

Shifting Power: localization and working with local partners, accelerating change in COVID

October 14th, 2020



Introduction

Among the many discussions around the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the international cooperation and humanitarian assistance sector is bringing the localization agenda to the table as an essential feature of the response to the crisis. In this panel, part of Coopération Canada's biweekly series [Shifting cooperation paradigms: adapting to a changing context in the COVID pandemic](#), panelists from different organizations and countries were called into reflecting on the topic of localization to share knowledge and practical strategies to create more equitable partnerships.

Initial questions

- 1) What is the biggest obstacle to localization and how has your organization been addressing it?
- 2) What practical and innovative approaches have you seen being used to rebalance power relations to truly localize international cooperation, and what has worked well?
- 3) What are the most important actions we can take to ensure equitable partnerships and relationships, and what is the one element we would like to see others transform in their practice?

Some highlights

Discussions circled around several aspects important to be taken into consideration whether by governments, international NGOs, donors or social movements. Some highlights referred to understanding how human groups are affected differently by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as indigenous populations and women, for example. Other comments focused on the necessity of flexibility in terms of funding so that organizations can effectively continue to carry out programming for the communities they serve. Still other reflections regarded the need of moving away from concepts that jeopardize the work of the sector, such as privilege, colonialism, racism, and the myth of the "white saviour". On the other side of the spectrum, in order to see true change, panelists focused on the importance of contribution and cooperation, of teaching and learning, of sharing and supporting.

Fundamental aspects going forward in the localization agenda

- 1) **Personal**. Personal encompasses the way we engage with others, and puts an emphasis on empathy, on listening and understanding how others (people, countries, organizations) are being affected, what are their needs and their realities.
- 2) **Partnership**, which relates to how we value what other partners can bring. It also relates to the spaces where we interact with partners, and how we align different priorities towards common goals.
- 3) **Power**, whose meaning can be nuanced towards that of privilege. Shifting power (or privileges) dynamics is an essential component towards more balanced relations, moving away from top-down approaches and favoring more horizontal and equitable ones.

While focusing on localization to accelerate change, particularly in the COVID-19 context, close collaboration is key. As stated by one of the panelists, "there's a lot of work to do, so let's do it together."

Resources

[AWID, High hopes & High expectations: Feminist movement recommendations to the equality fund](#)
[HPG Report, From the ground up: it's about time for local humanitarian action](#)