

# Locally-led Partnerships

## Five important dimensions when building equitable partnerships

### WHY

Global partnerships between civil society organisations can unintentionally be characterised by power imbalances. These imbalances are undesirable and need to be addressed. This tool paper introduces five dimensions to consider when engaging in global partnerships and interventions that are to be characterized by equality and locally led development.

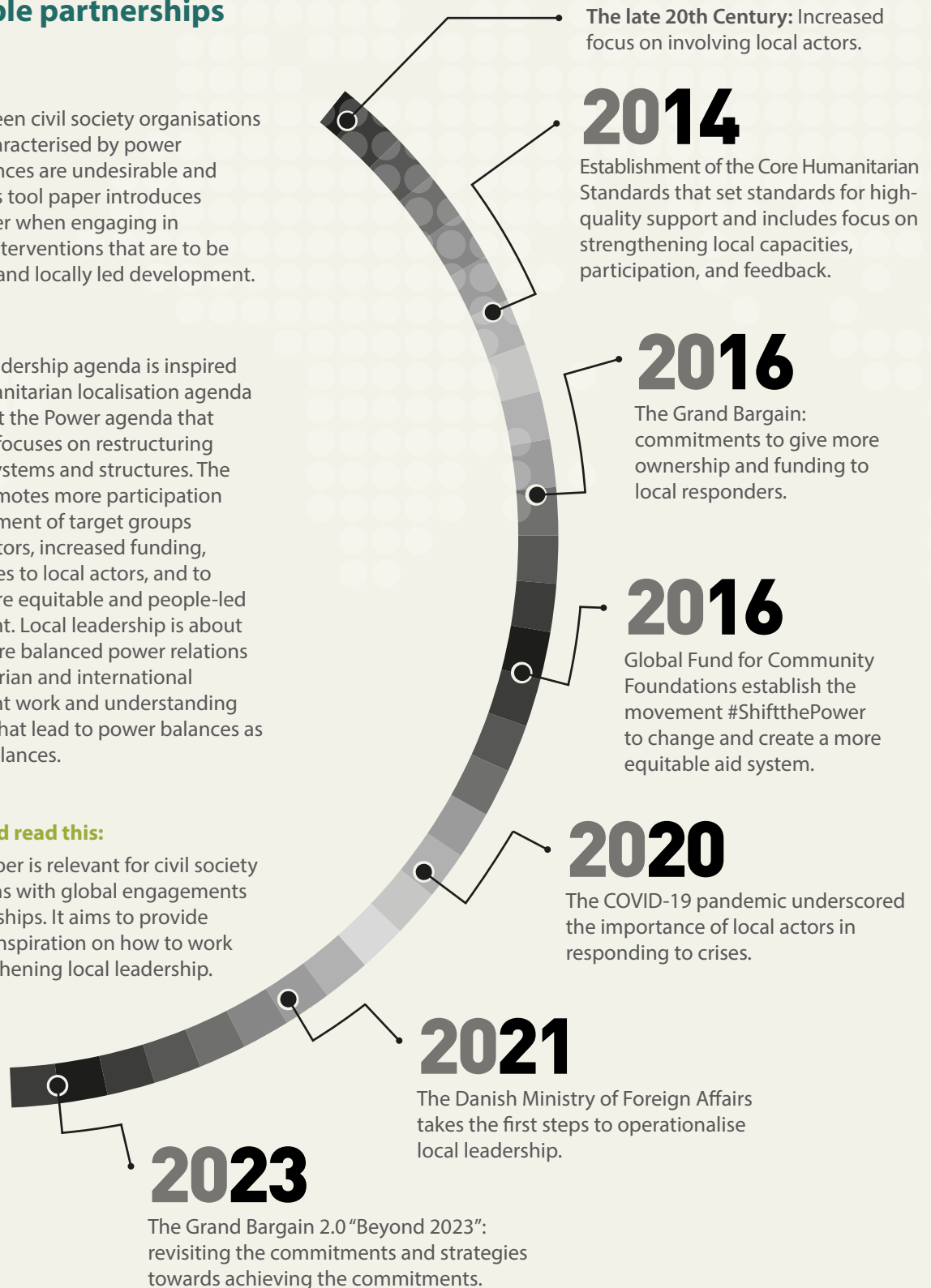
### WHAT

The local leadership agenda is inspired by the humanitarian localisation agenda and the Shift the Power agenda that collectively focuses on restructuring global aid systems and structures. The agenda promotes more participation and involvement of target groups and local actors, increased funding, and resources to local actors, and to support more equitable and people-led development. Local leadership is about creating more balanced power relations in humanitarian and international development work and understanding the factors that lead to power balances as well as imbalances.

### WHO should read this:

This tool paper is relevant for civil society organisations with global engagements and partnerships. It aims to provide inputs and inspiration on how to work with strengthening local leadership.

## Timeline of some key events relevant to the local leadership agenda





## HOW

The following section introduces a series of potential actions related to each of the five dimensions that should be reflected upon when engaging in partnerships.

