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PRACTICE PAPER

Practical approaches to localisation in peacebuilding Rwanda

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Introduction

This paper aims to provide practical insights into localisation in peacebuilding initiatives in Rwanda. It outlines actionable strategies and practical recommendations based on Rwanda's unique context, with a focus on community engagement, capacity-building, and sustainable initiatives. The paper intends to empower stakeholders at various levels to engage in peacebuilding activities in Rwanda.

The concrete actions and best practice in this paper bridge the gap between theory and practice. They are derived from Rwanda's unique context and experiences and have been identified by this research project. They seek to facilitate the implementation of localised peacebuilding strategies that can lead to lasting peace in Rwanda.

This paper is aimed at policy-makers, peacebuilding practitioners at national and grassroots levels, donors, researchers and academicians, as well as the local communities directly affected by conflict and violence.

Methodology

The research took a qualitative, participatory approach and drew upon primary data sources from an in-depth literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). The interviewees comprised significant stakeholders in senior and leadership positions, as well as strategic personnel, in local and central government, academia and civil society organisations (CSOs). The FGD participants were mainly technical staff from local government, CSOs and local community members.

Table 1: Participants in KIIs and FGDs by province, district and gender

Province	District	KIIs			FGDs		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
City of Kigali	Gasabo, Kicukiro and Nyarugenge	3	2	5	23	20	43
South	Huye, Nyaruguru and Nyanza	1	1	2	21	13	34
North	Musanze, Gakenke and Burera	1	-	1	18	15	33
West	Nyabihu, Rutsiro and Rubavu	1	-	1	20	11	31
East	Gatsibo and Nyagatare	1	-	1	12	7	19
Total		7	3	10	94	66	160

Data was collected from four provinces and City of Kigali; the 14 districts within these areas were selected at random. A total of 170 people participated actively in this research, including three delegates from Rwandan partner NGOs who provided their experience as case studies. Youth, women, and people with disabilities were represented.

The research areas included rural and urban districts, and secondary cities, to allow for geographic representation. A purposive sampling approach was used to include people with relevant experience

and information, including partners and participants in International Alert projects with peacebuilding experience, who would be likely to have valuable insights to contribute.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research cycle and all informants gave their consent to participate. International Alert also obtained the necessary clearance from central and local government.

The Rwandan context

Although the concept of localisation is gaining traction globally, its integration into discussions around aid varies by context and region. In Rwanda, the idea of localisation is increasingly recognised and incorporated into aid discussions, reflecting a global shift towards more inclusive and sustainable development practices.¹

Localisation in peacebuilding refers to a process and outcomes relating to the redress of power imbalances within the peacebuilding sector and therefore the transfer of power from international peacebuilding agencies (donors, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and multilateral agencies) to local actors, as defined by the needs in specific contexts. This is distinct, but recognises and encompasses the learning, from the longstanding experiences of ongoing locally led peacebuilding work. Participants in Rwanda generally saw localisation as a process that would lead to stronger locally led peacebuilding.

Rwanda's journey from the devastating genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 to its current state of stability and development is a testament to the importance of effective peacebuilding at different levels. Various factors have influenced success in the implementation of localisation of peacebuilding efforts. These include, but are not limited to, political will, local ownership, adaptability, strong institutions, collaboration between decentralised entities and organisations (CSOs, local NGOs, INGOs, and others such as the Rwandan Governance Board (RGB) and the Joint Action Development Forum (JADF)) at all levels, in addition to the participation of active citizens through various consultation approaches. These consultation approaches include state-led channels such as community assemblies (*inteko z'abaturage*), community work (*umuganda*) and the National Dialogue Council (*Umushyikirano*), and non-state-led channels including CSO initiatives at community level.

The peacebuilding sector has encountered numerous challenges in the last 25 years. International Alert's programmes contribute to the consolidation of peace and equitable development in Rwandan society. Alert continues to support groups most affected by the genocide against the Tutsi and its consequences, and uses dialogue to build trust and understanding between them.

