

Global Citizens Forum 2022- Concept Note

To kick off International Development Week 2022, OCIC's virtual 'Global Citizens Forum 2022: Localization Matters' seeks to bring together international cooperation sector leaders and practitioners, issue-specific experts and advocates, academics, funders, and youth in Canada and globally:

- to build awareness and shared understanding of the 'localization' agenda and its broader objective towards shifting power;
- to highlight the roles and perspectives of diverse stakeholders in this agenda, with a focus on civil society actors from grassroots and small and medium-sized organizations; and
- to share related research, tools and good practices within the international cooperation sector and with Canadians.

OCIC's 'Global Citizens Forum 2022' and related workshop and podcast activities are amongst the many existing and emerging initiatives to forward the localization agenda within Canada and globally. Guiding Principles for the Council for these initiatives include:

- OCIC's gender transformative approach, which emphasizes intersectionality and policies on [anti-oppression](#), [public engagement](#) and [gender equality](#);
- [The Government of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy's \(FIAP\)](#) feminist and integrated approach to development, which sees gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in a manner that is both targeted and cross-cutting;
- The [Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness](#); and
- The [Truth & Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#).

Why 'localization'?

Oxfam International defines localization as "a transformational process to recognize, respect and invest in local and national humanitarian and leadership capacities, to better meet the needs of crisis-affected communities", and posits that the localization agenda prioritizes ideas and solutions that are grassroots led, and views these approaches just as or more important than broad international guidelines.

Known also as 'community-led' or 'locally-led' initiatives, the core of localization is recognising that communities are far from homogenous, they often hold different views, and are deeply involved and aware of local politics.¹ It encourages participatory local governance and citizen engagement and aims ultimately for systemic change over short-term projects.

A 'localized' approach to international cooperation is necessary for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals calls for localization through target 17.9: Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation; and 17.15: Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and

¹ https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/catalysing_locally-led_development_in_the_uk_aid_system.pdf

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sustainable development. ‘Localising’ the SDGs means taking the individual subnational contexts into account; while the SDGs are global, their implementation and overall success relies on successful, sustainable local implementation.² As United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) says, “Subnational governments should not be seen as mere implementers of the Agenda. Subnational governments are policy makers, catalysts of change and the level of government best placed to link the global goals with local communities”.³ This sentiment, that local actors are best suited to effect sustainable change in their communities, is at the core of the localization agenda as it relates to the SDGs and more broadly.

In July 2021 the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) released the ‘DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance’, the first international standard of its kind.⁴ Comprising three pillars, the Recommendation recognises that the 2030 Agenda requires engagement from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in localisation, implementation, and monitoring.⁵ The three interconnected pillars: Respecting, Protecting and Promoting Civic Space; Supporting and Engaging with Civil Society; and Incentivising CSO Effectiveness, Transparency and Accountability, all embody the core values of localization, including supporting “more equitable partnerships between provider country and/or international CSOs” and taking “reasonable steps to do no harm to civic space in partner countries or territories”.

In their 2021 Report ‘Catalyzing Locally Led Development in the UK Aid System’, Bond supports the concise definition of ‘locally-led’ development as “initiatives owned and led by people in their own context”.⁶ They identify sustainability, the recognition of power dynamics, and diversity and plurality as some of the main principles and assumptions underlying localization. Bond also identifies numerous barriers to localization, such as and including the role of donors as agenda setters, colonial mindsets, organizational culture, harmful stereotypes, and narratives of local (in)capacity.⁷ Localization itself has received criticism from communities worldwide due to some INGOs making public commitments, but ultimately failing to deliver due in part to many of the aforementioned barriers.⁸

In Canada, various CSOs are taking steps towards the institutional, behavioral and regulatory changes needed for localization and some, including OCIC, have joined Cooperation Canada’s newly formed Localization Working Group, which seeks “to coordinate, learn and facilitate actions around a long-term

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sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/commitments/818_11195_commitment_ROADMAP%20LOCALIZING%20SDGS.pdf

³ Ibid., pg 7.

⁴ <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021#mainText>

⁵ <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021#backgroundInformation>

⁶ Bond, 7.

⁷ bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/catalysing_locally-led_development_in_the_uk_aid_system.pdf

⁸ https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PD-Decolonising-Aid_Second-Edition.pdf pg 14

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effort of shifting international cooperation paradigms in ways in which support the implementation of the principle of locally-led and nationally-owned civil society development and humanitarian interventions.”

As a part of these efforts, in our own recent content analysis of OCIC member websites we found that many organizations describe their efforts ‘working with local partners’ and supporting ‘grassroots’, ‘locally-driven’ or ‘community-led initiatives’, but most do not use the word ‘localization’. At our November Global Citizens Forum ‘Idea Jam’ focused on building awareness of localization and better understanding related capacity building needs, participants indicated interest in advocacy areas related to this topic, increasing dialogue between Global North and Global South actors, and working with other small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) in Canada to come to a nationally recognised working definition and principles of localization, relevant to the SMO context. In addition, questions, such as ‘how do we recognize and address the burdens imposed by ‘localization’?; how do we unpack the utilitarian aspect of localization, versus the political aspect?; ‘how is localization part and parcel of a feminist approach?’, ‘what does ‘local’ mean?’, and ‘how are localization and decolonization related?’ were raised as areas for collective learning.

Given the significance of this agenda and the diverse views, challenges, and questions it raises, OCIC is prioritizing this topical focus in a number of ways. In the winter months of 2022 we invite you to:

- Join us as a participant in OCIC’s ‘Reimagining International Solidarity: Foundations of Equitable Relations in International Cooperation’ Workshop with Gloria Novovic, January 7, 2022;
- Apply to be a as a partner in OCIC’s ‘Tapestry 2030’ Podcast Season 2, by January 10, 2022; and
- Contribute to OCIC’s ‘Global Citizens Forum 2022’, exploring ways in which ‘localization matters’, particularly to SMOs and other civil society actors, February 2-3, 2022.