Challenges in Localization and the Role of Trust

A case study of local organizations in Ghana and Kenya and their perceptions of the challenges and the influence of trust in collaborating with international organizations

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Table of contents

Abstract

This thesis explores the challenges that local humanitarian organizations in Ghana and Kenya experience in the localization process, as well as how their perceived trust towards international organizations influences the nature of their collaboration. The research adopts a qualitative methodology with a social constructivist approach, aiming to capture perspectives and meaning-making processes of local actors. Empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three local organizations based in Ghana and Kenya. The analysis draws on the empirical material from the interviews, existing literature, and the theoretical framework, which include Mayer, Davis and Schoorman's *Model of Trust* and Moyo's critique of aid dependency in *Dead Aid*.

The findings reveal that local organizations face several challenges in the localization agenda, including financial dependency on international donors, limited influence in decision-making processes, and power imbalances that reinforce externally driven priorities. While the collaboration with international organizations offers access to funding, capacity-building and networks, it also exposes local organizations to vulnerability and marginalization. However, trust emerged as a force that can mitigate the perception of these challenges.

The study concludes that trust plays a role in shaping the quality of the collaboration between international and local organizations. When the trust is nurtured through transparent communication, cultural engagement, and long-term partnership, it can enhance inclusivity and sustainability. However, when trust is shallow or one-sided, it risks perpetuating the very dependencies that localization seeks to overcome. Ultimately, the research highlights that while local organizations face challenges in localization processes, these may be perceived as less significant when trust is strong. In such cases, trust can help reshape relationships and support more meaningful and equitable collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

This section introduces the background and relevance of the study, discusses key debates in localization, highlights a potential research gap related to trust between local and international actors, and presents the study's problem formulation, motivation, and overall structure.

1. Introduction

This section introduces the overall research topic and its relevance, outlining the key themes and debates that frame the study. It provides an overview of localization in humanitarian action, discussing its aims, challenges, and significance in shifting power and decision-making to local actors. The section also presents areas that have been extensively studied and identifies aspects that remain underexplored. This leads to the problem formulation, which defines the study's central focus. Additionally, the section outlines the motivation behind the research and introduces the thesis structure, providing a roadmap for the study.

Over the past decades, the world has become increasingly interconnected. Borders have grown more open – not only in terms of trade and communication, but also in how political decisions, economic shifts, and humanitarian needs flow across regions. Globalization has tied countries closer together, creating systems of mutual dependence where the actions of one state can have consequences far beyond its own borders. This growing interdependence means that no country acts in isolation. Countries rely on one another not just for economic growth, but also for security, health systems, and humanitarian responses. As global linkages have deepened, so have the effects of foreign policy decisions. When major donor countries redirect or withdraw aid, the impact is felt across continents (Danmarks Statistik, n.d.).

One recent example is the United States' decision to freeze foreign assistance through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which has long played a key role in global humanitarian and development efforts. The suspension has already disrupted health services, education programs, and crisis responses in several regions, illustrating how aid decisions in one country can have far-reaching effects. For example, in Ethiopia, which was previously the largest recipient of support of USAID in sub-Saharan Africa, the impact has been particularly severe. As reported by The Guardian, the freeze has halted critical health programs and created life-threatening conditions, destabilizing essential services for vulnerable populations (Harter, 2025).

Additionally, The New York Times reported that the freeze created urgent and life-threatening conditions. The temporary suspension of financial support led to immediate disruptions in HIV care across several countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Clinics in Malawi, Uganda, and Kenya were forced to turn patients away, cancel treatments, and lay off staff due to stalled funding and missing medical supplies (Konyndyk, 2025). This underscores how a single political decision can send shockwaves far beyond national borders.

1.1 Research field

In this global landscape, there is a growing recognition among humanitarian actors of the importance of localization. Localization has emerged as a fundamental concept in humanitarian actions, emphasizing the transfer of power, resources, and decision-making to local actors. The concept of localization is rooted in the recognition that those closest to humanitarian crises – local organizations, national non-governmental organizations (NNGOs), and community-based groups – are often best positioned to respond effectively. Unlike large-scale international interventions, which may struggle with cultural nuances, logistical barriers, and long-term sustainability, localized responses can ensure aid is delivered in a manner that is both contextually relevant and community-driven. Localization thus aims to challenge the historical dominance of international actors in humanitarian efforts by shifting leadership and control to those with a deep understanding of local contexts (Humanitarian Action, 2023).

The push for localization gained significant momentum following the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, where international donors and aid agencies pledged to allocate more direct funding to local actors, strengthen their capacities, and promote inclusive decision-making processes. This commitment was solidified in the Grand Bargain agreement, which set a target for 25% of global humanitarian funding to be channeled directly to local and national actors (OCHA, n.d.).

One of the main arguments in favor of localization is that it enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian aid. When aid is delivered by organizations embedded within affected communities, it is more likely to be trusted, culturally appropriate, and aligned with local priorities. Moreover, localized responses can strengthen community resilience by investing in local institutions and capacities rather than creating dependency on external actors (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, n.d.).

Despite the widespread recognition of these benefits, the actual implementation of localization often falls short. While international organizations acknowledge the need to transfer power, resources, and decision-making to local actors, this is not always what happens in practice. Structural power imbalances between the Global North and the Global South raise concerns about whether localization efforts can genuinely create equal partnerships. Many local organizations still face significant barriers in accessing direct funding, influencing strategic decisions, and gaining full autonomy in humanitarian efforts. As a result, localization, while widely supported in principle, remains difficult to achieve in practice (Khoury & Scott, 2024).

Furthermore, traditional development models remain top-down, with international organizations setting priorities and controlling resources, often overlooking the specific needs of local communities. One obstacle is the lack of trust, as governments, private sector actors, and civil society organizations often struggle with mutual skepticism. Breaking down these divisions is essential for fostering effective collaboration. Additionally, political dynamics further complicate localization. Rising nationalism has led some donor countries to cut foreign aid, potentially disrupting progress if local institutions are not yet prepared to take full ownership. Successful localization requires more than financial investment; it demands a shift in mindset, prioritizing trust, cultural understanding, and adaptive approaches to change. By fostering equitable partnerships and supporting local leadership, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) can help ensure localization becomes a sustainable reality rather than a distant goal (Gaye, 2019).