International Alert promotes spaces for dialogue between citizens and authorities, working in partnership with local authorities on peaceful community development to ensure equitable growth and a reduction in the risk of conflicts. Trauma counselling and microfinance schemes have enabled people affected by the genocide to identify common ground for cooperation and coexistence, and to learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Community-level consultation channels

Community assemblies (*inteko z'abaturage*): These were initially established in 2010, following Ministerial Instruction N° 002/07/01 of 20/05/2011, which was intended to guide decentralised entities to handle citizens' concerns. Article 16 of this instruction states that "*inteko z'abaturage* are attended by cell² residents and leaders from various structures who should come to provide the citizens with advice and share ideas". *Inteko z'abaturage* constitute one of the three mechanisms put in place to examine and solve citizens' concerns at the village level.³

Community work (*umuganda*): This is one of the traditional tools of mutual help rooted in Rwandan culture. The practice was reinvented by the government after the 1994 genocide. *Umuganda* is practised every last Saturday of the month. The roles of *umuganda* are two fold. Firstly, it contributes to the socio-economic development of the community through infrastructure development, environmental protection and cleanliness, as well as the implementation of government programmes. Secondly, through meetings within the *umuganda* framework, it contributes to information sharing and fostering social cohesion and peacebuilding in the country.⁴

National Dialogue Council (*Umushyikirano*): This is an annual event where the president meets different government officials, including district representatives and Kigali City Council members, high-ranking government officers, members of the judiciary, parliamentarians, governors, the mayor of the city of Kigali, members of civil society, representatives of the business community, Rwandans from the diaspora, and representatives from higher education institutions.⁵ The format is a series of interactive sessions where citizens can drop in or send short messages or tweets to lodge complaints or ask questions. Importantly, the implementation of the National Dialogue resolutions is evaluated at the start of the following year's *Umushyikirano*.⁶

The research shows that localisation in Rwanda will only be feasible, sustainable and impactful if it reflects Rwandan values, culture and the historical and political context behind local needs and priorities. Localisation emphasises the empowerment of local actors and communities to lead and sustain peace processes, ensuring that interventions are culturally appropriate and context specific. Through localisation, the role of international actors in peacebuilding is not necessarily being reduced, rather it is evolving amid challenges and opportunities. Recent trends reflect the complex interplay between increasing acknowledgment of local actors' importance and the persistent structural barriers they face.

Key findings

Identifying local peacebuilding actors in Rwanda

Based on data from this study, local actors are defined as individuals, groups, organisations or institutions that operate within affected communities or regions in Rwanda where peacebuilding

efforts are being conducted. This means that local actors can include a wide range of stakeholders such as community leaders, local NGOs and other local CSOs such as faith-based groups, local government institutions, conflict-affected communities and individuals.

Defining localisation in peacebuilding in Rwanda

All the above-mentioned actors have different views on localisation depending on their specific local context, role and profile, and what they want to see from localisation efforts in Rwanda. The perspectives seen in the research also varied depending on respondents' exposure to localisation discourse, but localisation was generally understood as a process that leads to stronger locally led peacebuilding and many participants focused their responses on what this outcome would look like. For instance, one government representative from Northern Province explained his view of localisation as follows:

"For successful localisation in Rwanda, our district ensures that ownership and leadership focus on local communities in decision-making processes and implementation through decentralised structures we have such as isibo,⁷ village and cell. With support from local leaders and stakeholders, the community actively participate in shaping and driving peacebuilding and development initiatives."

A government official from Nyarugenge district highlighted how localisation can empower lower actors:

"[Localisation is] an innovative approach that enables local actors at community level to take the lead in delivering peacebuilding support, aiming to enhance the capacity and resources of local organisations to respond to crises and foster long-term sustainability."

