

# Fast-tracking Decolonisation Dialogue Series



**DEVELOPMENT  
REIMAGINED**

## **DIALOGUE 1 COLLABORATION VS. COMPETITION- HOW CAN AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS GET THE MOST OUT OF LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS?**

Summary

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## Introduction to the Dialogue

Development Reimagined – an African led, women led development consultancy- continues to make calls for how international development can be reformed to ensure African development is African owned and African led. Previously, the organisation has engaged with reforms pertaining to the global health sector, making recommendations for the creation of a *Coalition of the Willing*. Building on the success of [previous dialogues](#) on how to action the transformation in international development, and responding to a growing stagnancy in transformation, Development Reimagined launched the *Fast-tracking Decolonisation* dialogue series.

To launch this new series, Development Reimagined hosted the first dialogue titled ‘**Collaboration vs. Competition – How can African organisations get the most out of local partnerships**’. This virtual dialogue was hosted on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2023 on Zoom. This conversation was premised on the idea of how to ensure localisation, a common theme in the international development space, is transformed to place emphasis on African led development initiatives. This being in response to the side-lining of local organisations for more established regional and country offices of larger international development partners in designing and facilitating context specific programmes.

This first dialogue explored how African led and/or African-owned organisations – from think tanks to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), private sector organisations (incl. consultancies) and even banks - can work together to build their strengths, avoid competition, best advance decolonisation in development, and ultimately fast track progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 on the African Continent.

In addition, the conversation focused on exploring what challenges exist for effective local partnerships and how to bypass the spirit of competition to ensure robust local partnerships for development.

This document provides a summary of the outcomes from the discussion.

## Objectives

The dialogue had three main objectives:

### **Objective 1: To have a significantly African led, African centered conversation.**

The invitees to the dialogue were African development experts working on the continent and outside the continent but on African issues.

### **Objective 2: Explore some of the pros and cons of local partnerships using case study examples.**

The dialogue was an opportunity for honest conversations on some of the positives and negatives of local partnerships. Therefore, the focus was on practical solutions that are informed by real examples.

### **Objective 3: Develop some key action items for organisations such as ours and the international development partners we work with.**

To ensure that this dialogue is impactful and contributes to practical next steps that can transform local partnerships, Development Reimagined ensured that the space facilitated these outcomes. This resulted in the sharing of practical solutions to build trust, foster collaboration, and move away from competition between local organisations. This included ways to engage with international development partners and African governments to support African organisations.

## Participants and Agenda

The dialogue was divided into three sessions. The first session included a keynote speech and panel discussion with African development practitioners working in African countries and for African centered organisations. The speakers shared practical examples, based on their experience, of when and if local partnerships worked for them and any key takeaways. This provided necessary context for the dialogue.

The second session included a Q&A with the speakers so that participants could contribute to the conversation by sharing their own key insights and ask any questions. The third session included a breakout room discussion whereby two groups discussed practical solutions and next steps. The dialogue concluded with calls to action.

Participants included African and international development practitioners working on African issues across different regions. Additionally, the invitation was also shared with funders and donors who invest in African development initiatives and specifically on localisation. A total of 86 people expressed interest through registering for the dialogue and 25 participated in the panel and breakout rooms.

To foster an environment of trust and honesty, Chatham House protocol was used and the participants in the dialogue were invited to join in their personal capacity, not representing their organisation or institution.

The full agenda can be found in Annex 1.

## Key messages from the dialogue

### **The challenge**

The localisation debate continues to be central to how international development agencies and donors engage with African organisations. However, the localisation agenda has been defined for African organisations and not necessarily by African organisations, something that the speakers and participants emphasised in their contributions. From their experience, this has resulted in some organisations being side-lined in the development space. While localisation is premised on the idea of ensuring the 'north' and 'south' divide is bridged, what emerged from the dialogue is that this divide is being recreated. Examples on this included, the nature and size of which African organisations are prioritised as ideal partnerships for international agencies and how regional or country branches of international development agencies work in silos and not in collaboration with local organisations. What is causing this divide?