### Establish the foundation for an equitable partnership

Ideas and initiatives for new interventions can derive from all stakeholders but should always be based on locally identified needs, concerns, and expertise and be developed in co-creation. It is essential that partners closest to the target group feel a strong sense of (co-)ownership and have the mandate to respond to changes in the context through an intervention. Partners are accountable to each other and should report, discuss, and provide feedback to each other. Joint interventions should also add mutual value to all parties in the partnership (e.g., resources, capacities, competencies, exposure, etc.). Trust, free and open communication are key to an equitable and valuable partnership.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Conduct a joint session where you reflect upon the power relations and potential power imbalances within your partnership. Acknowledging and making power imbalances explicit is the first step in creating a more equitable partnership.
- Have open conversations about how decisions are made in your partnership and concrete collaboration. Consider how to strengthen local partners' influence and decision-making in your collaboration.
- Before starting a new partnership and/or a new joint intervention, develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) describing the agreed decision-making processes and responsibilities, accountability structures, transparency principles, how to jointly mobilise and share resources and capacities, communication efforts, and representation externally.
- Develop a habit of mutual reporting, where both partners report on developments in the organisations to strengthen a culture of mutual feedback and learning.
- Recognise and respect your respective differences in your collaboration, be it contextual and cultural backgrounds, capacities and resources, strategies and priorities, organisational practices, etc.

**Trust, free and open communication are key to an equitable and valuable partnership**

### Strengthen capacities of partners

Organisations always need new inputs to foster development. Thus, it is important to have open dialogues about how to support capacity strengthening of all partners as well as target groups. This can be capacity strengthening at an institutional level as well as on a more individual level.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Have open conversations within the partnership about the needs for capacity strengthening at institutional as well as individual level.
- Include capacity building in joint efforts and prioritise allocating time and resources.
- Establish peer-to-peer learning structures. Search for other local organisations or local actors that partners can learn from and share experiences with.

### Include target groups

All people have the right to participate and access information relating to the decision-making processes that affect their lives and well-being. Therefore, involving target groups who will be affected by the intervention, is essential. For participation to be meaningful and beneficial to all, it is important that potential target groups are involved at the planning stage of an intervention – as a minimum, a representation of the potential target groups. When implementing an intervention, opening channels for receiving continuous feedback from target groups, listening to their inputs, and change the intervention accordingly, is key to support the sustainability of the intervention.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Make sure to include representation of potential target groups in the design of a new intervention (knowing that it is unrealistic to ensure thorough inclusion before an intervention has received support).
- Remember to inform target groups and stakeholders about their rights to provide feedback and make complaints and how to do it.
- Set up systems that ensure that you can receive feedback and complaints (also anonymously) from target groups during the implementation. Remember to plan how to use this feedback to adjust your intervention.

## Strengthen role and visibility of local partners

Local partners are dependent on being exposed to relevant stakeholders, be it duty bearers, like-minded organisations, companies, donors, etc. Being able to show their achievements and expertise is essential for them to gain new relations and partnerships. Moreover, local partners are dependent on being credible actors in their field of work.

### POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Examine relevant networks, coordination fora, and policy fora, and support that local partners engage in these.
- Provide support, prioritise resources, networks, and time for local partners to be present, and able to influence and take leadership in relevant networks and fora.
- Support local partners in being more visible related to their field of work through their participation and engagement in coordination fora, networks, other CSOs/NGOs, authorities and politicians, and potential donors, etc.
- Celebrate and communicate the results and changes that local partners have contributed to and give direct credit to the partner.

## Prioritise institutional support and flexibility in partnerships

Making budget priorities between the involved partners can be somewhat challenging, and core organisational costs (e.g., rent, and other housing costs, subscriptions, phone, internet, etc.) and capacity building is often given a lower priority than e.g., support to activities. Though this can be a very natural way of collaborating, thinking more strategically about partners as organisations can in the end benefit joint efforts. Moreover, flexibility in the usage of funds throughout the implementation is also key to a successful intervention as well as building a trustworthy, strong partnership.

### POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Engage in conversations in the partnership where you discuss the budget and how funds are allocated, and why it is fair in relation to the joint intervention at hand. Also discuss if the budget prioritises enough institutional support for the local partner.
- Decide together when both have to ask the other for permission to change elements in the budget.
- If there is an institutional donor, double check if you can set aside unallocated funds for activities, staff and/or administrative costs.
- Avoid micro-management and excessive control of partners. Instead, make room for capacity building through a mentor/mentee or peer-to-peer learning arrangement.

## Read more

### **Power Awareness Tool, Partos, 2022**

A tool for analysing power in partnerships for development

### **Dream paper: Shift the Power, Partos, 2022**

Insights and recommendation on division of roles between Northern and Southern CSOs

### **Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation, Peace Direct, 2023**

Provide a series of approaches to building and sustaining better partnerships between civil society actors

### **Participatory M&E, Intrac, 2020**

Recommendations on how to perform participatory monitoring and evaluation

### **Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms, Intrac, 2020**

Addresses the importance of feedback and what makes a good feedback mechanism

