



Future of Development Co-operation conference: how it can achieve genuine and meaningful engagement and be locally led

The UK Government has made locally led development a key priority in the up-coming Future of Development Co-operation conference, with the aim to “strengthen people and countries at local level”. This aligns with four shifts outlined by the Minister for Development as priorities for how the UK will work going forward, including a “move away from international intervention toward local provision, where local partners drive their own solutions.” The conference presents an opportunity to put this vision into action.

Government, civil society, philanthropic, private sector, and other stakeholders can work together more effectively on the conference through meaningful, inclusive, and deliberative engagement. Early involvement of civil society and other stakeholders from global majority countries in the design of the conference will help create better policies and programmes that have greater impact, as those with lived experience and knowledge are best placed to inform decisions. To truly be locally led, impacted communities need to drive, or at the least, co-design the work and by doing so, civil servants and ministers will have access to diverse expertise and new ideas. Peace Direct, the Movement for Community Le Development and CIVICUS’ [guide on how to design an international conference and convenings](#), is endorsed by over 2000 actors from global majority countries, and offers some useful insights into how communities should be central to the design of events on locally led development with the spirit of convening ‘nothing about us, without us’.

Bond’s resource, [This is the Work](#) is also a useful, interactive step-by-step guide to help policy and advocacy teams embed a different approach to working and address the common barriers to change. The three co-created resources demonstrate that strategic planning must incorporate balanced perspectives from global majority countries, diaspora communities, and people with relevant lived experience. This includes creating more room in project timelines to allow for engaging diverse voices.

The conference provides an opportunity for the UK government to truly foster equitable partnerships with Global Majority countries and civil society by:

Shared decision making and design of the conference

- Bring civil society into the decision-making process as early as possible and allow civil society to shape the direction of the engagement. This can create buy-in and a shared sense of ownership. It is crucial to consider who is in the room and who is not. If you can’t invite all the relevant stakeholders, be open and transparent about the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Seek advice from sector networks about who might be well placed to contribute.
- Agree the purpose and scope of the engagement: Decide together what the conference can and cannot influence, to avoid extractive consultation. Discuss what you hope to achieve through the engagement and agree objectives.
- Co-create a well-structured process that encourages consistency: Develop a clear structure and timetable so participants know what is expected and can dedicate the necessary time and resources to ensure it is a success.
- Consult with global majority countries and civil society in the design of the conference, ensuring there is a diverse range of speakers and participants in terms of nationality, race, gender, age and disability.
- Design sessions to avoid power imbalances e.g. not placing small CSOs on panels dominated by large CSOs or funders.

- Be open and accountable, while recognising the need for confidentiality: Engagement should be as open and transparent as possible, but there may be a need to balance openness with the need for confidentiality.

Provide equitable access

- Make allowances so everyone can participate on equal terms. Provide plenty of notice of invites for global majority representation due to visas, accommodation and flights. You may also wish to pay honorariums or cover expenses. Think about making the conference hybrid so global majority actors have access, choose a time zone and language that is inclusive and provide interpretation and captioning if needed.
- Consider language/interpreters otherwise only those that speak English will be involved.
- Provide people with plenty of notice and sufficient time to respond: Diarise meetings as soon as possible and agree the agenda well in advance to ensure the right people are in the room. Ensuring adequate time to respond to documents and consultations makes it easier to include a range of perspectives and improves the quality of responses.
- Participation should promote the use of equitable language in consultations and engagements should not include the use of problematic terms that reinforce racial and colonial power dynamics.

Feedback loops and accountability

- Be open to feedback and set out in advance the specific outcomes the conference will deliver and the process by which Global Majority and civil society input will inform policy, with named owners and timelines.

What more the UK government can do

- Implement the recommendations of the **WACSI-led report** for FCDO on equitable partnerships.
- Prioritise developing the local leadership strategy as a cross-department piece of work, in a meaningful and inclusive manner that centres people from the global majority and the diaspora.
- Design funding so that it supports locally led development. Give unrestricted flexible funding and ringfence at least 25% funding to go directly to LMICs and diaspora communities.
- Embrace risk as a necessary element of social change: Trust the efforts that are being made by communities and embrace failure – you will not learn “what works” without it. Promote a trust-based approach to funding that is adaptable and review risk appetite regularly.
- Have difficult conversations that focus on redressing power imbalances: Facilitate sector-wide discussions to achieve an equitable power balance and commit to being an advocate and ally as a funder to build trust with civil society and support locally led development.
- Promote a justice-led approach to development: take a holistic approach to development looking at global challenges like poverty, inequality and the climate crisis. A justice-led approach recognises that the current system of global development isn't working for everyone and therefore that new models and systems need to be imagined, created and tested.

UK NGOs moving forward on locally led

Change has already started. Some INGOs within the sector have committed publicly to change through initiatives like the **Grand Bargain, Pledge for Change, CREED** and **Charter for Change** amongst others. These are important initiatives to sign up to and signal a commitment to transforming, but there is still much more work to do to encourage more leaders to sign up to these and similar commitments, and more importantly to help organisations deliver on them through meaningful action.

In 2022, Bond released a **guide** aimed at helping organisations to become locally led. In 2025, Bond **published a collection of case studies** that highlight the efforts some UK-based INGOs have made to successfully move the project of localisation forward. This includes examples of INGOs such as **Mango Tree** which shifted its' governance structure to increase their local offices' potential to independently raise funds in the future; **Link Education** is using systems-change thinking to guide organisational change by establishing a global decision-making body with international representation across the organisation, this ensures all country offices have an equal voice in the organisation's future direction. **Avert** co-creating locally owned, internationally recognised brands and choosing to close the UK charity while boosting African partner organisations who have since developed their own HIV brands and campaigns. **HelpAge International** returning to the organisation's origins as a decentralised global network by leveraging the power of both the local and global within its international coalition to address core issues facing older people. By decentralising decision making, national HelpAge organisation now determine what suits their local contexts and apply directly to donors for funding.

INGOs are actively considering what their role will be in the future, with organisations such as **Peace Direct** identifying **nine roles that intermediaries can play** and the **Reimagining INGOs (RINGO)** project have worked up prototypes that are using as they seek to transform INGOs. Many organisations are focusing in on participatory grant making as an inclusive way to shift power to ensure that decision-making power about funding sits with the groups it aims to serve. **ADD International** and **Transform Trade** are both trailing this approach. ADD found that their **Disability Justice Fund for Women** "enabled the voices of women with disabilities to lead change, making the funding process more just, relevant and impactful" and Transform Trade found that it increased farming productivity with 67% of farmers who collectively bought better quality seeds had a 225% average increase in productivity.

Christian Aid have been sharing their organisational transition and leadership journey, highlighting changes to recruitment and bias training, staff engagement, governance, and accountability and how they continue to sustain anti-racist practices in the current climate. As part of their operational transformation, they moved from a model based on country offices delivering programmes to one based on more equitable partnerships with national organisations.

Start Network has transformed its network and approach to prioritise a locally led humanitarian system that is accountable to people affected by and at risk of crises. **Start Fund** is reducing barriers for local and national NGOs to join Start Fund committees, including live interpretation in multiple languages as well as reviewing application and reporting requirements to better suit local partners. In 2023 the Start Network dispersed over £4.7 million directly to organisations in Global Majority countries.

Organisations including **Womankind Worldwide, Amref Health Africa UK** and **Results UK** have made public their focus on decolonisation, anti-racism and anti-oppression why it is important to them as a feminist organisation, a health organisation and a campaign organisation.