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# GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT WORKING PAPER SERIES

What does locally-led development look like in practice? Insights and lessons from national staff

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## Foreword

Debates regarding the “localisation” of aid and development must first and foremost be led and influenced by the views of national staff, partners and actors. In order not to perpetuate the same power imbalances that have underpinned the debate to date, any discussion of localisation must start with a nationally-defined understanding of what locally-led development means: where it works? Where it doesn’t? Why? And what can international actors (donors and implementing partners) do about it? What can we do better? This paper is thus an important contribution to this debate – it is a nationally-led research project which focusing on the voices, views and lived experience of national staff working for Abt, across Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and the Pacific. The paper raises important issues and practical ways in which we (the international community) can do better – from re-framing how we think about capacity development, through to supporting local leadership in program management. I would like to thank Abt staff for their time and honesty in preparing this paper – and look forward to working through how Abt, as a global company, can continue to reflect on our own policies, practices and culture to continue allowing local leaders to drive development in their own countries.

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# What does locally-led development look like in practice?

## Insights and lessons from national leaders

Priya Chatter

*With contributions from: Jonah Simet, Stella Rumbam, Joy Waffi and Anna Winoto*

### 1. Introduction

1.1 The COVID pandemic has pushed many of us working in the international development sector to build stronger partnerships with local organisations, forcing us to ask some uncomfortable questions around who gets to decide what is development, progress, well-being, and justice. The Covid-19 pandemic has made it increasingly clear that the nature of aid and development work is rooted in the global problems of power, control, and inequality. Now more than ever before, development partners are questioning the heavy reliance on internationalised workforce across the aid sector.

1.2 Grappling with some of these complexities around localising aid and our role as national leaders working for a managing contractor, we embarked on a nationally-led research study. The purpose was to reflect inward and learn from our national program staff: what does localisation mean to them? Is it happening? What opportunities are we missing? What are the barriers? Are there examples of effective localisation practice across the project cycle? What more must we do?

1.3 This paper is structured into four sections. The first section outlines the research methodology, objectives and sample size. Section two presents findings that emerged from the interviews. Section three and four identify findings for donors and conclusions. A summary of key findings is presented here.

1.4 Interviewees were united on the ethical as well as effectiveness arguments for localisation. They felt that the two key defining features of genuine localisation (as opposed to continuing business as usual) were:

- **Local actors, processes and relationships must have power to drive change.** All interviewees felt that localisation was about power: who has it, who doesn't. Staff felt localisation worked when it involved the 'transferring of power to local partners and national actors so that they have the opportunity to decide, participate, contribute, and learn from each other that ultimately leads to sustainability over time'. Without this power transfer, localisation is simply tokenistic.
- **Change must be cognisant of the local political context:** interviewees felt that the effectiveness of efforts to 'localise' also depended upon local staff being able to think and work politically. It is not enough to simply put staff into leadership positions. Staff need to be able to wield that power in ways that allow local actors to determine the design and delivery of aid activities; based on what is politically possible. While it is not assumed that all local staff will have these skill sets, it is argued that local leadership heightens the salience of solutions when these are locally negotiated and informed by local actors who are sufficiently politically informed to operate effectively in local contexts. One interlocutor remarked insightfully that flexible funding modalities which support iterative problem-solving approaches often allow locals gradually to take ownership and leadership. This element of contextualising development solutions from design to delivery can be missing in the localisation discourse.

1.5 Respondents also highlighted three key enablers of localisation:

- **Local staff need to be empowered to lead:** All our interlocutors felt that international staff were almost always valued more in senior roles by bilateral donors. Most staff felt that donors have a fixed view of what an effective team leader should look like – usually someone who has English as their first language, is from the donor’s dominant culture and can argue confidently with senior local decision-makers. Respondents encouraged donors (and managing contractors) to consider other leadership models, particularly models that recognise and prioritise personal power, which was seen as more likely to bring about transformative change than formal power.
- **Valuing local knowledge:** interlocutors many staff felt that Western perspectives were valued higher than local knowledge, and that they crowded out space for local staff to build and grow into the program. Many felt that assumptions were frequently made about what local populations required, based on western knowledge and technical expertise as opposed to the views and lived experience of communities themselves.
- **Support capacity exchange:** all staff felt that capacity and knowledge exchange was a key enabler of localisation and local leadership. But staff also felt that the focus should be on creating practical opportunities for local staff to learn on-the-job (rather than an international TA stepping in and doing the job for a national staffer; this is supplementation, not capacity exchange). Staff also need to be given space to test new skills, manage resources and learn from failure. The starting point for capacity strengthening should also not be a ‘deficit’ approach (i.e., assuming that staff lack skills which international TA must therefore train them in) but rather look at existing strengths and view capacity strengthening as a two-way process of learning.