Similarly, a representative of people with disabilities from Southern province explained:

"Localisation can only be sustainable and impactful if it guarantees the capability for peacebuilding preparedness and response resides with those in close proximity to crisis-affected populations, who are most adept at providing swift and suitable responses and can remain on the ground for extended durations ... [local] NGOs and other CSOs are closest to community and together with citizens at the grassroots; they know much better than anyone local needs and priorities."

Some local actors thought localisation sounded confusing and seemed to have little information about it:

"Localisation is a new concept that confuses most of the actors and we do implement it differently. However, we all agree that localisation can neither be productive nor suitable if the effective coordination and collaboration among the beneficiaries is unclear and not well organised. We strongly believe that the citizen is at the centre of governance when it comes to Rwanda, so the only way to support localisation is to focus on local needs and priorities."

At one of the FGDs a local woman described that localisation could be organic and happen in practice without actors officially labelling it as such:

“Localisation strengthens our social cohesion within our communities by promoting collaboration, dialogue, and mutual understanding among ourselves as community members. We work together to address conflict-related issues that may develop stronger bonds and trust in one another. Probably we do it without knowing that we are implementing localisation, but we do it.”

Participants shared their own perspectives on how peacebuilding efforts could be localised to address the country’s unique challenges and dynamics effectively. One woman from Western province summarised the homegrown local peacebuilding approaches:

“Rwanda in its uniqueness has identified some of the best homegrown initiatives that were productive and tailored to their challenges and gaps, I can only mention some among many such as community assemblies (inteko z’abaturation), community work (umuganda), parental evening (umugoroba w’ababyeyi) and local leader outreach (umunsi wo gukemura ibibazo by’abaturation utegurwa n’ubuyobozi) etc. These should be supported to make localisation practical on the ground.”

Traditional, community-based practices have been integrated into formal processes because traditional practices are seen as legitimate, effective and culturally relevant. These processes are led by community volunteers and jointly owned by the government, which oversees these processes.

Additionally, the approaches below were identified through the FGDs as crucial for effective localisation in the Rwandan context:

- **Community-led initiatives:** Local community members interviewed prioritised peacebuilding initiatives that are led and implemented by community members themselves. This involves empowering local leaders, elders, women’s groups, and youth associations to take ownership of peacebuilding efforts, tailoring interventions to the specific needs and priorities of each community.
- **Socio-economic development:** Local communities view peacebuilding through the lens of socio-economic development, recognising the interconnectedness between peace, stability and prosperity. They prioritise initiatives that address poverty, unemployment and inequalities by providing opportunities for economic empowerment, education, and skills training within their communities.

According to research participants, localisation requires involvement of and constructive collaboration among different stakeholders. These approaches are beneficial to the development of the community, as explained by the JADF chairperson in Western province:

“In our regular meetings, we meet INGOs, [local] NGOs and CSOs in general that support our district in various pillars (socio-economic development and governance) with the aim to track the progress, challenges and find solutions together. This collaboration among ourselves is vital to the success of our districts in all sectors and we acknowledge their role.”

Overall, local communities in Rwanda view localisation in peacebuilding as an opportunity to draw upon their own strengths, resources and cultural traditions to address the root causes of conflict and build a more peaceful and resilient society. Research participants emphasised the importance of participatory approaches that respect their autonomy and local knowledge, fostering sustainable peace from the ground up.

“Rwanda’s good governance has much contributed to this collaboration between us and civil society organisations operating in our district in terms of assisting persons affected by Covid-19, disasters and, now, in peacebuilding projects. We appreciate the results from a good collaboration through district leadership, JADF and our community and pledge our full support.” – Research participant

It was clear from the research that CSOs play a crucial role in advocating for social change, promoting human rights, and fostering peace and reconciliation in Rwanda. Their perspectives on localisation in peacebuilding in the Rwandan context are shaped by their experiences, expertise and values.

