

Discussion on Integrating Local Knowledge in Humanitarian and Development Programming: Perspectives of Global Women Leaders

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Recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QU-vfGjnN2Q>

Speakers:

Adrian Rivera, KMOL Advisor at USAID

Megan Kelly, GBV in Emergencies Program Officer at CARE

Veronica Ngum Ndi, CEO/Founder of the Community Association for Vulnerable Persons (CAVP) and Founder of the Cameroon Women's Humanitarian Network

Veronica Supliguicha, Director and Co-founder of the Alas de Colibri Foundation

Why this report?

[The report](#) builds on recently published report by USAID called Integrating Local Knowledge in Development Practice and aims to extend the original methods to better understand grassroots actors' own interpretation of local knowledge and its integration into programming.

Integrating Local Knowledge in Development Programming by Adrian Rivera

- Over the period of 8 months, a team from USAID explored how local knowledge is currently used, challenges in practice and how it can be used in the future.
- Goal: to hear from local knowledge holders themselves and how developmental practices can be adapted to integrate local knowledge into policy and programmatic activities.
- Findings:
 - It is the responsibility of practitioners to inquire, understand, and use the various terms and meanings that are given by those involved in local knowledge.
 - Local knowledge comes in diverse unconventional forms
- Best Practices:
 - Essential to establish trust and build relationship
 - Community engagement
 - Local and Scientific knowledge can work in tandem
- Outcomes:
 - Programs rooted in lived experiences of the community and tailored to the context are more accessible, adaptive and efficient.
 - Using local knowledge strengthens relationships
 - Integral step to build local ownership and more sustainable
- Ethics and Power Dynamics:
 - Power dynamics exists between organization and local communities
 - Local knowledge is often seen as inferior
 - Power imbalance between external and local organizations since the former holds majority of funding and resources
 - Extractive practices such as publishing with paywall preserves the power imbalance
 - Diverse teams and approaches are essential in mitigating internal biases
 - Use of local knowledge must not be used to reinforce existing unequal power dynamics
- Challenges

- Establishing validity of local knowledge in development
- Balancing community priorities and donor requirements
- Addressing power dynamics within community and between donors and communities

Integrating Local Knowledge in Humanitarian and Development (CARE) - Megan Kelly, GBV in Emergencies Program Officer at CARE

- What does having local knowledge mean to grassroots leaders?
 - Knowing what a community is like; Knowing what a community needs; Knowing where the solutions lie; Having a connection with the community
- Challenges to sharing and receiving local knowledge by grassroots leaders
 - Not enough time; not enough money; inability of local actors to establish relationships with power holders; lack of access for external actors; barriers to sharing certain types of knowledge because of political sensitivity; competition between local organization; Western viewpoints dominating conversations; lack of long-term vision; dependence on too few actors; extractions of information without giving anything back.
- What works?
 - Include local perspectives when you build budgets and proposals; Invite local partners to international spaces; Modify plans based on local feedback; Decide together how jointly produced research/data get used; Visit communities and listen to them
- What to do more?
 - Move from paper to practices – strategies are not enough; Make it simpler, safer, and more comfortable to participate; Hold more frequent, meaningful interactions; Create opportunities for local groups to engage directly with donors; Generate real space for feedback and criticism; Consult with multiple community actors in a community not just one
- What to stop doing?
 - Refuse to pay for travel and participation; Ask for feedback, but don't listen; Listen to feedback, but don't act; Never explain what you did with the info; Extract info, then ignore the local partners; Impose complex and rigid templates; Ignore local context
- Recommendations for Donors to change
 - Be a partner always- not just for a project or a proposal; Diversify partnerships; Stop bringing in outsiders; Lower bureaucratic requirements; Stop propaganda; Work more transparently; Combat unfair pay; Recognize the value of local knowledge and consult local communities; Support networks of solidarity; Be more flexible.
- How will we know it's working?
 - International actors behave differently; International groups connect with grassroots organizations more deeply; Local knowledge is bridged with external knowledge; Women make gains, and they have fewer social norms restricting them; Good solutions to problems are posed based on local knowledge; Communities solve problems collectively; Local knowledge becomes visible; Local NGOs form networks.

Questions and Answers

Question to **Adrian**: Does the new report reinforce old findings or add new ones?

Answer: CARE's report does expand upon focusing specifically on women-led organizations. CARE's report expands the geographical location and voices. The three specific definitions that came up add to specificity. There are multiple things where two reports tie in and there are places where CARE's reports expand on.

Question to **Veronica Supliguicha**: A key takeaway that you want everyone on this call to know based on your experience.

Answer: It is key to know how to interact with the community. What are the elements to keep in mind when I enter a community. Similarly, it is important to understand that communities have their own knowledge and wisdom and if we are working with them, we need to adapt to their way of doing things. There also has to be constant change, adaptability and flexibility.

Question to **Veronica Ngum Ndi**: What do you want people to take away based on your experience?

Answer: Working with truly local organizations is important to bring in impact. Also, Partnership should be maintained even beyond the project's lifespan.

Question to **Adrian Rivera**: What has changed since you published your report and how has that informed actions, practices and learning over the last year.

Answer: The report provides a whole vision for the agency to set development agendas. USAID is building on past efforts to create a model of locally led inclusive development. It is committed to providing at least 25% of its program funds directly to local partners by the end of fiscal year 2025 and at least 50% by the end of fiscal year 2030. We are also in the process of issuing USAID's first KM and organizational learning policies (still undergoing agency clearance). One of its three main goals is to invest in local knowledge to inform development practices.

Question to **Veronica Ngum Ndi**: What actions do you want to see international actors take next?

Answer: Strategies to build capacities for local women led organizations; effectively putting to practice localization; local actors owning opportunities; intentionally allocating opportunities for women and girls internationally; support women led organizations with a running cost; local organizations can be running the resource and data and can be the source for accurate information.

Question to **Veronica Supliguicha**: What actions do you want to see international actors take next?

Answer: It is important to construct joint proposals for projects with the local community and local organizations. It is necessary to build the capacity of local organizations, this will allow us to have autonomous local organizations. Feedback is important for us, there should be spaces where we can talk and debate in a horizontal way. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that when organizations work in such complex issues and contexts, they are faced with high-risk situations, it is necessary to take their mental and physical need into consideration.

Question to **Adrian**: Where do you think we need to go from here?

Answer: I would like to see more research like ours and implementing it into practice. Increasing direct fundings to local organizations worldwide. We want to be in partnership with the local communities.