1.6 **Our findings highlight the need for systematic change across the aid sector. National staff and partners are capable and ready, but the aid ecosystem has not caught up.** Two critical issues remain: firstly, the tension donors face between controlling aid spend and letting go to allow for greater leadership and direction over aid programs. And emerging from this is a second issue: how donors can shift their processes at delivery to enable greater local participation and ownership over program governance, design, delivery, and review.

## 2. Methodology

2.1 The primary purpose of our research was to test and deepen our understanding of what national staff believe localisation looks like in practice: what works, what doesn't and why? To achieve this, the research study used a mixed methods approach. We combined rapid, real-time primary qualitative inquiry (semi-structured interviews) with a document review of secondary sources.

2.2 We adapted HAG's seven-dimensional framework (figure 1 below)<sup>1</sup> to explore what locally led development looks like in practice across four key dimensions: partnerships, capacity, financial resources, and coordination. This guided the interview questions and approach (Annex 1).

**Figure 1: The Humanitarian Action Group's seven dimensions of localisation**

FUNDING	PARTNERSHIPS	CAPACITY	PARTICIPATION REVOLUTION	COORDINATION MECHANISMS	VISIBILITY	POLICY
25% As directly as possible Better quality	Less sub contracting More equitable relationships	Institutional development Stop undermining local capacity	Participation of crisis affected communities Inclusion: Gender, age, disability.	National actors have greater presence and influence	Roles, results and innovations by national actors	National actors greater presence and influence in international policy debates

2.3 Remote online interviews with national program staff took place in May 2021 over a period of three weeks. A small sample of 15 participants spanning five countries (Indonesia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, and Eastern Europe) participated in interviews. During the interviews, program staff explored localisation and decolonisation across the development sector, and how aid landscape is changing in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and doing development differently.

2.4 Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which considered their demonstrated interest and experience in engaging with issues of localisation in the development sector. Particular attention was paid to ensuring gender balance and diversity in age and experience across the programs, although the sample sized was constrained by the number of countries in which Abt Australia and Abt Britain operate.

2.5 The interviews were transcribed and the quotes from participants presented in this report are illustrative of the perspectives raised during the interviews and are used with oral consent of those quoted. Some quotes have been edited for clarity and length.

2.6 One limitation of the study is the very small sample of program staff which means that findings are by no means a comprehensive representation of a managing contractor's role in the aid sector as a whole. However, to mitigate the risk of limited perspectives a deliberate attempt was made to purposively select a diverse group of local program staff from non-Western background. Secondly, qualitative data from the interviews informed the key themes for each discussion thread in the report as illustrated using participant quotes. Author bias in the selection of some of the themes was cross-checked with program staff who participated in this study as part of the peer review process when the draft was sent for their input and validation. In addition, the participant quotes have also been validated against Abt's corporate quantitative data where they were available for at least some of the themes in the findings section. The draft paper also went through a two-stage internal peer review process that involved validating the findings with program staff and select team members from Abt Australia's business development unit and International Technical Practice team.

<sup>1</sup> Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (2018) *Localisation in practice: emerging indicators and practical recommendations*, Accessed on 30/04/21 < [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/59895\\_localisationinpracticefullreportv4.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/59895_localisationinpracticefullreportv4.pdf) >

### 3. Findings

3.1 The national staff interviewed as part of this research project identified two key arguments for localisation and three related enablers that collectively constitute meaningful localisation. It is noteworthy that interlocutors in all five countries provided a remarkably consistent set of responses. The following sections unpack each of these findings in detail.

3.2 Interviewees were united on the ethical as well as effectiveness arguments for localisation. They identified two key defining features of genuine localisation (as opposed to continuing business as usual).