“In our perspective as CSOs, we do emphasise the importance of inclusivity and participation in peacebuilding efforts, advocating for the meaningful involvement of diverse voices, including women, youth, and marginalised groups. This encourages the adoption of inclusive processes that prioritise the representation of all stakeholders in decision-making towards effective localisation in Rwanda.” – Research participant

CSOs in Rwanda understand and advocate for localisation in peacebuilding in various ways:

- **Community-centred approaches:** CSOs prioritise community-centred approaches to peacebuilding, recognising the importance of engaging local stakeholders in decision-making processes, including survivors and perpetrators of the 1994 genocide and marginalised groups. They advocate for initiatives that empower communities to identify their own needs, priorities, and solutions to conflict, thus promoting sustainable peace from the grassroots level.
- **Human rights and justice:** CSOs advocate for accountability for past atrocities, including the genocide, while also promoting reconciliation and healing processes that respect the rights and dignity of all individuals. Rwanda has previously taken steps to localise justice mechanisms on cases related to the genocide through the Gacaca court system in the 2000s.⁸ CSOs argue that localised peacebuilding mechanisms are needed to work at this level and address ongoing local tensions, such as through mediation over compensation payments from perpetrators to victims.
- **Dialogue and reconciliation:** CSOs promote dialogue and reconciliation as essential pillars of peacebuilding in Rwanda. They also facilitate intergroup dialogues, community reconciliation forums, and truth-telling processes that promote understanding, empathy and healing among individuals and communities affected by conflict through the provision of psychosocial support and trauma counselling to survivors and perpetrators of violence.
- **Partnerships and collaboration:** CSOs recognise the importance of partnerships and collaboration in advancing peacebuilding goals in Rwanda. They work closely with government agencies, international organisations, religious institutions and other stakeholders to coordinate efforts, share resources, and leverage collective expertise. CSOs also collaborate with local community-based organisations (CBOs) and grassroots movements to amplify the voices of marginalised groups and promote inclusive peacebuilding initiatives.

According to many CSO participants, however, the dependence on external actors hampers the localisation efforts described above. This view was expressed by a community-based actor in Northern province:

"I strongly believe that localisation in Rwanda cannot be fully implemented when our CSOs and [local] NGOs still depend [so] much on donors or international organisations. There is a need for the government through their institutions to internally finance and build capacities necessary for our CSOs/[local] NGOs to design peacebuilding interventions that are aligned with local realities, citizens' needs and priorities, as these are leading factors. Otherwise localisation will remain in theory but not in practice."

Overall, CSOs in Rwanda understand localisation in peacebuilding as **a holistic and participatory process that empowers communities, promotes human rights, and fosters inclusive dialogue and reconciliation**. They advocate for approaches that address the root causes of conflict, build social cohesion, and promote sustainable peace and development in Rwandan society. A participant in an FGD in Northern province summarised:

"Of course, localisation cannot be productive, sustainable and impactful without necessarily considering the effect of community inclusion in the agenda. In fact, in our district we have a slogan saying that 'nothing with us, is without us', thus emphasising the importance of local community engagement in any programme under implementation as long as community is concerned."

Challenges to localisation in peacebuilding in Rwanda

Research participants identified several factors that hinder the effective implementation of localisation in Rwanda. These include political issues, funding pressures, international peacebuilding focus shifting to other countries, lack of alignment between the priorities of INGOs and local organisations, and limited institutional capacity locally. As one respondent explained:

"From both our organisation and personal long experiences in civil society organisation, the localisation in Rwandan context faces many barriers and risks, among them include but not limited to political issues and mindset at organisations' and donors' level. These include the shifting of the business focus, significant loss of the funds, orienting peacebuilding focus to other countries, resistance of some donors and INGOs to their agenda, which sometimes bring the suspicions of a hidden agenda and lose of job and other opportunities."