According to the participants firstly, the differences in internal and external capacity of organisations has an effect on how they are perceived. Smaller, local organisations often do not have the internal capacity to manage certain types and sizes of projects. This also impacts the quality of their outputs and as a result, this leads to them being side-lined despite possibly having more knowledge on the context and stronger links to the recipients of the development initiatives. The implications of this is not being considered as viable partners to work with.

Secondly, speakers and participants agreed that the divide can be attributed to how African local organisations perceive their worth and price their services. The organisations with access to larger pools of resources are able to price their services accordingly and often funders and donors meet their price. For smaller local organisations however, they tend to under-price their services which often do not accommodate their staffing and capacity needs. How does this contribute to the divide? More

established organisations that are often the go to partners or recipients of funding tend to operate separate to the smaller organisations. This means there is no partnership that is based on their individual strengths and capacity and smaller organisations continue to be side-lined. Furthermore, the value perceptions have an implication in cases where the organisations do work together. The go to organisations tends to take a leading role and potentially do not view the smaller organisations as equal partners.

Based on this context, the speakers and participants outlined the following key messages.

### Key messages from speakers and participants

“If we build agency, we build strength and people know what their strength is”.

#### Key message 1: African organisations need to be confident in their offerings and expertise.

African experts especially women are under-pricing themselves and the root causes of this needs to be addressed. While the system seems favourable to lower bids from Global South experts, the underpinnings and continuation of this needs to be examined. In fact, what is also happening is that a value was placed on practitioners and this value was accepted. The location tends to have an impact on how services are being priced. The speakers and participants agreed that perception of-lower overhead costs for people located in LMICs results in the expectations of lower prices.

#### Key message 2: Creating strong ecosystems and building up networks can play a significant role in transforming how African organisations partner.

Consistent networking that is intentional should bring people together and result in the creation of ecosystems. Ecosystems can be created from a national and regional perspective, factoring in different contexts. This can also lead to shared understandings on localisation thus feeding into shared objectives and goals. Bringing people together intentionally should also include engaging with communities that receive development interventions. Local organisations have a mandate to ensure they do not replace communities and their voices when it comes to designing programmes that benefit them.

“Being able to articulate your strength as an organisation and what it is that you will or will not do, how you want to be engaged on an ongoing basis, is all important.”

#### Key message 3: Local organisations need to invest in their own capacities.

Investing in their capacity ensures that African organisations have more autonomy in how they negotiate partnerships with larger international development agencies. Doing this would require shared pools of knowledge exchange on financial management and capacity building. This can be shared within the different ecosystems. How does this benefit local organisations? They will have more backing to define what works within the development plans of international agencies and the power to revise and redesign programmes as key experts.

#### Key message 4: African governments have a role to play in supporting local partnerships.

African governments can acknowledge and value African knowledge and expertise by utilising them in their own work. Secondly, the African capacity to analyse and make recommendations needs to be fore fronted in how the governments work with the development sector. Ensuring there is accessibility

of development partnerships to local organisations would work to advance the importance of local organisations.

## **How to make partnerships/collaboration work**

Speakers and participants shared insights and examples on what makes local partnerships possible and suggestions on ways to make collaboration work. Nine areas are outlined below.

### **1. Having a collection of different organisations contributing their different strengths:**

Many local organisations have varied areas of expertise and strengths. For local partnerships to work, organisations must partner in a strategic way ensuring that they bring each their strengths to the table and leverage on each other. Where one does not have the expertise, their partner must contribute this to the partnership to ensure there are shared gains. For example, policy institutions can contribute their expertise on research and advocacy, while an NGO might bring their training and capacity building expertise to the partnership.

### **2. Having an organisation take the lead on the strategic and innovation capacity helps ensure the collaboration is a success:**

According to the participants, this must be done in a way that does not duplicate problematic relationships where the lead tells people what to do and deepens the divides discussed earlier. Whichever organisation leads or convenes the partnership must ensure it creates room for other organisations to bring their strengths to the table. This would look like including policy experts in the development of strategic interventions and placing a development consultancy on any specific delivery. The pressures of contractual requirements should not result in the micromanagement of partners as this replicates the unequal power balances that African organisations are subjected to in the international development space.