Scholars have extensively examined localization from various perspectives, including funding mechanisms, power relations, and operational challenges. Some scholars emphasize that INGOs often act as intermediaries, controlling financial flows and decision-making, which some view as ensuring accountability, while others argue it reinforces hierarchical relationships and dependency (Lilja & Höglund, 2018; Contu & Girei, 2014; Dissanayake, 2024; Mulder, 2023).

Moreover, other scholars emphasize the power imbalance between the local and national actors as a key challenge in localization. Some scholars highlight how INGOs, due to their financial and structural advantages, tend to dominate decision-making processes, even when localization is a stated priority (Roepstorff, 2019; Bian, 2022). Others argue that these power asymmetries are unavoidable, as INGOs are primarily accountable to donors rather than local communities (Frennesson et al., 2022; Erdilmen & Sosthenes, 2020). There is also a perspective that suggests that while imbalances exist, they can be mitigated through better collaboration and shared decision-making mechanisms (Baguios et al., 2021).

While these structural challenges are well-documented, the role of trust in shaping localization outcomes is often mentioned but rarely explored in depth. The absence of trust between INGOs and local actors may further complicate partnerships, influencing their ability to work collaboratively (Robillard, Atim, & Maxwell, 2021). Many of the above scholars acknowledge trust as a factor yet compared to more tangible challenges like funding and power dynamics, its role often appears secondary or assumed rather than critically analyzed. This raises the question of whether trust is an overlooked but fundamental element in localization.

1.2 Problem formulation

Financial resources and decision-making authority are often framed as the central challenges in localization. However, could local organizations' ability to operate effectively also depend on the level of trust between them and international actors? If there is a higher level of trust between the two parties, it may not only strengthen the partnership but may also improve the outcomes of their joint efforts. Nevertheless, it is not always clear how trust plays out in practice and whether its absence could be one of the overlooked barriers that undermine the intended goals of localization. Could trust play a decisive role in determining whether localization genuinely empowers local actors? These wonderings have led us to the following problem formulation:

What challenges do the local organizations experience in the localization processes, and how does their perceived trust towards the international organizations influence the collaboration between international and local organizations?

This study seeks to examine how trust – or its absence – shapes localization efforts. Specifically, we will investigate the obstacles local organizations encounter in their collaboration with international organizations. Additionally, we will explore how local actors experience being met with trust in their collaboration with international organizations.

1.3 Motivation

Our motivation for this research stems from our collective professional backgrounds in humanitarian organizations. Over the years, we have witnessed both the potential and the limitations of localization in humanitarian action. Our experiences have underlined the big potential of empowering local actors and ensuring that humanitarian aid is responsive to the unique needs of communities on the ground. However, we have also seen how localization efforts can sometimes fall short due to different challenges. These observations have led us to pursue this research as an opportunity to delve deeper into the complexities of localization. We are driven by a shared commitment to not only identify the barriers that hinder effective localization but also to explore potential pathways for a good partnership between local and international partners.

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis begins with an exploration of our philosophical foundation, grounded in a social constructivist perspective. By outlining our ontological, epistemological, and methodological stance, we clarify how knowledge and reality are understood as socially constructed. This is followed by a comprehensive literature review, examining key debates surrounding localization, including the roles of INGOs, power dynamics, and trust in humanitarian partnerships. We then introduce our methodological considerations, where we outline our qualitative case study approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with local organizations to capture their perspectives. Following this, we present our theoretical framework, applying Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's theory on Organizational Trust to understand how trust is established and maintained between local and international actors. Furthermore, we will apply Moyo's perspective of Dead Aid to understand the challenges that may arise in the localization processes. In the analysis, we present our findings on how local actors experience the challenges in the localization processes, and how the local actors perceive the trustworthiness of their international partners. These findings are analyzed and discussed in relation to our theoretical framework and the key perspectives outlined in the literature review. Finally, the conclusion summarizes our key insights.

PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

This section presents the thesis's philosophical foundation, based on a social constructivist perspective. It outlines the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions underlying the study.

2. Philosophy of science

Different philosophical approaches are based on different assumptions about how a research problem is investigated and how credible knowledge is created (Jensen, 2004:36). Therefore, the philosophy of science forms the foundation for our thesis, including the chosen arguments, methods, and approaches.

The following section outlines the philosophical foundation of the thesis, grounded in a social constructivist perspective. By addressing ontology, epistemology, and methodology, it highlights how reality and knowledge are understood as socially constructed. This perspective provides the framework for exploring how trust in localization processes is shaped and negotiated through social interactions and institutional contexts.

2.1 Social constructivism

In this thesis, we adopt a social constructivist perspective, which posits that reality and knowledge are not objective and independent entities, but are rather constructed through social interactions, language, and cultural practices (Holm, 2022:141). This perspective is relevant for our study, as it allows us to explore how trust in localization processes is not a fixed concept but something that emerges and is continually reshaped through communicative exchanges, institutional settings, and contextual dynamics.

Social constructivism emphasizes that knowledge is generated within specific social contexts and through collective discourse (Ibid.:142). This means that the way individuals perceive and interpret the world is influenced by the social relations they are part of. Therefore, our study acknowledges that trust and collaboration in localization processes are not fixed or universal concepts but are instead context-dependent and negotiated in social interactions.

To further elaborate on these philosophical assumptions, we present three fundamental aspects of our social constructivist approach; ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Daymon & Holloway, 2011:100).

2.1.1 Ontology

Ontology concerns the nature of reality. From a social constructivist stance, reality is not something that exists independently of human perception but is formed through social processes and interactions. This relativist view acknowledges the existence of multiple realities, shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Egholm, 2022:26).

Social constructivism recognizes that reality is socially constructed and does not exist independently of human interaction. This implies that the researcher is not merely an observer of an external world but is actively involved in its construction. Reality is thus not static but continually shaped by historical, cultural, and social factors (Daymon & Holloway, 2011:101). For our study, this means that trust in localization efforts is not an inherent or static phenomenon, but one that is continuously created through organizational discourse and stakeholder interactions. As Holm (2022) points out, organizational identity and narratives are shaped through practice, and understanding how these narratives are formed is central to a constructivist inquiry (Ibid.:161).

2.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology addresses how we come to know and understand the world. In a social constructivist paradigm, knowledge is constructed through social interaction and shaped by the context and perspectives of those involved (Egholm, 2022:28). This subjectivist epistemology emphasizes intersubjectivity, where knowledge emerges from shared understandings rather than objective observation (Holm, 2022:145).