#### Feature 1: Local actors, processes and relationships must drive change

3.3 All interviewees felt that localisation was about power: who has it, who doesn't. Staff felt localisation worked when it involved the 'transferring of power to local partners and national actors so that they have the opportunity to decide, participate, contribute, and learn from each other that ultimately leads to sustainability over time'. Without this power transfer, localisation is simply tokenistic.

*"Localisation means being mindful, respectful and complementing instead of duplicating the work that is being done in the country and the context we are working in."* (Interviewee, 2021)

3.4 A unified response from interviewees was that localisation must constitute an empowering process and that the advantages go beyond the moral and ethical argument. In addition to being respectful of the local culture and context, localisation is about recognising the local knowledge and ability to influence

*"Localisation means utilising local resources - human and funding either in emergency relief or development aid so that community leaders take ownership and responsibility. For example, in an emergency or crisis, the locals who are affected are the ones to respond first [rather] than outside organisations or government. During COVID pandemic we saw the expatriates started to leave and you find only national staff who take on responsibility when it comes to face-to-face needs and assistance."*

change that is led and guided by local partners. Localisation in practice means that local and national actors are directly involved in driving and fronting both humanitarian and development efforts where local voices define what progress means in their context. Staff emphasised "local ownership, leadership and decision-making capacity of local actors at subnational and provincial level to better address the needs of the communities in which we work". An example is detailed in Box 1.

*"I think localisation for me [means] it's local or national staff or local organisation doing certain things, or managing certain program activities, that were initially done by international organisations. It's about empowering locals, within a community or an organisation, to be in leadership roles."*

#### Box 1: Using local leadership to support change in Indonesia

*"In Indonesia, we worked in the past with the Yayasan Pulih foundation. They are one of the founders of an umbrella network called "Aliansi Laki Laki Baru" (Alliance of New Men). Our work with them is around engaging men to be part of the conversation for gender equality, particular in promoting men's roles at home. This can be controversial topic in Indonesia, it goes into religion, the cultural norms shaped by government policy and by elders in the community and so forth. By getting local organisations to drive it, particular those that both work on women economic empowerment and have experience working with men on gender-based violence, we are able to find the right champions to lead the conversation in Indonesia. What the foundation did in this case was taking the partnership approach further, by working with local partners that can lead the conversation. It's a meta-localisation. It has allowed the partners to respond quickly to criticism and negative comments, to conversations that tend to reinforce the norms and stereotypes, because you have a good champion driving*



*“Localisation must involve giving power back to local partners and national actors so that they have the opportunity to decide, participate, contribute, and learn from each other that ultimately leads to sustainability over time.”*

3.5 Staff also emphasised the importance of shifting power over the long-term, not just at the outset of a project, and across multiple aspects of delivery and operations. It is not enough to simply appoint a national leader or senior staff member. The process of design, implementation and review needs to be localised, as does decision making and governance. The goal of development programs should be to eventually work international staff out of a job by program end.

## Feature 2: Change must be cognisant of the local political context

3.6 Interviewees felt that the effectiveness of efforts to ‘localise’ also depended upon local staff being able to think and work politically. It is not enough to simply put locals into leadership positions. Staff need to be able to wield that power in ways that allow local actors to determine the design and delivery of aid activities; based on what is politically possible. While it is not assumed that all local staff will have these skill sets, it is argued that local leadership heightens the salience of solutions when these are negotiated and informed by local actors who can effectively navigate the local political landscape. One of our respondents emphasised that locals were able to take ownership and leadership gradually when projects used flexible funding modalities which supported iterative problem-solving approaches. Effective pathways to localisation must incorporate such elements of contextualising development solutions from design to delivery.

3.7 Understanding the ideas, incentives, and interests of key decision-makers (both political and officials) is critical for effective program delivery. Localisation will require locals not only to understand the contemporary political economy, but also the ability to maneuver through those dynamics. Indeed, the advantages of localisation are the local knowledge, connections, and the ability to influence national and local government decision making offered by national staff. Respondents also felt that localisation allowed for better brokering and understanding between a donor and their national counterparts, through insider knowledge and joining the dots between donor and local stakeholder interests.

