

questions: 1) Which knowledge is valid? 2) Who holds the resources? 3) How do we avoid extractive practices when working with local knowledge? and, 4) How do we address biases?

First, local knowledge is often placed in opposition to Western, scientific knowledge and often deemed an inferior form of knowledge. Its validity is discounted because of its anecdotal and subjective nature. Second, there is a power imbalance between external and local organizations because the former hold the majority of funding and resources; this feeds a dynamic in which external development organizations have greater power to define local realities than local communities. The relationship between external and local organizations is framed by funding, and development interventions are shaped by funding requirements. Third, extractive practices preserve the power imbalance between external organizations and local communities and strip local communities of their agency and control over their own experiences and knowledge. Finally, development practitioners must be aware of and actively address their own internal biases. On an organizational level, diverse teams and approaches are essential to mitigating biases, which in turn is essential to the openness required to achieve shared understanding of local realities and true partnership in pursuing local priorities.

In terms of power dynamics within local communities, organizations underlined the importance of recognizing the power structures and social arrangements embedded within communities and ensuring local knowledge is not used to reinforce unequal power dynamics at the local level. Additionally, organizations highlighted the need for interventions to approach issues with an intersectional lens.

CHALLENGES

Interviewees identified three key challenges in integrating local knowledge within development practices: 1) establishing the validity of local knowledge in development, 2) balancing community priorities with those of external organizations, and 3) navigating power dynamics and biases.

First, our interviews and comprehensive literature review indicated there is a common assumption that the only valid knowledge is “scientific” evidence, a narrative which implies that knowledge derived from communities’ shared and longstanding experience is unimportant. Many noted this is a result of colonial dynamics and negatively affects the holders of local knowledge. Second, integrating local ownership throughout development projects is a difficult, costly, and time-consuming process. However, as long as donors place an undue premium on efficiency, obstacles will arise between the goal of local knowledge and ownership and its actual implementation. Third, in order to address power dynamics between donor organizations and local communities, donors must ask uncomfortable questions to ensure intentions are genuine instead of tokenistic. Moreover, donors also must be cognizant of the power dynamics/social hierarchies that exist within local communities. Ensuring all people are represented in the knowledge gathered, instead of just the loudest voices in a community, is one of the most concrete things organizations can do to address local power dynamics.

METHODS

Prior to reaching out to organizations, the team developed a set of research questions to serve as a framework for collecting and synthesizing insights and lessons learned from interviewees. Through an open call for interviewees on the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community of practice, as well as through outreach to team members' professional networks, the team identified representatives from 25 development organizations to interview and also requested materials to review, many of which are linked in this report. The interview process was guided by a questionnaire structured around the research questions with room for open-ended conversations. The findings are shared in this report and were also shared in a [webinar](#) recorded on May 17, 2022.

FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT

The future of development should include intentional integration of local knowledge and community members' input into development programming. To this end, many organizations noted that donors can make a concerted effort to modify their current practices to create an environment that values and utilizes local knowledge. Donors can also examine the power dynamics inherent in their development practices and funding relationships and work to unlearn colonial legacies. Throughout this report, it is apparent from our conversations that local knowledge is not a silver bullet to reforming international development, but is an essential component for organizations and communities to achieve more successful, sustainable, and equitable development outcomes.

Similarly, The Global Fund for Children supports communities to conduct self-assessments to discover their own goals rather than impose externally developed projects on them. This practice recognizes that local actors are best positioned to understand community problems. By respecting local perspectives, organizations can ensure communities are invested in a project from the beginning. World Vision also noted that if local participation and respect for local knowledge is not built into the design phase, it is almost impossible to have meaningful local engagement later on. If a project is based on foreign knowledge systems, it may not seem relevant to community members and may conflict with their local practices. Furthermore, World Vision noted that community participation in monitoring and evaluation is unhelpful if the project is not addressing a real community need in the first place. Establishing local engagement from the outset of a project sets a precedent of participation throughout the process.

While there was widespread agreement that a participatory process that respects local knowledge is necessary, some organizations went further by emphasizing the need for a broader power shift away from development organizations and toward communities. Salanga, ActionAid, and Network for Empowered Aid Response all emphasized that a true community-led approach requires examining who has power over key decisions in programming and evaluation. These organizations underscored that merely respecting local knowledge is not enough; only when local actors drive the agenda, control resources, and hold decision-making power is the program truly community-led. TetraTech noted that when these elements are in place, people's lives are significantly improved. Communities realize their knowledge is valuable and they have the ability to solve their own problems long after a project ends.