A key implication of this epistemological stance is that our research does not aim to establish universal truths but rather to explore the ways in which participants construct and negotiate meaning in their specific contexts. Levers (2013) highlights that knowledge is always filtered through the observer's lens and co-created between the researcher and participants (Ibid.:3). As researchers, we acknowledge that our own interpretations are influenced by our background and preconceptions, and we therefore strive for reflexivity in our analysis. Additionally, we recognize that our findings are co-constructed through dialogue with our participants, making the research process an interactive and interpretative endeavor.

2.1.3 Methodology

Methodology concerns how knowledge is produced and justified within a particular philosophical framework (Daymon & Holloway, 2011:103). Aligned with our ontological and epistemological stance, we employ qualitative methods that allow us to explore how trust in localization is co-constructed through social interactions and institutional settings. Our methodological consideration will further be elaborated in a later chapter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a comprehensive literature review on localization in humanitarian aid, examining key themes such as the definition of 'local', power dynamics between INGOs and local actors, partnership structures, donor influence, and the often-overlooked role of trust.

3. Literature review

To establish a solid foundation for our study, we have conducted a comprehensive review of existing literature on localization in humanitarian aid. This review provides an overview of key debates, dominant perspectives, and critical findings within the field, ensuring that our research is grounded in established knowledge. By engaging with relevant literature, we identify how different scholars have approached the topic and we use this as a basis for framing our own study.

Our literature search was conducted using academic databases, including Google Scholar, to ensure a focused exploration of relevant research. We employed keywords and themes such as *localization in humanitarian aid*, *INGOs and local actors*, *power dynamics in aid distribution* and *challenges in localization.* This approach allowed us to identify key scholarly contributions, map prevailing debates, explore different perspectives, and identify areas that require further investigation.

The literature review is structured into key thematic areas. First, we examine the importance of localized humanitarianism and the debates surrounding the definition of "who is local." Next, we explore the dynamics between INGOs and local organizations, including INGOs' role as intermediaries. We then investigate the barriers and challenges to localization, such as donor influence and power imbalance. Lastly, we address the role of trust in localization by examining how trust – or the lack thereof – affects the collaboration, power-sharing, and the legitimacy of localization efforts.

Through this literature review, we map the existing research landscape and position our study within it. This process allows us to identify where further inquiry is needed and how our research contributes to ongoing discussions on localization and trust in humanitarian partnerships.

3.1 The importance of localized humanitarianism

According to the Danish Refugee Council (2023) localization in the humanitarian sector is a strategy aimed at shifting power, resources, and decision-making to local actors, ensuring they play a leading role in aid delivery and crisis response. It is based on the principle that those closest to crises such as community-based organizations, local authorities, and national NGOs are best positioned to understand and address the needs of affected populations effectively. The approach promotes equitable partnerships between international and local organizations, with the goal of reinforcing rather than replacing local and national capacities (Ibid.:5). They more concretely define it as:

"*The term refers to the strengthening of local responders to lead and deliver humanitarian aid, in a spirit of partnership [that aims to] reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities*" (Ibid.:3).

Localization also involves capacity building, financial support, and inclusive governance structures to enable local actors to take ownership of humanitarian and development initiatives. By fostering sustainability, localization enhances community resilience and ensures that humanitarian efforts are more contextually relevant and culturally appropriate (Ibid.:7).

According to Taithe (2019) being local is essential in humanitarian efforts as it fosters trust, enables context-specific responses, and strengthens long-term community resilience. Taithe highlights how local humanitarianism, or what he calls *demotic humanitarianism,* is deeply embedded in community networks and driven by personal connections, making it more adaptable and responsive to crises than large-scale international efforts (Ibid.:1782). Unlike bureaucratic INGOs, local actors operate within familiar cultural and social contexts, ensuring aid reaches those in need more effectively (Ibid.:1783). Additionally, the involvement of local volunteers and organizations enhances sustainability, as these initiatives are rooted in enduring relationships rather than temporary interventions (Ibid.:1786).

By prioritizing localized responses, humanitarian efforts can become more inclusive, equitable, and aligned with the actual needs of affected communities (Ibid.:1791). For example, the humanitarian organization Hudfam operated independently of large INGOs, allowing it to maintain strong local engagement while supporting international relief efforts (Ibid.:1785). Similarly, the Christian African Relief Trust (CART) and Ghana Outlook (GO) exemplify how local networks mobilize resources and expertise to address global challenges while remaining community-focused (Ibid.:1789). These organizations thrived due to their ability to build trust and leverage personal connections, demonstrating that local humanitarianism not only complements international aid but often surpasses it in effectiveness and sustainability (Ibid.:1791).

3.2 Defining ‘who is local’ in localization

The notion of ‘who is local’ in humanitarian aid is complex and context-dependent. In their study, Mosel and Holloway (2019) highlight that displaced people in Bangladesh and Lebanon often could not distinguish between local and international humanitarian actors, nor did they find this distinction particularly relevant. Instead, their primary concern was that assistance was provided in a respectful and transparent manner, regardless of the provider (Ibid.:15). Moreover, Mosel and Holloway question the definition of ‘local’ in humanitarian contexts. While Bangladeshi and Lebanese actors are local in their respective countries, they are not necessarily perceived as local by displaced populations (Ibid.:16).

Expanding on this discussion, Baguios, King, Martins, and Pinnington (2021) argue that defining ‘who is local’ is not a neutral or objective process but rather one shaped by power dynamics. They highlight that international donors and INGOs often determine who qualifies as local, influencing funding access, leadership opportunities, and decision-making power in humanitarian responses (Ibid.:15). Furthermore, the term ‘local’ can obscure internal hierarchies within communities, as those categorized as local may not necessarily represent marginalized or less powerful groups (Ibid.:16). The authors stress that many localization efforts fail to critically assess these complexities, instead applying rigid definitions that do not reflect the fluid and contested nature of local identities (Ibid.:17).

Barbelet’s (2018) study *As Local as Possible, as International as Necessary* further explores the complexities of localizing humanitarian aid, building on the World Humanitarian Summit 2016’s push for localization. Using a combination of a literature review, case studies, and a perception survey with 55 respondents from 29 countries, she finds that international actors often undervalue local knowledge and flexibility, while local actors face systemic barriers to funding and decision-making (Ibid.:2).