*“I was in a meeting with one new deputy director/secretary with a senior international Abt representative and a local colleague. At the initial meeting we discussed next steps and agreed to keep in contact. The Dep Sec only gave her work email address following this initial meeting. I had a follow up with the Dep Sec and right after that, I got her work email, Gmail, mobile phone, and willingness to engage. If you talk someone within government and if they only give their work email address and landline, 9 out of 10 they don’t want to work or engage with a managing contractor.”*

*“Many senior program manager positions filled by expats are now being filled by Papua New Guineans...this is a good thing because it gives decision making power to citizens who in many cases are able to work better with fellow Papua New Guineans in the government. Progressing development outcomes has a lot to do with relationships, getting buy-in from government, and being open and honest with government counterparts. An expat cannot be as open and honest with a PNGean who is in government because it comes across as being offensive. As a PNGean, I can talk to government counterparts not as an employee of a managing contractor, but as a fellow PNGean. I’m their Wantok, so they won’t take offence”.*

### Box 2: The case of Papua New Guinea (PNG)

*"The other one [example of locals driving the agenda] is the Abt policy on Gender Based Violence in PNG. When I first joined Abt, we didn't have any policy. One of the local advisers, who had legal background like myself, we did a political analysis of all our policies. We didn't have a GBV policy for our staff. One in three women in PNG face violence every single day. Without a policy, how do we support staff coming to Abt who have a passion for development for our country when they are still faced with challenges at the personal level. With the agreement given, we came up with GBV policy, and Abt adopted it. And that was one of the things we initiated, because of looking at our own context, and what is real in our country."*

3.8 Respondents also highlighted three key enablers of localisation. These are detailed in the following sections.

### Enabling factor 1: Local staff need to be empowered to lead – formally and informally

3.9 All our interlocutors felt that international staff were almost always valued more in senior roles by bilateral donors. Most staff felt that donors have a fixed view of what an effective team leader should look like – usually someone who has English as their first language, is from the donor's dominant culture and can argue confidently with senior local decision-makers. The assumption inherent in the dominant model was that bilateral donors preferred or even required international staff in key management positions.

3.10 While interviewees reported that national staff were increasingly taking up technical positions<sup>2</sup> (and already dominated administrative and program management roles), many felt program leadership was still dominated by the perspective of the internationals. Respondents encouraged donors (and managing contractors) to consider other leadership models, particularly models that recognise and prioritise personal power, which was seen as more likely to bring about transformative change than formal or positional power. Options included:

- Identifying locals with high potential who, with the right type of development opportunities, could rise to program leadership roles. This requires careful succession planning which must continue beyond a single project or budget cycle.
- Investing in the professional development of staff through on-the-job learning, including in leadership and management skills (not just administrative or project management functions).
- Being more proactive on retention strategies for key national staff, including understanding the factors which retain or push national staff (one issue which was raised repeatedly as a negative was the uneven remuneration of national vs international TA).
- Emphasising the value of non-Western leadership traits at hiring and performance management.

*"If I'm being frank, the leadership is very expatriate based. But what I think [this program] is doing really well is making sure the local staff are engaged in key decisions. There's a participatory approach. I am still mindful of the fact that it is important to achieve the right balance of local staff and local leadership. Just looking at the organisational structure at IW, there are no directors who are local. That's a challenge dealing with local partnerships. There's a perception amongst local partners of IW being a white feminist-led program (for lack of a better term) when they see all directors are internationals. Part of the way to manage it is to really localise leadership. Senior managers in the technical team are locals, which is really important as the director draws a lot from senior managers for decision making."*

<sup>2</sup> For example, over the years, Abt has evolved its internal governance, recruitment, retention and HR policies for program delivery and implementation so that it is more diverse, equitable and inclusive. In Papua New Guinea, 89% of full-time program staff are PNG citizens who come from 19 of the country's 21 provinces. Similarly in Eastern Europe, one of our program staff noted that in the 1990s technical assistance was fully provided through international experts but the number of national experts is now increasing across development projects.

- Re-framing performance and development discussions from a strengths-based approach as opposed to a deficit mindset.
- Allowing for more mentoring and co-leadership in roles (such as shared Team Leader positions), with the aim of increasing localisation by the end of the program and reducing in-line international roles.