### **3. Frame how localisation is in your context and how to engage with it:**

Building on the point of creating networks and ecosystems, one way that local partnerships can work is when there is a shared vision on what localisation is to the organisations and how they envision this being applied in their context. Local partners must be on the same page to ensure they can disrupt and reframe development programmes initiated by international development agencies that seek to engage in their context.

### **4. Create goals and set an agenda:**

In addition to framing and contextualising what development means for local partners in a certain context, there should also be a creation of goals, an agenda, and a parameter of the agenda. This works to ensure that all organisations are working collectively, in different ways, to achieve the shared goals. This will likely have a positive impact on the outcomes and impact of development programmes at scale. This can therefore result in longevity and not adhoc initiatives with little impact.

### **5. Cultivate relationships at a national and regional level:**

Many organisations tend to be working on similar development issues nationally and regionally. Local partnerships and collaborative approaches to address those issues can happen when organisations network aggressively and build mutually beneficial relationships.

## **6. Cultivate relationships with communities:**

Building relationships with communities that local organisations are working in can ensure that development interventions are appropriate and have the intended impact. Additionally, recipients have a role in defining initiatives that suit their needs and meet their vision of what development is. If local organisations cultivate strong relationships with communities, they will be the preferred partners in African communities, and it will result in more engagement of international development agencies with local organisations.

## **7. Build trust in partnerships:**

For African organisations to get the most out of local partnerships, mutual trust needs to be established to ensure all parties are benefiting from the collaboration. Establishing trust requires bypassing the spirit of competition which often manifests in organisations not having mutually beneficial terms and conditions to their partnership. Competition is one of the reasons why African organisations shy away from local partnerships. The competition can be attributed to a perceived limitation in financial resources which then leads to an unwillingness to partner.

## **8. Being true to your offerings:**

According to the participants, one of the reasons that mistrust prevails between African organisations is because organisations often change their offerings to suit financing needs or gaps. Where organisations could submit joint bids in partnership with an organisation that brings specific expertise, they instead would apply for the funding offering the expertise they do not have experience in. If organisations are committed to their offerings and have good networks, they can pursue funding collectively or refer the opportunities to organisations with the expertise. This would build on trust between organisations and ensure there is no encroachment on partners. When co-writing each other into bids, it is imperative that as each organisation's expertise and comparative advantage is reflected significantly in the bids. This is how African organisations can contribute to backing their own expertise and the conditions that enable their success.

## **9. Honest contracting between local partners:**

Before engaging on partnerships, it is important to set foundations at the beginning of partnerships to ensure you are on the same page. This reinforces a key message from the dialogue conversation on setting goals, an agenda, and limitations. To enhance collaboration and build trust between organisations, honest conversations need to be had, during the bidding and proposal stages, around expectations, standards and what does not work well. Doing this in a bilateral or multilateral way between organisations ensures that the partnership is guided by agreed upon rules/limitations.

## **Outcomes of the dialogue**

The participants and speakers further discussed practical ways that African organisations and other partners, including government, can contribute to building the ecosystem. This was explored in two breakout rooms where participants and speakers discussed and answered the following questions: *What can African organisations do to build the ecosystem? What can development partners do to build the ecosystem?*

## Building the ecosystem: African organisations and African governments

Below are some of the ways that African organisations and African governments can contribute to building an ecosystem that ensures there is African led and African centered development.