One of the main challenges identified is the lack of a clear definition of ‘local’. Barbelet highlights that the term is applied inconsistently, covering actors such as national NGOs, community-based organizations, diaspora groups, and even local branches of international organizations (Ibid.:6). This ambiguity impacts funding distribution and leadership opportunities, often sidelining grassroots organizations despite their deep contextual knowledge and community trust (Ibid.:7). Barbelet also critiques how ‘capacity’ is framed, arguing that donor-driven requirements like reporting and compliance over the actual effectiveness of local actors (Ibid.:8).

Building on these themes, Barbelet’s (2019) report, *Rethinking Capacity and Complementarity for More Local Humanitarian Action*, further explores how capacity and complementarity between local and international actors can improve humanitarian responses. The report finds that low levels of trust, unequal power dynamics, and different perceptions of legitimacy often hinder effective collaboration between local and international actors (Ibid.:5). She argues that humanitarian action often oscillates between two extremes; either prioritizing localization or relying heavily on international actors, rather than fostering true complementarity (Ibid.:8).

We will include these texts to highlight the complexities of defining ‘who is local’ in humanitarian aid and the power dynamics shaping localization processes. Since definitions are not universally applicable, they likely shape frameworks for collaboration in different ways. We therefore found it worth considering how INGOs’ definitions influence individual organizations and whether this affects access to funding, leadership, and decision-making. We will keep these complexities in mind, particularly how definitions of ‘local’ shape power dynamics, funding structures, and collaboration. These insights will help us explore how local actors experience trust in partnerships with international organizations.

3.3 Partnership and the dynamics between INGOs and local organizations

Exploring the partnerships between local and international organizations, Contu and Girei (2014) examine the concept of partnership in international development, particularly between INGOs and national NGOs (NNGOs). They argue that the rhetoric of partnership often masks power imbalances and perpetuates hierarchical relationships. While INGOs position themselves as equal partners, they tend to control funding, set agendas, and impose managerial frameworks that may not align with local needs (Ibid.:210). The study, based on fieldwork in Uganda, highlights how partnerships often fail to deliver on their promise of equality, instead reinforcing historical inequalities where Southern NGOs must conform to Northern donors' expectations (Ibid.:206).

Expanding on these points, Mulder (2023) explores how localization efforts in aid delivery often result in externally controlled, top-down structures, despite the intention of promoting local participation. Using a case study in Ethiopia, the research highlights the contradictions between two paradigms: *the resilience paradigm,* which emphasizes empowerment and self-reliance, and *the surveillance paradigm*, which prioritizes accountability and compliance to donor standards. The study finds that local actors must navigate these conflicting expectations by employing impression management strategies to appear compliant while maintaining local agency (Ibid.:8). This paradox ultimately sustains hierarchical relationships rather than fostering genuine partnerships.

Both texts critique the idealized notion of equal partnerships between INGOs and local organizations, highlighting various power dynamics that influence these relationships. However, they approach the issue from different angles. Contu and Girei (2014) focus on how INGOs maintain dominance over NNGOs by controlling resources and imposing managerialist practices, making true equality in partnerships difficult to achieve (Ibid.:211). Mulder (2023) extends this critique by demonstrating how localization efforts create paradoxical legitimacy demands that local actors must navigate, further reinforcing hierarchical structures rather than dismantling them (Ibid.:10). These findings will inform our research by highlighting how power imbalances and externally imposed frameworks shape partnerships between local and international organizations. By examining these dynamics, we can better understand how trust is built or undermined in localization processes and explore ways to foster more equitable collaborations.

3.3.1 INGOs as intermediaries between donors and local actors

To elaborate further on the dynamics between international and local organization, Frennesson, Kembro, de Vries, Jahre and Van Wassenhove (2022) examine the barriers international humanitarian organizations (IHOs) face in implementing localization. They find that progress is slow due to financial constraints, donor preferences for large organizations, and resistance from IHOs to transferring power to local actors (Ibid.:2). One of the challenges identified is that INGOs act as intermediaries between donors and local organizations. While localization efforts aim to transfer funding and decision-making power to national and local actors, INGOs often function as gatekeepers, restricting direct access to resources (Ibid.:6). Donors prefer working with INGOs due to concerns over financial accountability and risk management, further reinforcing their control over funding distribution. This limits local organizations' ability to build long-term capacity and reduces their autonomy in humanitarian operations (Ibid.:15).

Lilja and Höglund (2018) examine another perspective of the INGOs as intermediaries. They explain the role of INGOs in local peacebuilding, emphasizing their function as intermediaries between international donors and local actors (Ibid.:412). They argue that while local ownership is essential for sustainable peace, external actors play a crucial role in enabling action, particularly in high-risk environments where local institutions lack resources or legitimacy (Ibid.:414). The authors identify two key functions of INGOs; *risk absorption* and *accompaniment*. As risk absorbers, INGOs take on fiduciary and political risks, ensuring local actors can access donor funding despite strict financial and managerial requirements (Ibid.:424-425). The accompaniment approach involves long-term engagement, mentoring, and shared decision-making, allowing local organizations to develop sustainably without excessive donor dependence (Ibid.:419-421).

Despite these benefits, Lilja and Höglund highlight the challenges that INGOs face, particularly in partner selection and funding. Finding the right local partners requires balancing ethical values with practical effectiveness (Ibid.:419). Additionally, short-term donor funding contradicts the long-term nature of peacebuilding, pressuring INGOs to show quick results. Some INGOs mitigate this by separating financial oversight from strategic guidance, maintaining local partnerships beyond funding cycles (Ibid.:423-424).

A recommendation paper by InterAction (2021), an alliance of nearly 200 humanitarian and development NGOs, also explores how INGOs function as intermediaries in humanitarian coordination (Ibid.:4). INGOs bridge the gap between international donors and local and national NGOs (LNNGOs), facilitating funding distribution, operational support, and risk management while ensuring compliance with donor requirements (Ibid.:14). The report highlights that while LNNGOs are expected to take on greater leadership, INGOs continue to dominate many coordination structures due to their resources and networks. While some NGO fora seek to involve LNNGOs in decision-making, financial and structural barriers persist. The report concludes that sustainable coordination requires stronger LNNGO inclusion and funding mechanisms that reduce dependence on INGOs (Ibid.:18).

