

Local Voices, Global Impact: Power shifting for localisation

Localisation refers to the shifting of power, leadership and ownership of funding to the countries and communities where the funding is being implemented. It is an important part of how we achieve sustainable development and is particularly pertinent with increasing economic and political instability, escalating climate and health crises and worsening social inequality.

We have a responsibility as part of the international development community to ensure our global impact programmes go above and beyond getting funding to local leaders, entrepreneurs and communities. It is about shifting power to drive more inclusive, needs-driven, local-level responses to the global challenges we are facing.



Find out more

Collaboration is key to scaling impact enterprises. Learn more about the successful projects that TRANSFORM has delivered alongside other enterprises. [Read more stories here.](#)

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LOCALISING PROGRAMMES FOR MORE IMPACTFUL SOLUTIONS

TRANSFORM'S JOURNEY TO LOCALISE

Global impact accelerator, TRANSFORM, was founded in 2015 and is led from the UK by Unilever, the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and EY, and scales solutions coming from innovators across Africa and Asia.

In late 2023, we handed decision-making power over to our colleagues in region to run an open call in East Africa, identifying new enterprises to receive funding and business support from TRANSFORM. For the first time, the whole process was conducted locally, from sourcing the enterprises to selection. The British High Commission of Nairobi promoted the challenge through its collaboration with the Association of Countrywide Impact Hubs, a platform that brings together innovation hubs, tech startups, and ecosystem enablers across Africa. Meanwhile, Unilever and EY activated their network of employees to refer applicants. Then all three organisations came together to select a suite of new enterprises based on their local knowledge of the issues that need addressing with scalable solutions.

Since then, TRANSFORM has continued to build on this process. To date, it has run seven regionally led challenges, disbursing £2.5 million in grant funding to 25 local enterprises.



NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

This is just one example of a funding programme taking a more local approach and there are of course, many other ways to localise programmes and operations. TRANSFORM spoke with some of its allies and collaborators, ahead of its event at the 2025 Marmalade Festival in partnership with the Skoll World Forum, to find out their recommendations for shifting power and localising operations. While this is not an exhaustive look at the vast spectrum, and challenges, of localisation, it does offer some achievable steps for organisations, donors and funders to consider.

INSIGHTS FOR ORGANISATIONS RUNNING GLOBAL IMPACT PROGRAMMES: SUPPORTING LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING TO INCREASE IMPACT

1. IDENTIFY LOCAL CHANGEMAKERS AND EXPERTS

You cannot work with local experts and leaders without first identifying who they are and how you can collaborate.

Who are the local changemakers you can work with? Who will ask the right questions to ensure that any solution you are considering is right for the local context?

A way of doing this is ensuring your teams are made up of local people. Hire people on-the-ground, ensure their roles give them ownership to build on their own experience and influence the direction of the programme. Help them explore their own connections to identify other local changemakers. Too often local voices have been marginalised in the discussion about localisation; make sure they are present from the start.



2. COLLABORATE TO RECOGNISE CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

No single organisation or individual has all the necessary knowledge and perspectives.

Build partnerships with other organisations on the ground that complement the skills of your programme. Go into decision-making with clarity about what expertise you bring, and what expertise you need from others. What might potential on-the-ground partners know that you don't? Who is best placed to understand a particular challenge?

To ensure longevity and commitment from everyone in a partnership, all parties need to find the overlap in their existing strategies – the sweet spot that can really drive momentum. Where do your strategies already line up?



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3. SUPPORT A PIPELINE OF IDEAS AND LEADERS

Developing solutions to challenges doesn't happen overnight.

People with an entrepreneurial mindset and the brightest ideas to local challenges aren't always immediately ready with a scalable solution or a ready-to-go business model. Consider what support is in place to create a pipeline of scalable solutions before they exist. Invest in prospective leaders, from leadership training to business courses for young people. Where possible, look to identify local partners or organisations already running programmes.

Ask yourselves: Where are your strengths and how can they help others? Which causes can you support with your resources that mean you go beyond financial funding? Which organisations can you collaborate with that complement your offering?



4. BE FLEXIBLE AND READY TO ADAPT

Localisation is all about continuous adaption - it is not true localisation if it stops evolving and improving.

A once-and-for-all approach that overlooks changes within local communities is not true localisation. Intersectional methods are essential for examining gender, class, race, and power dynamics. Such approaches can prevent the reinforcement of unequal power relations and ensure that even the most marginal groups benefit. The design of impact programmes should be flexible and constantly evolving to meet changes in the local context.

5. LEARN FROM OTHER PROGRAMMES AND EXPERTS

Many global development organisations and programmes are shifting decision-making to address traditionally unbalanced power dynamics, which stifle innovation.

Rising to the challenge and rethinking existing systems can only be solved using a mix of different skills, experiences, perspectives and talents. TRANSFORM has learned from other programme leaders, and we hope that other programmes will learn from us. Learnings, and failures, should never go unshared, and insights should be passed on to fuel new solutions or help others in the wider system to leapfrog forwards.



TRANSFORM is an impact accelerator that unites corporates, donors, investors and academics to support visionary enterprises across Africa, Asia and beyond. Together, we test and scale new solutions that tackle environmental challenges, improve health and wellbeing, and build inclusive economies.

Combining grant funding, business insight and research, TRANSFORM is advancing the development of innovative business models to help solve global challenges. It was established in 2015 and is led by Unilever, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and EY.