Just as there were differences in the extent of community engagement considered necessary for success, organizations shared many different approaches to formalizing guidelines for local participation and the use of local knowledge. Biovision Africa Trust, MCLD, and Salanga all noted the importance of flexibility in community engagement requirements. They mentioned that while particular methodologies may work in one area, they may not work in other areas. Knowledge systems and cultural contexts vary widely, necessitating different approaches. Thus, practitioners should adapt to local needs rather than rigidly follow a set of pre-determined metrics. IFRC shared a similar sentiment, stating they do not have fixed rules or methodologies but instead use best practices and general guidance. According to IFRC, this approach is more participatory and accounts for different contexts.

FHI 360 has rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure communities are involved throughout a project, but like the aforementioned organizations, they recognize the importance of being able to incorporate feedback and adapt as new circumstances arise. FHI 360 found that oftentimes conversations with local actors lead to new ideas and approaches that could not have been foreseen in the existing evaluation system; therefore, processes should be flexible enough to account for these changes.

ActionAid also has robust organizational guidelines regarding community participation detailed in its [Accountability, Learning, and Planning System \(ALPS\) document](#). This document outlines how units should conduct annual “participatory review and reflection processes.” Additionally, the ALPS helps ActionAid to ensure, “Planning is participatory and puts analysis of power relations and a commitment to addressing rights—particularly women’s rights—at the heart of all our processes.” ActionAid

knowledge should not be applied the same way in every instance; these and other organizations shared scientific knowledge so that local communities could utilize the new information in ways that made sense for their particular needs.

Organizations addressing disaster and climate change also reported substantial success in integrating local knowledge with other knowledge forms. The Centre of Resilient Development (CoRD) helps communities construct resilient buildings to withstand natural disasters. They begin every project by assessing the local community's current practices. Many communities have already adapted their building strategies based on the natural disasters in their region and offer a valuable context-specific approach. However, because climate change shifts conditions so rapidly, sometimes traditional practices do not work as well as they did in the past. CoRD compares current interventions with empirical best practices and finds a way to combine both approaches to create safer and more resilient buildings based on current climate change conditions. Because CoRD starts with existing local knowledge and augments it with scientific knowledge, local actors are more likely to accept CoRD's proposed solutions because they are not entirely new interventions but rather enhance the solutions communities are already implementing.

Local knowledge and scientific knowledge are not in opposition; rather, [the two knowledge forms often overlap](#). Furthermore, knowledge is not a fixed entity, and both knowledge forms change as they interact with each other and as community needs arise. Organizations recognize that neither local knowledge nor scientific knowledge is a silver bullet, but both can be used together to produce better outcomes.

OUTCOMES

Overall, organizations resoundingly agreed that incorporating local knowledge has led to more effective and successful programs. Valuing local knowledge not only strengthens relationships and trust between organizations and local stakeholders, but also ensures programs are genuinely addressing community priorities. Importantly, placing local knowledge at the core of an organization's programming means it informs every component of the project in some way. Local knowledge is valued and synthesized with other forms of knowledge, and placing it at the center ensures that the local community is engaged at every step of the process. As a result, community members develop ownership over the project and results, which improves project sustainability.

LOCALLY GENERATED SOLUTIONS IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF SERVICES

Local knowledge leads to more effective and successful programs because thoroughly understanding the local context can improve access to services and develop solutions that are more adaptive to local needs. For example, FHI 360's HIV-focused programming in Nepal was struggling to reach transgender individuals and provide them with HIV treatment. To address this shortcoming, FHI 360 conversed with local stakeholders and learned about the seasonal migration patterns of Nepalese transgender communities. Many transgender individuals migrate from Nepal to India during certain seasons, and FHI

community issues. When local knowledge is not used to develop program priorities, organizations have to tailor their programs to please donors to continue to receive funding. While donor and community priorities can align at times, they often also diverge so that initiatives are not necessarily serving the best interests of the community. Additionally, many organizations mentioned how donors' focus on specific targets and goals often prevent them from carrying out important "process" programs, such as landscape analyses, that are a precondition for and integral to developing future initiatives. Overall, this imbalanced relationship dynamic prevents local knowledge from being leveraged to inform programs and raises questions on who is really in control of development initiatives and who a project is truly serving.