## Enabling Factor 2: Valuing local knowledge

**3.11 Many staff felt that Western perspectives crowded out the space for local staff to build and grow into a program.** Many felt that assumptions were frequently made about what local populations required based on western knowledge and technical expertise as opposed to the expertise, knowledge, and lived experience of communities themselves. These assumptions in turn influenced the career paths and professional opportunities made available to local staff. As aptly captured by a Nepali interviewee:

*“There’s somebody like yourself, maybe who worked in different parts of the world, and they come in, sometimes there is already inbuilt narrative that somebody coming up from an international agency who was working in different parts of the world knows better than the local. You already assume that the international person knows more than the person who’s been there...who was born and has been brought up and studied there. Sometimes these kinds of mindset can supersede the knowledge of the local staff. Maybe that’s not to do with the language skills or fluency in English. I see that as a very structural challenge... you don’t really see it out there. But it’s already built into the system. And it’s very hard to get rid of”.*

*“Having people working on a donor funded development who know the context and can navigate the dynamics of what it takes to bring about change either working with the government or a community... having the inside experience and relations is important in terms of making the connection between the interests of donors and local stakeholders. It’s all about having that inside experience, the relations, and knowing how things work in local context.”*

## Enabling Factor 3: Support capacity exchange

**3.12 All staff felt that capacity and knowledge exchange was a key enabler of localisation and local leadership.** But staff also felt that the focus should be on creating practical opportunities for local staff to learn on-the-job (rather than an international TA stepping in and doing the job for a national staffer; this is supplementation, not capacity exchange). Staff also need to be given space to test new skills, manage resources, and learn from failure. One good practice solution identified by respondents was to employ more cross-program learning and peer to peer mentoring between local staff (either between different countries or different regions of the same country).

**3.13** Staff also called for an overall shift in the way the capacity development model was conceived. The starting point for capacity strengthening should also not be a ‘deficit’ approach (i.e., assuming that staff lack skills which international TA must therefore train them in) but rather look at existing strengths and view capacity strengthening as a two-way process of learning. Localisation requires recognising existing strengths, talents and skills of local staff, even if these strengths may take “non-Western” forms (e.g. valuing political insight and relationships as opposed to university degree, technical background or ability to write well in English).

3.14 Some staff felt that an intermediary (such as a managing contractor or INGO) could facilitate capacity exchange. One area could be support to local organisations to improve their governance and organisational systems to receive and manage donor funds. This, however, needs to be balanced against creating dependencies on external support. One good practice model cited was a “technical support hub” that allowed local NGOs or government counterparts to draw on specific support (e.g., TA, systems review) as and when needed. The focus in this model should be on building their confidence and ability to manage funds over time, rather than supplanting capacity.

*“Having a managing contractor (MC) is really important to add that layer between the donors and the local partners. Because the dynamics are quite different. The MC has an opportunity to shape the program design and implementation, to really enable localisation and empower the local partners [in a way] that an international donor is quite limited [in doing]. Having an MC in place is a good way to support localisation and empower partners... because the MC tends to have keen eyes on local staff, being able to support local organisations with local staff... Definitely through [its] systems and processes, a MC is directly able to support the capacity of local partners.”*

*“Already we are seeing [that for] local NGOs that we work with... financial management is an area of concern. Often local NGOs need to provide records of donor fund management and various audit reports... [for] various funders. There are huge gaps in NGO capacities. A lot of NGOs still need that technical support [including] to manage their money. That gap is where Abt needs to provide technical support... in terms of finance and program management. We try to mentor some of their staff officers, in managing their money. If they are proven to perform, they should be getting funding directly by donors.”*

3.15 Others, however, felt that intermediaries were better suited to being a buffer between the local organisation and the donor. The rationale here is to keep the intermediary focused on meeting complex due diligence and compliance requirements (especially relating to finance and program management) and allowing local actors to get on deliver activities. This proposal points to a key tension within the localisation agenda: increasingly working with and through local organisations versus the compliance requirements of the donor – which are often out of scope for local organisations or not aligned with existing government systems and checks and balances. An example of where this buffering role has worked is described in box 3.