Several scholars highlight how INGOs act as intermediaries between international donors and local actors. This aspect of collaboration is particularly interesting, as it may influence the partnership between local and international organizations. In our research, we will examine how the intermediary role of the international organizations shapes trust and decision-making power from a local perspective. Specifically, we aim to explore how local actors perceive international organizations' role and how their position as gatekeepers affects trust dynamics.

3.4 Barriers and challenges

While previous literature has highlighted the importance of being local and the role of INGOs as intermediaries between local actors and donors, this section delves into the barriers within these partnerships. Roepstorff (2019) is critically examining the localization agenda within humanitarian action, focusing on key barriers in the partnership between INGOs and local actors.

Roepstorff identifies power imbalances and funding inequities as key barriers to localization in humanitarian action. She argues that power imbalances arise as donor accountability is prioritized over the needs of affected populations, which leaves decision-making concentrated in the hands of international actors. Regarding funding, she states that local organizations are often marginalized due to donors' upward accountability structures, which favor their own interpretations of needs over those of local communities. Additionally, she notes that increased local involvement in a resource-scarce system can heighten competition, potentially limiting the effectiveness of humanitarian efforts (Ibid.:288).

To address these barriers, Roepstorff introduces the concept of critical localism, which moves beyond a binary distinction between 'local' and 'international' actors and instead frames the local as a dynamic and interconnected space shaped by transnational and transcultural interactions (Ibid.:291). This approach emphasizes the need to examine how power, resources, and social values are negotiated within these partnerships, calling for a reconsideration of whose knowledge and capacities are prioritized in the design of humanitarian projects. Roepstorff further argues that more equitable and inclusive approaches are necessary to avoid reproducing existing inequalities, cautioning that without critical engagement, the localization agenda risks becoming a tool that merely reinforces dominant power structures rather than challenging them (Ibid.:292).

As a complementary perspective, Erdilmen and Sosthenes (2020) presents a case study from Tanzania, where they identify three major barriers to localization; restrictive political and legal frameworks, gaps in policymaking and implementation, and financial and capacity-related constraints (Ibid.:6-7). The authors describe how bureaucratic hurdles and shifting government regulations create instability, forcing humanitarian actors to repeatedly reapply for permits, which disrupts operational continuity (Ibid.:20-21). In addition to these regulatory challenges, they highlight the absence of standardized collaboration mechanisms and weak coordination as additional obstacles (Ibid.:22). Furthermore, financial constraints are emphasized, as local NGOs often rely on short-term, project-based funding, face competition for limited resources, and experience high staff turnover due to salary disparities with INGOs (Ibid.:23-24).

To address these challenges, Erdilmen and Sosthenes outlines several policy recommendations aimed at fostering a more sustainable localization process. They call for increased direct funding to local NGOs, including support for administrative costs, to enhance financial stability and local capacity (Ibid.:25). Additionally, they advocate for stronger accountability through reciprocal frameworks and emphasize a regional, context-specific approach to improve flexibility and effectiveness and finally, they highlight the potential of public-private partnerships, the need for a gender-sensitive approach to address power imbalances, and the importance of clearly defining responsibilities between the state and civil society to ensure effective localization efforts (Ibid.:26). While acknowledging the challenges faced in Tanzania, they present these targeted policy reforms as potential pathways toward a more inclusive and sustainable humanitarian system (Ibid.:28).

In our research, we do not investigate the practical implementation of the recommendations from Roepstorff (2019) or Erdilmen and Sosthenes (2020). Instead, we use their critiques to assess if their perspectives align with the experiences of the local actors we interview. We explore how local actors in Ghana and Kenya perceive power imbalances, funding inequities, and other barriers to localization, and whether their experiences match the challenges highlighted by both scholars.

3.4.1 Donors role in localization processes

While Roepstorff, Erdilmen and Sosthenes highlight the power structures and financial inequalities that hinder the localization agenda from the perspective of local actors, the issue of donors' internal barriers and incentives remains central to understanding the limited progress. Dissanayake (2024) identifies three main factors hindering localization: ambiguity surrounding its definition, operational challenges in aid systems, and principal-agent issues within donor organizations and their partners (Ibid.:1). Central to these barriers is donors' reluctance to transfer decision-making and financial control to local actors, which is further complicated by the conflict between decentralizing resources and managing risks such as corruption and capacity gaps in local systems (Ibid.:2). These challenges are exacerbated by conservative risk management, complex reporting requirements, and tied aid (Ibid.:3). Moreover, principal-agent problems arise when donor staff incentives conflict with localization goals, and when INGOs act as intermediaries, limiting local autonomy (Ibid.:14). To overcome these challenges, Dissanayake advocates for clearer localization goals, local capacity investment, increased donor staff presence in recipient countries, and streamlined aid flows, calling for structural adaptations and a focus on local empowerment within donor organizations (Ibid.:16-19).

Despite these recommendations, donors continue to maintain significant control in the localization process despite calls for increased local ownership. Robillard, Atim, and Maxwell (2021) note that donors control most financial resources, with the majority of aid still flowing through international intermediaries (Ibid.:22). The Grand Bargain's goal of allocating 25% of humanitarian funding to local actors by 2020 has not been achieved, with current allocations around 3-4% (Ibid.:22). While local actors are involved in implementation, they often lack control over funding allocation and project design, creating dependency on international organizations (Ibid.:27). Local actors are frequently excluded from key decision-making bodies such as the cluster system, where leadership remains dominated by international actors (Ibid.:30-31). Even when local actors are included, their input is often marginalized by more influential international players (Ibid.:32). Capacity-building efforts further reinforce this imbalance, as they tend to focus on meeting international standards rather than empowering local leadership (Ibid.:35-36). Donors' risk aversion leads them to favor international organizations, perceived as more stable, thereby limiting local actors' autonomy (Ibid.:40-41). As a result, despite the push for localization, donors continue to hold substantial control over both financial resources and decision-making processes (Ibid.:45).

In relation to our study, the barriers identified in the literature will be used to understand how local organizations experience trust within the constraints of the localization agenda. By focusing on the practical realities of local actors, we aim to assess whether the perceived power imbalances and operational difficulties undermine trust and collaboration. To this, we will be examining if trust is a pivotal factor that could either strengthen or weaken partnerships between local and international organizations, and how this trust can be cultivated despite the inherent challenges posed by current localization practices.