As a Global North donor with a large amount of available funding, CARE is questioning its role in localization and mentioned how locally-led development is not really locally led until local actors hold the funding. Many other donors in addition to CARE are grappling with how much autonomy and resources they are willing to relinquish so that local stakeholders can set the priorities and lead change in their communities. Organizations understand the current aid structure flows from top to bottom. At the top, donors can choose whether to gatekeep knowledge, money, resources, and power or to share and eventually shift power to their partners on the ground.

C. EXTRACTIVE PRACTICES

While organizations are shifting to valuing local knowledge and incorporating it into their practices, they often face an ethical dilemma related to the extractive nature of obtaining knowledge from communities.

Extracting local knowledge not only preserves the power imbalance between organizations and local communities, but also strips local communities of their agency and control over their own experiences and knowledge. One example of extractive practices is when universities publish data gathered from local communities and claim intellectual property rights. Not only does this financially benefit the universities, but it also strips the community's control and ownership over its own data and knowledge. Furthermore, the publications containing the local knowledge are often placed behind paywalls where the community cannot access it. These types of practices erode the relationships between development practitioners and local communities as they violate the trust established to respect the community's autonomy and their ownership over their own knowledge and, as a result, lead to ineffective outcomes for development projects.

Furthermore, extractive practices are an extension of imperialism and colonialism. They are processes of dispossession, and the local knowledge gained ultimately serves the organization, often at the expense of the local community. They reinforce a system where communities are dependent on organizations who hold and gatekeep power and resources. Local knowledge should serve the community; as Rituu Nanda, formerly of The Constellation, said, "Knowledge is not for us, it is for the communities." Finally, organizations stress that learning goes both ways and oftentimes the best solutions are the product of integrating local knowledge with other forms of knowledge.

uncertain. While this hesitancy is understandable, many organizations emphasize that a locally led approach focused on social change rather than discrete projects is more [cost-effective, sustainable, and leads to better results](#), even if it requires a bit more risk initially on the part of the donor.

Additionally, donors could [examine the power dynamics](#) inherent in their funding relationships with implementing organizations and local populations. Aid funding is controlled by a few powerful actors, and donors can unintentionally act as gatekeepers that inhibit local stakeholders from accessing knowledge or proposing novel solutions. Donors can work to decentralize this power and divert greater funding to local communities. Only when communities are in control of financial resources will development truly be locally led and will the benefits of local knowledge be fully realized. More immediately, donors can take steps to amplify local voices from outside the West. High-level meetings usually exclude local actors, but donors can use their privileged platform to hear from the communities they seek to help and amplify new voices.

Changing donor practices will be difficult and will require a different measure of success. Quantitative metrics based on Western frameworks may not be able to capture the social change that is possible when communities are empowered to find their own solutions based on their local knowledge. The development community, with donors leading the change, will need to redefine how they measure success and recognize that a change in attitude, a new community practice, or the empowerment of a new local leader is harder to measure than the number of people attending a workshop, but the results may be far more valuable and sustainable. Donors should consider the importance of qualitative results and make funding decisions based on a more nuanced understanding of the potential impact.

Although changing ingrained donor practices will take time and resources, agencies must dedicate themselves to [unlearning colonial legacies](#) that regard foreign systems of knowledge as “backward.” Until local knowledge systems are internalized as not only valid, but indeed crucial to the effectiveness of development policy, donors will continue to perpetuate an outdated and oppressive system of knowledge collection.

As [Christoph Antweiler argues](#), local knowledge is important to the future of development but it is not a silver bullet. Just as with a scientific approach, there are drawbacks that must be considered and nuanced execution is required. Nevertheless, it was evident from our conversations and literature review that integrating local knowledge into development practices and prioritizing community engagement will lead to more successful and sustainable outcomes.

APPENDIX

LEARNING AGENDA

Guided by USAID's aim to adapt its development assistance to understand how local knowledge is used in development practice, the USAID KMOL function developed a learning agenda to collect information and knowledge from all participating organizations. The learning agenda provided a framework for knowledge synthesis, drawing on insights and lessons learned that can be applicable to the needs of a wide range of stakeholders. The agenda focused on the following key questions:

- Defining Local Knowledge:
 - Is there a taxonomy for all the types—and dimensions—of Local Knowledge (i.e., is there something that exists that is relatively complete)?
 - How are other development organizations defining Local Knowledge? Are there sector-specific definitions (e.g., public health, community forestry, etc.)? Is there any consensus within the development field on definitions of Local Knowledge?
 - What are the implications of these definitions for development practice?
 - How do local communities feel about defining local knowledge?