A respondent from Southern province described the difficulties of balancing global and local agendas:

"Balancing global agendas with local needs presents several difficulties when it comes to localisation efforts. For instance, in our case, differing priorities whereby the global agendas often prioritise certain issues that may not align with the immediate needs or priorities of local communities. For example, global initiatives may focus on climate-change mitigation, while local communities may prioritise access to clean water or healthcare as this is [the] practical need in our district. The same challenge was observed in capacity constraints, whereby local governments and organisations lack the capacity or expertise to effectively engage with global agendas and implement related initiatives. Building the necessary capacity to participate in global processes, while also addressing local needs, requires significant investment in training, education, and institutional strengthening."

Power dynamics and the imbalance between international and local actors was highlighted as another challenge, as was lack of local capacity to fulfil international donors' financial and reporting requirements. This can then impact trust within partnerships.

"International organisations do inadvertently dominate decision-making processes, marginalising the voices and priorities of local partners. In fact, this happened most of the time in all our organisations, few of them can survive on it. Another challenge is accountability and transparency. It is not easy for many of the local NGOs to ensure accountability and transparency due to capacity to understand donors and INGOs systems, particularly when it comes to financial management, reporting mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation processes. To this, establishing clear accountability mechanisms and fostering mutual trust is therefore essential for building effective partnerships." – Research participant

Challenges to effective implementation of localisation in Rwanda

- **High dependency of CSOs and local NGOs on donors and international organisations for funding:** The dependency on external funding impacts the shape and sustainability of local peacebuilding efforts. Participants discussed the need to diversify funding sources. Recently, legal changes have made it easier for local NGOs to undertake income-generating activities to fund their work. Some participants also felt that there was a role for the government in funding interventions. Unrestricted (and increased where possible) funding from donors and INGOs would be a long-lasting and sustainable solution.
- **Unequal power dynamics between local, national and international actors:** Power imbalances impact decision-making processes and resource allocation disadvantaging local organisations. Participants reflected that international organisations often dominate decision-making processes and marginalise the voices and priorities of local partners. This risks interventions being disconnected from local needs and realities.
- **Limited financial resources of local organisations:** This creates a challenge for local organisations to develop long-term, sustainable, locally led programmes that respond to the needs and priorities of local communities. Participants also raised concerns about the lack of access to information on funding for many organisations, creating inequality and a lack of transparency about where funding is allocated.
- **Limited capacity locally:** Capacity-building needs among local organisations are significant and institutional and organisational support and strengthening are required to realise full local ownership of local peacebuilding and help ensure accountability and transparency.
- **Poor coordination:** Coordination and communication must be enhanced among all actors (local CSOs and NGOs, local authorities, national government and international organisations) to help ensure complementarity and alignment of approaches, and relevance to local needs.
- **Limited access to information on entry points and opportunities for localisation, and existing efforts:** The research revealed significant disparities in levels of understanding and exposure to localisation debates and initiatives among local actors. Open access to information on opportunities to inform and shape local peacebuilding efforts is highly encouraged.

Enabling factors for effective localisation in peacebuilding

The findings revealed several factors that can enable localisation in peacebuilding in Rwanda and support its successful implementation.

One research participant from Western province revealed the importance of local community and citizen ownership and framing localisation within the context of the Rwandan Constitution and existing decentralisation processes:

“In as far as Rwanda is concerned, I would say that from the Constitution to other policies, programmes and strategies such as decentralisation, Vision 2050, National Strategy for Transformation 1 to mention but a few, a citizen is considered at the centre of governance. This means that localisation would be meaningless without the involvement of local community or citizens. So, we as people at grassroots should be more engaged than ever for any government policies to be impactful and productive. Through local government structures, we are involved and connected with NGOs or CSOs in their activities from consultations, workshops, meetings and implementation towards fulfilment of our needs and priorities.”

Another respondent noted that funding is a key factor, alongside collaboration with government and bodies at all levels:

“I am sure we all need collaboration between government, CSOs, [local] NGOs, INGOs and our citizens. Another factor is funding, which could be managed by government or its local partners if we are coordinated, collaborative and engaged towards our citizens. In fact, this would lead to more accountable, trustful and impactful localisation.”