#### **Box 3: The case of Indonesia – serving as an intermediary**

*“We can make things happen more quickly...because DFAT has entrusted us to manage the funding, resources to respond to government’s needs. We have more freedom, more independence, to respond to the needs of the government. But if DFAT gives the money to government of Indonesia directly, they would have to manage the project. There’ll be issues of government not having enough time or people, to get things to happen quickly. As a contractor, we can also draw on experts for specific issues. That’s where the government relies on us. Let’s say we need an analysis of how village funds have impacted on health services at the village level, we can, without the constraint of the government procurement system, more easily and more quickly arrange that support for that particular analysis.”*

## 4. Implications for donors

4.1 In addition to reflecting on what localisation means to them, interviewees also identified five implications for donors when progressing the localisation agenda:

- i. **Funding matters greatly:** donor funding, who gets it and who decides how it is spent is of central importance to the whole localisation agenda. Staff welcomed funding modalities which were transparent, allowed for a degree of autonomy in funding decisions, and provided local partners flexibility to choose modalities (e.g. TA, grant etc) depending on the strengths and weaknesses of local (in-country) systems.
- ii. **Whose interests matter?** All participants felt that donors needed to be more careful when placing their own priorities over local views of development challenges and possible solutions. Whilst it may take longer to design and implement programs in true partnership with local entities, it makes the project (funding, effectiveness, buy-in) more sustainable for donors in the long term – and arguably achieves better value for money.
- iii. **Balancing short and long-term goals.** The pressure to achieve short-term results was cited as a key reason for excluding local voices and actors from decision making. However, staff felt that change (of the type most donors profess to seek) often takes years or decades – and can follow significant trial and error. This is particularly the case in uncertain political contexts – such as Eastern Europe. Donors should therefore be more explicit and realistic about the balance between demonstrating short-term outputs and achieving longer-term results.
- iv. **Don't be dogmatic – be open to trial and error. Donors should not be “married” to their program Theories of Change and log frames.** Many staff felt designs needed to allow for local adaptation – in line with the pace of change occurring in that country (and not bound by a donor's funding or program timeline).
- v. **Balancing issues of compliance and fiduciary risk with long-term effectiveness:** Despite fiduciary controls, any public funding anywhere involves some degree of risk of fraud and wastage, with fiduciary risks higher in countries where politics is driven by vested interests and incentives and institutions of public accountability are weak.<sup>3</sup> Interviewees felt that one of the barriers to localisation and locally led development was donors' emphasis on controls to counter perceived fiduciary risks at the expense of achieving long-term development outcomes through localising aid. A better balance needs to be struck in judging short-term risk and longer-term reward.

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Glennie, Ahmed Ali, Maim King, Alastair McKechnie & Gideon Rabinowitz (2012) 'Localising aid: can using local actors strengthen them?', *Working Paper 352*. ODI: London. Accessed on 08/10/21 < <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/7792.pdf> >

## 5. Conclusion

5.1 In recent years we have seen a growing push for the ‘localisation’ of development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these efforts, by virtue of travel restrictions. Over the last two years, many international development workers, organisations and donors have had to build and rely more heavily on partnerships with local organisations to continue operating during the pandemic. This has brought to the fore questions regarding who has the power to decide what aid narratives count, and how development programs should be designed, delivered and assessed. As a result of the pandemic, it has become increasingly clear that aid and development work is rooted in historical and contemporary injustices and inequalities in power, control, and resources. The increased responsibilities carried by country-based staff amid travel restrictions have reignited debates around power structures within the international development sector.

5.2 Our review of the literature – coupled with the lived experience of national staff – has indicated that there are small examples of change, but overall progress remains slow and there is little evidence of structural or systemic change. To understand better some of these complexities around localising aid as evidenced in the literature, and our role as a managing contractor in this complex aid ecosystem, we embarked on a research study by reflecting inward and learning from our national program staff what for them constitutes localization and what worked and what did not.

5.3 Our findings have highlighted the need for systemic change across the aid sector. National staff and partners are capable and ready, but the aid ecosystem has not caught up. Donors face an ongoing dilemma how to balance control over aid strategy and spend with greater local leadership and direction over aid programs. At the local level this manifests itself in questions on how donors can shift their processes at delivery to enable greater local participation and ownership over program governance, design, delivery, and review.