- Local Knowledge in Practice:
 - How do other organizations approach and use Local Knowledge? (How do they define it, identify/find it, collect it, use it, and when/why do they decide to use Local Knowledge)?
 - Are there any best practices in the wider development community for using Local Knowledge? Any consensus on what to avoid doing?
 - What have been the experiences of other development organizations? (What lessons have been learned on, for example, pitfalls to avoid, or necessary ingredients?)
 - What challenges have organizations encountered when using Local Knowledge?

ORGANIZATIONAL OUTREACH

Through an open call for interviewees on the KM4Dev community of practice, as well as through outreach via team members' professional networks, the team identified representatives from 25 development organizations to interview virtually and also reviewed materials they shared, many of which are linked in this report. The research team interviewed participating organizations and then reviewed the materials they shared.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interview process was guided by a questionnaire seeking to address the major areas of interest as defined by the learning agenda and thematic areas of interest. The interviews took the form of discussions of open-ended questions, which allowed for organizations to provide their interpretations of the processes the KMOL function sought to identify. Therefore, the questionnaire below was utilized only to ensure the objectives were addressed in some capacity.

APPENDIX I: SAMPLE OF QUESTIONNAIRE EMPLOYED IN THIS ACTIVITY

Defining Local Knowledge

- I. How does [your organization] define Local Knowledge, or its equivalent (we recognize that you may call it something different.) Is there an organization-wide definition?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. What is it? How does it overlap with more “standard” knowledge forms, and how is it distinct?
 - ii. How was this definition reached?
 - iii. What role did local knowledge holders play in the process of creating your organization’s definition?
 - iv. Is this definition actually used in practice? / Are there different definitions used in the field vs. the “official” definition?
 - v. Does the definition capture different types of local knowledge? –how would you characterize them?
 - b. If no,
 - i. Is there a reason there is not a definition?
 - ii. Does your organization/office/department/team use an agreed-upon definition?
 - iii. Are there sector-specific definitions that you use? / Do those definitions capture different types of local knowledge?
2. How does [your organization] identify Local Knowledge stakeholders? How do you engage local knowledge holders?
 - a. Are there challenges in identifying what is Local Knowledge and what isn’t?
 - b. How do you ensure Local Knowledge is used ethically?

WEBINAR

To support knowledge-sharing efforts beyond this report, the USAID KMOL function hosted a virtual webinar that featured three of the individuals interviewed for this report as panelists. The webinar provided a space for KMOL practitioners and international development professionals to share and exchange information, practices, and knowledge around local knowledge in development. The team facilitated a panel discussion around the themes and challenges documented in this report and addressed questions and comments from the audience. Overall, the webinar aimed to identify best practices and explore future steps, such as how to build trust with local stakeholders and how donors can better facilitate the use of local knowledge in development. A link to the webinar recording is [here](#).

TABLE 1: LIST OF RESOURCES FROM DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Organization	Links	Descriptions
Solidaridad	Sustainable Livestock Management Improves Livelihoods and Landscapes in Zambia	This article discusses how the landscape in Mazabuka District in Zambia has deteriorated due to poor livestock management practices. The Nambola Livestock projects help to address this problem through teaching farmers holistic management practices.
CARE International	Shifting Power to Local Actors: Why COVID-19 Responses Can't Ignore Gender-based Violence	In a 2021 panel, women throughout Asia discussed the importance of locally led action in addressing gender-based violence, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article highlights the speakers' insights into this issue.
	Shifting Power to Local Actors: Resourcing Local Action	This article discusses the role of money in locally led action and provides insight into how organizations can transform imbalanced power relations.
	In Practice: Supporting Social Movements	In this article, CARE discusses the importance of supporting social movements through supportive and productive relationships.
UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women	SHINE	SHINE is an online hub for global knowledge exchange on ending violence against women and girls. SHINE aims to connect a range of partners and changemakers to co-create, collaborate, and amplify knowledge and learning together to end violence against women and girls.
	Evaluation Library	This learning hub is a database of evaluation reports related to the Trust Fund's work. Reports are searchable based on topic, region, and publisher.