3.4.2 Power imbalance

As described in multiple of the previous scholars, power imbalance is a well-documented issue in humanitarian aid and the localization debate, with research showing that power typically remains with international actors, creating structural barriers to local autonomy. Scholars have critically examined the ways in which these imbalances persist, highlighting the role of racialized perceptions of expertise, the enduring influence of colonial legacies, and the financial and bureaucratic mechanisms that hinder meaningful shifts toward local leadership. These elements form three key dimensions of the power structures that continue to shape humanitarian aid, which will be explored in the following section.

Given that extensive research has already established the presence of power imbalances in humanitarian aid, our study does not seek to confirm whether these asymmetries exist. Instead, we take this as a given and focus on how these imbalances shape trust and collaboration in localization processes. We use existing scholarship to understand how local actors perceive and navigate these structural barriers, examining whether power asymmetries influence their ability to form equitable partnerships with INGOs and access decision-making spaces.

3.4.2.1 Hidden power hierarchies and the racialization of expertise

In this context, Bian (2022) explores how humanitarian organizations maintain power through hidden hierarchies rooted in perceptions of expertise (Ibid.:4). These hierarchies are not neutral; instead, they are shaped by racialized and post-colonial frameworks that favor white, Western professionals over local experts. The categories of 'expat' and 'local' are not merely professional distinctions, but act as tools that reinforce racialized power dynamics. Expat status is often equated with competence, while local knowledge is undervalued or ignored, despite its contextual relevance (Ibid.:6).

Bian draws on Omi and Winant's theory of *racial formation* to argue that race is not an inherent biological trait, but a socially constructed category shaped by historical processes and power relations (Ibid.:5). This concept leads to the racialization of expertise in humanitarian organizations, where expat status is associated with competence, reinforcing the dominance of white professionals and sidelining non-white, local experts. Additionally, black, indigenous, and people of color expatriates are often expected to prove their competence through affiliations with Western institutions or norms, further entrenching racial hierarchies (Ibid., pp. 9-10). Bian also critiques the *colorblindness* inherent in these structures, a concept introduced by Omi and Winant. Colorblindness is the ideology that race should not be acknowledged, yet in practice, it masks systemic inequality by pretending to be neutral. This allows racial hierarchies to persist, with spatial divisions, such as the exclusive use of 'auxiliary spaces' by expatriates (e.g., cars, compounds, and hotels), symbolizing and reinforcing racialized power imbalances (Ibid., pp. 7-8).

3.4.2.2 Decolonization and the humanitarian industrial complex

Aloudat and Khan (2021) further explore the dynamics above by addressing the role of decolonization in humanitarian aid, emphasizing that systemic power imbalances between the

Global North and South remain largely unchallenged. They highlight how humanitarianism is often conflated with Northern-led institutions, creating what they refer to as a 'humanitarian industrial complex' that reinforces colonial legacies and hinders meaningful power redistribution. They argue for a shift away from Eurocentric, top-down interventions and the promotion of local leadership. However, they note significant disagreement on whether decolonization should be a reform or a complete transformation and observe that efforts to change are often met with resistance from those in power, which limits progress (Ibid.:1-3).

Although we do not engage directly with decolonization and the humanitarian industrial complex as a core analytical focus in this study, we draw on this perspective as background knowledge to contextualize our study, particularly given our position as European researchers analyzing localization processes in Ghana and Kenya.

3.4.2.3 Localization as a process with structural barriers

Building on the critique of power dynamics within humanitarian aid, Harris and Tuladhar (2019) discuss the slow progress of localization in humanitarian aid, which remains hindered by international actors' reluctance to cede power. Despite growing recognition that localization is an ongoing process, international organizations continue to dominate decision-making and resource distribution, with financial structures reinforcing these imbalances by restricting local actors' access to resources (Ibid.: 43-44). This reluctance stems from a deeply ingrained belief that international organizations are better suited to assess needs on the ground, despite local communities often having a more nuanced understanding of their own circumstances (Ibid.:43).

Harris and Tuladhar argue that this slow pace of localization is a result of entrenched power dynamics within the current humanitarian system, making full implementation dependent on sustained local leadership and a genuine willingness among international actors to relinquish control (Ibid.:51-52). They emphasize that the shift towards locally led development is ultimately dependent on the leadership from Southern partners, yet this process is further complicated by the persistent unwillingness of Northern actors to adapt their practices and share power (Ibid.:51). We use this perspective to analyze how power dynamics are perceived by local actors, exploring whether the interviewees experience any barriers due to international organizations' reluctance to cede control.

3.5 Trust in localization processes

Through our literature review, we have explored discussions on localization in humanitarian aid, including the role of INGOs, power dynamics, and the structural challenges faced by local organizations. While several scholars mention trust in passing, it is often framed as a secondary factor rather than a central element in localization. The literature primarily focuses on donor influence, decision-making hierarchies, and financial dependencies. However, there is little in-depth exploration of how trust functions within these partnerships or the ways in which it influences collaboration, power-sharing, and the perceived legitimacy of localization efforts.

This gap raises questions about the role of trust in localization. If international and local organizations do not fully trust each other, could this impact the extent to which power is meaningfully transferred? Could trust influence how funding is allocated or how decisions are negotiated? Given these considerations, we found it necessary to expand our literature review to include theories of trust, allowing us to explore how trust is built, maintained, or challenged in partnerships from the perspective of the local organizations.

3.5.1 Conceptualization of trust

Hoffman (2002) highlights that trust is a crucial component of relationships in international relations, yet it remains poorly defined and difficult to measure (Ibid.: 375). He categorizes trust into two primary conceptual approaches; *the predictive approach* and *the fiduciary approach*. The predictive approach defines trust as an actor's expectation that another will not act against their interests when given discretion over an outcome. This perspective equates trust with calculated risk-taking, treating it as a rational gamble (Ibid.:379). In contrast, the fiduciary approach incorporates both risk and obligation, suggesting that trust is not just about predicting behavior but also about believing that the trusted party has a duty to act in a trustworthy manner, even at a cost to themselves (Ibid.:380). This approach highlights moral responsibility beyond risk-taking (Ibid.: 385).

Hoffman proposes three measures to operationalize trust. First is *discretion-granting policies and decision-making data,* where one party gives another decision-making autonomy based on trustworthiness (Ibid.:385). Second is *oversight mechanisms*, where the level of monitoring reflects trust, more intrusive oversight signals lower trust, while less intrusive oversight suggests higher trust (Ibid.:388-391). Last is *rule indicators,* where framework-oriented agreements indicate higher trust due to flexibility, while statute-oriented agreements suggest lower trust due to rigid rules (Ibid.:391-393). These measures, used together, offer a comprehensive view of trust, involving both risk and an expectation of obligation (Ibid.:393).