- Define what the system will look like, agree on shared vision and goal and strategy. African organisations need to agree on a blueprint on localisation, how they contribute to it and how they can lead on it. In addition, African organisations should also set standards for quality of outputs that they adhere to and that international development organisations can also adhere to. Agenda 2063 can be a guiding tool as it is a strategic policy that can enhance collaboration. Developing a criterion for partnerships with international partners based on Agenda 2063 will contribute to shifting the agency of African organisations.
- Recognise the hierarchy and privilege that enables certain experts to demand their worth and others to not. Work to ensure the consultants who are often low-balled are seen and opportunities are redirected to them.
- Invest in capacity building especially around time and financial management and risk management. African organisations must drive quality and efficiency in a cost-effective way. This can be done through enhancing back-office capabilities.
- Collaborate on establishing African expert hubs across Europe, in the United States, Canada and Australia, where most funding is sourced. Staffing these hubs with African experts who have contextual knowledge and links to local organisation operating in Africa will enable shifts in perceptions around African knowledge and expertise. This is something government can contribute to.
- African organisations should develop white papers and guidelines on how existing networks can be enhanced and ensure they foster collaboration instead of competition. These networks can serve as potential 'unions' for African organisations creating standards and procedures that can support African organisations in pursuing development initiatives.
- African organisations can develop their financial resources by working closely with the private sector to support their corporate social responsibilities (CSR). African organisations have the expertise to ensure private sector financial investments have impact.
- Government should implement policies that favour African organisations and prioritise their representation especially in partnerships with international agencies. There is an opportunity for governments to play a significant role in advocating for where resources are directed and ensure that neo-colonial relationships where African development is externally defined, do not continue. African governments can back African organisations more.

## Building the ecosystem: Development partners

Below are some of the proposals that emerged on how development partners can contribute to building the ecosystem.

- A recognition of the significance and value of African expertise is necessary. For international development partners to develop this they need to engage with local organisations and see them as a first point of call when designing and implementing development projects



- Give contracts to African organisations for direct delivery or subcontracting. Regional organisations and African governments can support African defined and African led development by partnering with local organisations.
- Since multilateral development agencies have pledged to support locally led development, they should be accountable to and transparent with local organisations about what they are doing to deliver on the locally led agendas.
- Transformation in the bureaucracy around procurement of services and contracts is still required. Barriers to entry for smaller local organisations still exist and these needs to be dismantled.

## Proposed next steps for local organisations and for Development Reimagined.

The dialogue conversation was enriching and energetic. The speakers and participants contributed honestly and shared practical interventions that can be actioned to ensure local partnerships are developed and African organisations play a significant role in localisation. Some of the proposed next steps are as follows;

1. Building upon this first dialogue, Development Reimagined will host a follow up dialogue exploring how African governments can support local organisations in defining and driving the development agenda.
2. Based on the dialogues, Development Reimagined will be sharing a stakeholder mapping which will highlight key gaps and opportunities that could benefit from African organisations' collaboration.
3. Development Reimagined will continue to support participants within in its network and those who have shown interest in participating in these dialogues and advancing conversations on partnerships. This will also include continued exploration of potential new platforms, driven by African organisations, that share existing partnership links and match African organisations with each other. This will contribute to the creation of country and region-specific ecosystems.

## Annex 1: Agenda

### Collaboration vs. Competition: How can African organisations get the most from local partnerships?

Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023  
10:30 GMT/ 13:30 EAT/ 18:30 Beijing CST  
AGENDA

Time (UK)	Information
10:30	Welcome Remarks by Development Reimagined's CEO, Hannah Ryder.
10:35	Keynote address by <b>Mavis Owusu-Gvamfi</b> , Executive Vice President at the African Center for Economic Transformation
10:45	Speakers' Discussion with <b>Danny Gotto</b> (Founder and Executive Director, Innovations for Development), <b>Constance Agyeman</b> (Co-Founder, Partnership Bureau) and <b>Mavis Owusu-Gyamfi</b> (Vice President, African Center for Economic Transformation). Facilitated by Hannah Ryder.
11:30	Q&A session
11:50	Breakout Rooms Discussion (Group 1 facilitated by Ivory Kairo and Group 2 facilitated by Leslie Mudimu. Breakout room questions: <i>What can African organisations do to build the ecosystem? What can development partners do to build the ecosystem?</i>
12:15	Breakout room feedback & Open Discussion (Facilitated by Hannah Ryder)
12:30	Closing Remarks by Hannah Ryder and call to action.