Other participants highlighted collaboration at all levels – between community, local organisations, international partners and government bodies – as key to creating an enabling environment for effective localisation.

“In my view, I see collaboration between all partners as a key factor since we should plan as one team for the benefit of our local citizens. The programmes of the civil society organisations should be flexible and ready to be adapted to citizens’ needs and priorities. The capacity-building should be tailored to the local realities after conducting [a] needs assessment. This would enable trust and confidence while directly funding the local NGOs that master the local needs and priorities.” – Research participant

There were mixed views among research participants about the extent to which this collaboration was already underway between decentralised entities, CSOs, local NGOs, INGOs, and others like RGB and JADF. Since the research was conducted, there have been further developments in this area, with the Rwandan government seeking to take a greater role in coordination between peacebuilding actors. This has included a mapping of peacebuilding initiatives and plans for stronger actors to accompany weaker ones through technical and financial support, as well as practical accompaniment, to promote sustainability.

The other factors that participants identified for effective implementation of localisation in Rwanda included political will, local ownership, adaptability, and strong institutions. There was also an emphasis on coordination with active citizens who know their rights, needs and priorities through various state-led and non-state-led consultation approaches.

During the consultation process, research participants identified practical steps to facilitate effective localisation in peacebuilding in the Rwandan context.

Practical approaches to enable localisation for peacebuilding

- **Networking and collaboration:** Approaches need to encourage networking among stakeholders, breaking out of silos (local/national/international and government/NGO) and working across sectors to amplify the impact of local work. This also involves learning and exchange among actors at all levels on good practice for localisation.
- **Adaptive programming:** This involves building flexibility into design, implementation, monitoring and resourcing of interventions to respond to evolving needs and priorities of communities as well as changes in the context.
- **Equity in funding:** This requires addressing power imbalances by increasing direct funding to local actors, increasing flexibility in funding requirements, and funding institutional capacity development and core costs.
- **Capacity development:** This involves addressing capacity gaps among local organisations so they can take full ownership of local peacebuilding efforts.
- **Build trust, accountability and transparency:** This involves building trust between local, national and international entities, and between these actors and communities, through dialogue and open, ongoing engagement. Participatory and community-led monitoring processes and tools can improve accountability and transparency through enhanced information and the involvement of local communities and CSOs.
- **Voice and influence:** Approaches should put communities' priorities, perspectives and experiences front and centre of localisation efforts, including maintaining space for diverse voices to influence the direction of peacebuilding processes. These should be inclusive of people with disabilities, different age groups and genders, and survivors of the genocide.
- **Community engagement and participation:** Local communities should play a central role in guiding efforts and informing the priorities for local communities. Decision-making should be inclusive of different genders, ages, abilities and include survivors of the genocide, and consider socio-economic status and be inclusive of urban and rural communities.

Furthermore, from the findings it was clear that localisation interacts with conflict and peacebuilding dynamics in various ways, influencing power dynamics, addressing contextual issues, and offering valuable lessons from other sectors. For the Rwandan context, localisation can challenge existing power dynamics by empowering local actors and communities to take ownership of peacebuilding processes. Historically, the government's top-down approaches enabled power to be concentrated in the hands of elites (external to the community), leading to a lack of legitimacy and sustainability. In reality there is a need to acknowledge the importance of context-specific factors in shaping conflict dynamics and peacebuilding strategies.

Each conflict situation is unique, influenced by historical, cultural, social, economic and political factors. Therefore, localised approaches are tailored to the specific context, drawing on local knowledge, traditions and relationships to address underlying grievances and build sustainable peace. *Gacaca* courts and *Abunzi* committees have been instrumental in addressing community-level conflicts and promoting healing and reconciliation among Rwandans.

Gender and inclusion in localisation in peacebuilding in Rwanda

The research highlighted the importance of gender equality and inclusion for localisation in peacebuilding to be more impactful in Rwanda. Localising peacebuilding in Rwanda has significant gender and inclusion implications.