3.5.2 Interorganizational trust

Zaheer and Harris (2006) define interorganizational trust (IOT) as the collective trust that one organization has in another, based on shared organizational experiences, reputational signals, and relational norms, rather than individual interactions. This differs from interpersonal trust, which is built through personal connections. IOT is shaped by broader structural and environmental factors such as industry norms, governance mechanisms, and reputation, making it a more complex and collective form of trust. The authors propose a four-stage model to explore IOT (Ibid.:170).

The first stage explores the nature of IOT, noting that trust can be asymmetric, where one organization may trust another more than it is trusted in return. Long-term relationships foster deeper trust, while short-term ones provide fewer opportunities (Ibid.).

The second stage discusses how IOT develops, emphasizing that trust is initially built through interpersonal interactions but is solidified through repeated organizational experiences and mutual dependence (Ibid.). Institutional factors, such as cultural expectations, also influence trust-building (Ibid.:172). However, the high costs associated with developing trust can deter organizations from making long-term commitments, leading some organizations to rely more heavily on formal contractual mechanisms instead (Ibid.:184).

The third stage examines IOT's role in governance, where trust can complement formal mechanisms like contracts, reducing transaction costs and promoting cooperation. Some studies suggest trust may replace formal governance, while others argue that they work together to reduce opportunistic behavior and improve collaboration (Ibid.:187-188). Moreover, trust interacts with organizational structures. Studies show that trust influences the choice of governance structures, with organizations in high-trust relationships being more likely to engage in collaborative alliances rather than hierarchical controls (Ibid.:187).

Finally, the fourth stage examines the outcomes of IOT showing that trust brings both economic and relational benefits. It lowers transaction costs, increases operational efficiency, and enhances cooperation and knowledge-sharing. Organizations with strong reputations for trustworthiness attract better partnerships, further strengthening their market position (Ibid.:186).

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodological approach guiding the thesis. We will present our qualitative method, sampling and selection, data collections through interviews, data processing, and ethical considerations.

4. Methodology

To ensure a robust and contextually grounded exploration of trust in localization processes, this section outlines the methodological framework guiding our study. We adopt a qualitative research approach, which allows us to examine the lived experiences of local actors and the complexities of their partnerships with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) as unfolded in our literature review.

We begin by presenting our overarching research approach, justifying our choice of qualitative methods and explaining why they are particularly suited for studying trust in localization. Following this, we introduce our case study design, detailing our selection of Kenya and Ghana as focal contexts. Next, we outline our sampling strategy and selection criteria for interview participants. We describe how we employed purposeful sampling to identify local organizations who collaborate with international organizations. Additionally, we reflect on the role of gatekeepers in shaping access to interviewees and discuss how this may influence our findings.

The section then details our data collection process, focusing on the use of semi-structured interviews. We explain how our interview guide was designed, balancing deductive elements based on existing literature with an openness to inductive insights emerging from participant narratives. Following this, we describe our approach to data processing, including transcription and coding. Finally, we reflect on ethical considerations that guided our research.

4.1 Qualitative method

Qualitative research is a methodological approach that prioritizes the exploration of social phenomena through detailed, in-depth analysis of people's experiences, perceptions, and interactions. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on numerical data and broad generalizations, qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings and dynamics that shape human relationships within specific contexts (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012:167). This is particularly relevant for our study, as trust in localization processes is not a static or easily measurable concept but rather a complex, evolving relationship influenced by historical, institutional, and interpersonal factors. By using qualitative methods, we can capture the lived experiences of local actors working with INGOs, allowing us to explore not just whether trust exists but how it is built, negotiated, and sometimes challenged in these partnerships.

Furthermore, qualitative research enables us to examine the role of power dynamics and institutional structures in shaping trust, providing insights that may not emerge through purely quantitative measures (Ibid.:168). Through semi-structured interviews, we can develop a more holistic and contextually grounded understanding of trust dynamics, ensuring that our findings reflect the realities of those directly engaged in localization processes rather than being shaped solely by predefined theoretical assumptions.

4.1.1 Case study as a method

In our study, we employ a multiple case study approach to explore how local actors in Kenya and Ghana experience trust in their partnerships with international organizations. Case study research allows us to investigate complex, context-dependent phenomena in depth, making it particularly suitable for studying the nuanced dynamics of trust, power, and decision-making in localization processes. While case studies are sometimes criticized for their perceived lack of generalizability, Flyvbjerg (2006) refutes this notion, arguing that well-chosen cases can provide valuable analytical and theoretical generalization rather than relying solely on statistical inference (Ibid.:228). He further highlights that social science research rarely operates with universal laws, making context-rich case studies essential for developing deeper insights into human behavior and institutional dynamics (Ibid.:221).

By selecting multiple cases, we aim to capture variations in how trust is negotiated across different organizational and national contexts, strengthening the analytical depth of our findings. To achieve a nuanced understanding of how trust between local and international organizations develops and influences localization processes it is relevant to explore the factors that may shape these dynamics. In this study we examine how trust influences the collaboration in localization processes seen from the perspective of the local actors, rather than viewing it as a static condition. At the same time, we acknowledge that underlying factors may contribute to the challenges local organizations face in their collaboration with international actors.

To strengthen the credibility and validity of the findings, control variables such as organizational size and funding history are taken into account, which minimizes the risk of misleading conclusions regarding causal relationships (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:104-105). This helps ensure that our interpretations are grounded in the empirical material rather than shaped by random variation or unobserved factors.

While case-based studies are sometimes questioned for their broader applicability, the validity can be strengthened through analytical generalization rather than statistical inference (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:106). By incorporating cases from Kenya and Ghana, this study identifies patterns that may be relevant to similar localization processes in other post-colonial contexts. The comparative approach allows for a deeper understanding of how trust is negotiated across different organizational and national settings, acknowledging that historical and institutional conditions shape international organizations collaborations with local organizations (Ibid.).

Our case study approach enables us to examine both common patterns and unique challenges in trust-building, contributing to a broader understanding of localization processes. Moreover, Flyvbjerg (2006) emphasizes the value of case studies in identifying 'black swans' cases that challenge prevailing assumptions and reveal critical exceptions (Ibid.:227). Through our research, we seek to uncover such insights by critically assessing whether trust has an impact on localization efforts. While our findings may not be statistically generalizable, they provide empirically grounded contributions that can inform discussions and future research on trust and partnership dynamics in humanitarian actions.