Organization	Links	Descriptions
International Centre for Climate Change and Development	Adapting to Climate Change: Lessons from Bangladesh	This article responds to the recent climate change report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It offers successful examples of how Bangladesh has adapted to climate change, and calls on the world to do so as well.
	Locally Led Adaptation: We Can Lead the World	This article shares four main lessons from Bangladesh’s experience as global leader in locally led adaptations to climate change. These lessons include how to develop a national adaptation plan with a whole-of-society approach; making top-down national plans while also investing in bottom-up inputs from vulnerable communities, including knowledge partners; and designing adaptation investment plans for long-term implementation.
	Principles for Locally Led Adaptation	This report presents eight principles for locally led adaptation to help guide stakeholders through the challenging route of increasing the business-unusual financing, programming, and policy support needed to build resilient and regenerative societies, economies, and ecosystems.
	Past, Present, and Future of Locally Led Adaptation	This article presents a brief history of efforts regarding locally led adaptation to climate change.
World Vision	Good Practices for Putting WV’s Development Programmes into Action	This document is a compilation of the good practices from World Vision program teams’ work to find new and effective ways of improving child well-being in development programmes. These good practices have emerged from the innovations of teams at the local level.
	World Vision’s Approach to Doing Development Differently and What We Have Learned So Far	This paper shares World Vision’s experiences in applying the principles of the Doing Development Differently Manifesto, providing many concrete case studies and examples from World Vision projects all over the world.
ActionAid	ALPS Framework	ALPS is a framework that sets out the key accountability requirements, guidelines, and processes in ActionAid International, not only in terms of organizational processes for planning, monitoring, strategy formulation, learning, reviews, and audit but also for personal attitudes and behaviors.

Organization	Links	Descriptions
	Immersion in ActionAid	<p>This article focuses on a multi-country initiative, Immersion Program, which aims to bring together development decision-makers (donors, government officials, NGO staff, academics etc.) to learn directly from poor people. ActionAid sees Immersion as one way to influence decision-makers in an environment where the rich and powerful are ever more divorced from the daily realities of the poor.</p>
	Feminist Research Guidelines	<p>This guidance note aims to support ActionAid staff and partners and those interested in how ActionAid does, or commissions, feminist research. It accompanies the ActionAid Research Signature and Strategy and is a set of ideas for conducting feminist research that is rooted in ActionAid's feminist principles and mission and supports ActionAid's change objectives.</p>
	Reflection-Action Tools and Techniques	<p>Reflection-Action is an effort to capture and harmonize the different approaches to transformative practice, including in programming and research, that use participatory tools and processes to challenge and shift power. It contains a range of participatory tools and techniques that can help create an open, democratic environment in which everyone is able to contribute.</p>
	Bargaining for better: Bringing a feminist lens to the Grand Bargain 2.0	<p>Drawing on relevant literature on the Grand Bargain and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls commitments to date, as well as qualitative survey data with ActionAid's WRO and WLO partners and ActionAid staff in 10 countries, this policy brief provides key recommendations for shaping and implementing the Grand Bargain 2.0 so that it is more effective for women and girls.</p>
	Action for Global Justice in Practice: ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach	<p>This resource book is designed to be relevant for all ActionAid staff and partners. It aims to help staff and partners design, implement, and monitor local, national, and international rights programs that are aligned with their collectively agreed strategy, a human-rights based approach.</p>
	Powercube for Power Analyses	<p>Powercube is a resource for understanding power relations in efforts to bring about social change. Powercube.net contains practical and conceptual materials to help people think about how to respond to power relations within organizations and in wider social and political spaces.</p>

Organization	Links	Descriptions
Global Fund for Children	SALT Approach	This resource describes the methodology used by the Global Fund for Children to facilitate community ownership through supporting, appreciating, learning, and transferring.
	No More Consultants: We Know More Than We Think	This book describes how the use of consultants can be reduced or redirected to create a more sustainable and valuable impact.
IFRC	Community Knowledge and Awareness Raising	This portal includes resources describing how the IFRC helps communities reduce disaster risk and prepare for emergencies.
	Climate-smart Disaster Risk Reduction Programming Resources	This portal leads to resources and guidance created by the IFRC to help communities reduce climate-related risk.
	Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment	The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment helps analyze the risks communities face and identify ways they can reduce this risk. This assessment is a participatory process that helps communities become more resilient.
	Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness	This resource includes information about how the IFRC addresses epidemics and pandemics and its strategies for preventing, detecting, and responding to outbreaks.
	Community Health	This portal includes information about the IFRC's community health strategy and the actions it is taking to prevent disease and reduce suffering.
	Community Engagement and Accountability	This resource outlines how the IFRC recognizes and values community members as equal partners.