“It is true that peacebuilding cannot be possible and productive without comprehensively incorporating gender sensitivity into peacebuilding efforts, not just as a matter of fairness, but also as an imperative for creating lasting and effective peace. By recognising and addressing the unique experiences and needs of all genders, since males and females have different needs and are differently affected, peacebuilding initiatives can therefore become more inclusive, equitable, and successful if gender aspects are fully considered during localisation processes.” – Research participant

Overall, gender and inclusion considerations are essential for ensuring that localised peacebuilding efforts in Rwanda are responsive to the diverse needs, perspectives, and experiences of all individuals and communities affected by conflict. By prioritising women’s participation, addressing intersecting forms of discrimination, and promoting inclusive approaches, localisation initiatives can contribute to building a more just, equitable, and sustainable peace in Rwanda.

Perspectives on localisation: case studies

As part of the research, representatives were interviewed from three local NGOs to gain their perspectives and insight on localisation in peacebuilding in Rwanda: Initiative for Peace and Human Rights, Rwanda Civil Society Platform and Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe.

Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (iPeace)

"At iPeace, we believe that raising awareness of citizens and their leaders about human rights and good governance on a regular basis is the best way to contribute to building sustainable peace in the Great Lakes region. For Rwandans, they relate more with things that reflect their local realities. Here we mean the values of the people of Rwanda, the principles of the government of Rwanda, and the programmes of the government of Rwanda to come to solve problems on the ground. There are two main tendencies of localisation. The first is to bring solutions to local problems using local resources, local actors, and local assessments and the second way, and which I believe does not work, is trying to outsource a solution. For example, if the South African peace and the reconciliation process worked that way in South Africa, it would be a huge mistake to copy-paste this solution to solve the problem in Rwanda, thinking that it should also work. That's what I call outsourcing. And the human mind is very weak at that point. By working with International Alert, we bring our local expertise, our networks, our knowledge of the local people, their habits, the culture, the values, so that when we implement our activities, actually we do not come to create more conflicts, but we come to align with the existing local dynamics so that we can produce the optimal result for these people."

– Dr Elvis Mbembe Binda, President and CEO of iPeace



Dr. Elvis Mbembe Binda, President and CEO, iPeace © International Alert Rwanda

Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP)

"RCSP fully promotes grassroots engagement whereby we emphasise the importance of engaging local communities in every peacebuilding effort. We recognise that sustainable peace requires the active involvement of grassroots organisations, community leaders, and individuals affected by conflict. To materialise this, we sit with our donors and plan together to ensure the citizens' needs and priorities are considered while implementing the project. We try to have a win-win situation whereby the donor's targets and ours are considered in activity planning. Of course, this requires a determination, focus and respect of our values, vision, mission and Rwandan context, otherwise localisation can neither be effective nor sustainable without this foundation. We acknowledge the efforts, determination and commitments of our partners and donors when it comes to implementation of the localisation agenda. They understand its need and of course, it is a journey and process, of which we believe we are engaged in together."

– Ndayishimiye Zacharie, Programme Manager, RCSP



Zacharie Ndayishimiye, Programme Manager, RCSP © International Alert Rwanda

Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe (PFTH)

"We recognise that conflict prevention, resolution, and reconciliation can only be achieved if gender-inclusive approaches are applied. With the aim to address the root causes of conflict and build more inclusive and sustainable peace in Rwanda, from the above mentioned, we implement localisation in our context. To achieve this, we conduct various sessions of advocacy for a gender-inclusive approach that acknowledges the unique experiences, perspectives, and contributions of women, men, and gender-diverse. We welcome, collaborate and partner with any organisation, either local, regional and international, provided we agreed on the project implementation that handles the issues, needs and priorities of our rights holders and which respect our values, culture, [and] country context. Of course, not all donors fit with our needs because we strive for women at the centre of governance, and to this [end], PFTH and our partners are in a better position to know our rights holders' needs, challenges and priorities. From there we ensure any project designed and financed focuses on that."