5.4 Managing contractors like Abt Associates could play a greater role in localisation but are, at times, constrained by the lack of meaningful partnership between donor (the principal) and managing contractor (the agent). International actors have been contracted to be the agent, to do at the bidding of the client (the donor) who retains power and authority in a context of asymmetric information exchange. Our interlocutors noted the question of how to move towards greater partnership as an area requiring further investigation.

5.5 Appreciating that these changes will take time, our research has highlighted practical steps that donors and international aid implementers can take immediately, based on the insights and experiences of local staff. These include first and foremost: promoting local leadership and considering alternative models to capacity development. We hope that practitioners will be able to take these suggestions on board, to continue to progress a – if not the – most important debate in the aid sector currently: that of nationals leading and driving change in their own country.

## Annex 1: Interview Guide

Exploratory questions for semi-structured interviews <sup>4</sup>	
1.Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How well do we take partner government and local partner views into account in our programs?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are your projects co-designed, implemented and evaluated with your partners? Can you provide an example?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What guides the partnership values and principles – what sort of partnership dialogue exists? Are there partnership review processes, do you feel your partnership is meaningful?</li> </ul>
2.Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent and in what places do you think that local and national organizations (including government) should lead on decision making on development priorities of your country? Which actors are involved or should be involved? Is the balance, right?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When it comes to program leadership, to what extent do local staff should lead decision making in your country? How many of the senior leadership group are nationals? How may junior staff etc.?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What number of leadership positions (CEO, Country Director, and leadership team positions) are filled with national staff? What is the total number of staff in your program? Number of staff in leadership positions; Number of staff that are nationals; and Number of staff that are international.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have examples from within the program that illustrates how international staff have supported national staff in leadership roles in a respectful and meaningful manner?</li> </ul>
3.Coordination and Complementarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent does our programs use or work through in-country government planning systems?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you give an example from the program which illustrates how well we have worked with existing government planning systems and processes that takes into account the context of both donor and recipient partners?</li> </ul>
4. Policy influence and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are you aware and involved in country level planning processes in your country? What are the most important national level/sectoral planning policies and processes from your perspective?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are you happy with the extent to which you are involved to feed ideas into your country's development planning priorities and agenda setting?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How much are you and your downstream partners involved in influencing/feeding ideas into your country's development priorities and goals?</li> </ul>
5. Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do donors take the opinions of communities into account during the design and implementation of our programs?</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> The list of questions across the seven dimensions of localisation framework have been adapted from [Humanitarian Advisory Group's \(2010\) study on Measuring Localisation: Framework and Tools.](#)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do program team/managing contractors have flexibility to adjust their projects/programs when conditions change/based on the needs articulated by the affected communities/demographic population?</li> </ul>
6. Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What percentage of our budget goes to project activities as core support to countries (actual costs)? How much of our budget goes through local partners or consultants and how much through international partners and consultations?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you define ways in which our program supports country partners: (a) as core support to the work of partners (b) channeling funds through partners to complete pre-agreed activities?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there mechanisms in place to provide local/national organisations rapid funds in an emergency or pandemic? If so which ones?</li> </ul>
7. Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you feel that the capacity of your program is strengthened by international aid? Can you explain your answer? Why is it strengthened or not? What approaches are most effective?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who defines the capacity needs of your program? Is it appropriate?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do international program staff focus on the areas of capacity strengthening that you want them to?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What should international program staff be focusing on? What would you like them to continue doing or do differently?</li> </ul>
8. Additional questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does localisation mean to you? What conversations are taking place in the country to promote a more localised approach to aid?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What role do you see managing contractors playing to accelerate localisation efforts in country?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the challenges and opportunities in promoting a more localised approach to aid?</li> </ul>





## Abt Associates

Abt Associates is a mission-driven, global leader in research, evaluation and implementing programs in the fields of health, social and environmental policy, and international development. Known for its rigorous approach to solving complex challenges, Abt Associates is regularly ranked as one of the top 20 global research firms and was named one of the 40 international development innovators. The company has offices in the U.S., Australia and the U.K., and program offices in more than 50 countries.

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