influenced and in some cases dominated by the hegemony of Eurocentric and American views and practices. Postcolonial criticism is directed against Western historiography and the «grand narratives». It criticizes Eurocentric assumptions of superiority and universality, i.e. the ongoing power and representation relations and must also be understood as part of the ongoing «cultural wars».

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## DECOLONIZING AID DEBATE

Inspired by post-colonial studies and reinforced by the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, the term «Decolonizing Aid» is used to question common ideas and practices in development policy. Until today, many development projects and programmes, are shaped by the West, with programme and research design rooted in European or US values and knowledge systems. This has continuously led to the fact that local knowledge, traditional know-how and experience are not respected accordingly. Community-based organizations and local NGOs therefore sometimes rightfully complain that local knowledge is not adequately valued and that the relevant decisions on the design of development programmes are still mostly made in the West - for example in ministries and international development organizations, in multilateral institutions such as the World Bank or by large foundations. Representatives of Decolonizing Aid are concerned with balancing the power to define and decide on development and sustainable policy and bringing

it more strongly to the «Global South», i.e. «localizing» it. While development cooperation has been working for years to expand and strengthen partnerships with local actors and bring them on an equal footing, some believe that poorer countries do not actually need any «aid» at all. Rather, those governments and people should be «compensated» for the damage caused by decades of imperialism and the associated oppression and enslavement. Swiss actors also had global trade relations in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, yet to a much smaller extent. It is nevertheless worth reflecting on its role during that time.

Ultimately, the decolonizing aid debate underscores the legitimate and long-standing concern of many development actors from the «South», but also from the «North», to reduce unequal power dynamics, promote meaningful participation of all relevant actors and drive locally led development processes (ownership) and ensure agency for developing countries.