– Emma Marie Bugingo, Executive Director, PFTH

Recommendations

The recommendations draw on the analysis of feedback from research participants and good practices identified through the research process. The recommendations are directed at three main actors involved in the practical implementation of localisation in Rwanda: international development partners (donors, international agencies and INGOs, including International Alert), the government and local CSOs.

For all international development partners

- Tailor interventions directly to citizens' needs, following a needs assessment, and base them on research conducted in partnership with local NGOs aimed at solving the communities' real problems.
- Facilitate regular conversations with local NGOs and CSOs around their capacity to effectively implement activities and manage funds so that international organisations can lobby and advocate to donors in their favour.
- Establish connections (beyond financial support) with a variety of local government entities at a district and sector level through ongoing and tailored capacity-building based on a clear development plan.
- Examine critically and resolve internal bureaucratic barriers that limit local ownership and address trust-related challenges that make it difficult to grant funds directly to local NGOs and CSOs.
- Develop transition plans to progressively hand over direct implementation of peacebuilding activities and systems to local NGOs, while identifying the supporting role that international actors can usefully play.

For the Government of Rwanda and RCSP

- Establish a clear coordination mechanism to ensure all practical approaches to localisation are developed within the existing national peacebuilding framework. This coordination mechanism should be inclusive of a range of local authorities, local NGOs, local CSOs and diverse community members (taking into account different experiences and perspectives and representing all segments of society, including marginalised groups).
- Revise the systems for direct funding to local CSOs to enhance accessibility for a broader range of local peacebuilding actors registered in Rwanda, which represent citizens' needs and priorities so as to contribute to effective localisation.

For local CSOs

- Invest in developing capacities to effectively lead peacebuilding initiatives, ensuring CSOs have the necessary skills and resources using participative approaches in planning, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. This can include peer learning, skills sharing and exchange of best practice.
- Strengthen existing community-based initiatives through provision of support to grassroots organisations that have a deep understanding of local contexts and conflicts, in order to work together on peacebuilding efforts.
- Promote context-specific approaches through the design of peacebuilding interventions that are tailored to the specific cultural, social, and economic contexts of different communities in Rwanda.
- Encourage and facilitate local dialogue through organised community dialogues that allow local stakeholders to voice their concerns, share their experiences, and collaboratively find solutions to conflicts.
- Ensure, together with donors, that inclusive approaches are encouraged to promote participation by specific groups (e.g. women, girls and people with disabilities in conflict-affected areas) in all peacebuilding processes and ensure their voices are heard.
- Work on income-generating activities that would help local NGOs to become self-sufficient and independently design and implement peacebuilding initiatives for more impact and sustainability.

Endnotes

- 1 Trocaire, The contribution of various actors towards localisation of humanitarian and development action in Rwanda, 2020, <https://www.trocaire.org/documents/rwanda-localisation-research-report/>
- 2 Rwanda is comprised of provinces, City of Kigali, districts, sectors, cells and villages. Cells and villages are the smallest administrative entities.
- 3 Interpeace and Never Again Rwanda, Governing with and for citizens, 2016, <https://www.interpeace.org/resource/governing-citizens-genocide/>
- 4 RGB, Umuganda impact assessment report 2007-2016, 2017
- 5 RGB, National Umushyikirano Council: A decade of delivering democracy and development to Rwandans 2003-2014, 2019, https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME_GROWN_SOLUTIONS/National_Umushyikirano_Council.pdf
- 6 Interpeace, 2016, Op.cit.
- 7 *Isibo* is an unofficial administrative entity. It sits underneath the village leadership and aims to bridge the gap between citizens and leadership. As with village leadership, *isibos* do not provide services, but they offer support for small problems and queries, deferring to the cell, sector and district for more significant issues.
- 8 The *Gacaca* courts were a transitional justice system in Rwanda following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. See: <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>, accessed 29 November 2024

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