4.2 Sampling and selection

Our participant selection focuses on local organizations working in collaboration with INGOs to explore how trust is built, maintained, or challenged within these partnerships. By focusing on local actors, we gain insights into these collaborations from their perspective, allowing us to understand how they experience and navigate decision-making processes and power relations. From this perspective, we approach our interviewees' statements not just as individual experiences but as narratives shaped by broader social and cultural structures that influence their positions within these partnerships (Järvinen, 2005:37). Through this, we aim to understand how our interview participants experience trust from INGOs, shedding light on the factors that shape their interactions and influence the sustainability of these relationships.

The selection of interviewees was facilitated through pre-existing contacts within the research team. One of the researchers in our project group had prior experience working in a Danish organization, which provided an entry point for reaching out to local organizations who are engaged in partnerships with INGOs. This Danish organization has established connections with local organizations in Kenya and Ghana, which influenced our decision to narrow our research field to these countries. This prior connection influenced access to participants and shaped the network through which our interviewees were identified.

4.2.1 Introducing the interviewees

To gain diverse insights into local organizations' perspective of trust, we conducted interviews with representatives from three organizations: Positive Life Kenya, DUNK Grassroots, and the International Centre for Research and Development. Each of these organizations operates in different contexts and regions in Kenya and Ghana but shares a commitment to empowering marginalized communities through education, advocacy, and capacity building. In the following we will introduce the three organizations.

> *Positive Life Kenya* (PLK) is a non-profit organization based in Kenya that was founded in 2010 (Positive Life Kenya, n.d., a). PLK has various partnerships with international organizations to further its mission. Notably, they have collaborated with the Danish organizations 100% for the Children, and the Danish fund CISU (Civil Society in Development) (Ibid.). The organization focuses on breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting social well-being through a combination of education, health services, and economic empowerment. PLK works primarily with vulnerable women, children, and families affected by poverty, HIV/AIDS, and gender-based violence (Ibid.). Their programs provide mentorship, vocational training, and psychosocial support to equip individuals with skills for sustainable livelihoods. Additionally, PLK operates a community school and supports child welfare initiatives, ensuring that children from underprivileged backgrounds have access to education, healthcare, and a supportive environment. Through advocacy and active community participation,

PLK fosters long-term change by addressing systemic barriers to social and economic inclusion (Positive Life Kenya, n.d., b).

DUNK Grassroots is a youth-led NGO operating in Ghana, with a presence in Accra and Tamale. DUNK stands for Developing Unity, Nurturing Knowledge, and was founded in 2010. DUNK aims to create safe, inclusive, and empowering spaces for at-risk children and youth (DUNK Grassroots, n.d.). DUNK collaborates with multiple international and national organizations including: Soundboks, Crossroads International, AfricaBreak, Soulmogul DoGood, KGL, Surf Ghana, Lincoln Community School, CISU (Civil Society in Development), and Bajfreight (Ibid). The organization primarily uses basketball as a tool for social transformation, integrating sports with educational programs and life skills training. Beyond sports, DUNK provides mentorship, academic support, and leadership development opportunities, helping young people build confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging (Ibid). The organization also fosters gender inclusion by actively encouraging the participation of girls and young women in sports and leadership roles. By leveraging the power of community engagement, DUNK Grassroots nurtures a culture of empowerment, teamwork, and personal development, ultimately equipping youth with the skills and confidence needed to navigate social and economic challenges (Ibid).

The International Centre for Research and Development (ICRD) is a research, training, and consultancy organization based in Nairobi, Kenya (International Centre for Research and Development ICRD, n.d.). ICRD focuses on capacity building for individuals, institutions, and communities by providing tailored development programs in research, leadership, governance, and strategic planning. ICRD engages with a diverse range of international clients and partners, including the United Nations (Ibid). The organization supports policymakers, practitioners, and organizations in designing evidence-based solutions to social and economic challenges (Ibid). With a commitment to aligning its initiatives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, ICRD integrates cutting-edge research, technological advancements, and best practices from global development frameworks to enhance the effectiveness of local and regional interventions. Through its collaborative approach, ICRD plays a critical role in fostering knowledge exchange, strengthening institutional capacity, and promoting sustainable development across Africa (Ibid.).

These three organizations were selected for this study because of their distinct yet complementary approaches to community development and empowerment, on a local and grassroot level. While Positive Life Kenya and DUNK Grassroots focus on direct interventions through education, health, and youth development, ICRD provides research-based support to enhance the effectiveness of such initiatives.

4.2.2 Sampling method

Building on already established connections, we employed a purposeful sampling approach to ensure that our selected participants could provide detailed perspectives on our research topic. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to select individuals based on their specific knowledge, experience, and relevance to the study (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:161). Given our focus on localization and trust in partnerships, we have only reached out to participants who we know are actively engaged in collaboration with INGOs and thereby have firsthand experience with the challenges and opportunities inherent in these relationships. By selecting interviewees based on their direct involvement in partnerships, we ensured that our data collection remained focused and aligned with our research objectives. The combination of our existing network and the purposeful sampling method allowed us to identify actors whose insights would contribute to a nuanced understanding of trust-building in localization efforts.

4.2.3 Sample size and representativeness

While our sample size is limited due to the qualitative nature of our study, the aim when reaching out to interview participants was to include a diverse range of perspectives to capture the complexities of trust-building within the collaboration between international and local organizations. As Björklund & Kallenberg (2022) suggest, while purposeful sampling allows for the inclusion of participants based on their relevant experience and knowledge, it is also influenced by external factors, such as the role of gatekeepers within organizations. These gatekeepers may determine which participants are accessible and available for interviews, shaping the data we collect by filtering which voices and perspectives are included, even though we sought to capture a diversity of insights (Ibid.:74). By narrowing the participant selection to organizations based in Kenya and Ghana, we introduce a geographical focus that were historical, cultural, and political factors, such as the legacies of colonization (Afrokonnect, n.d.). This aspect of our study is essential, as it highlights the importance of considering how the dynamics explored in our research may not be transferable to countries outside of the post-colonial context.

In terms of sample size, our ambition was to conduct a minimum of seven interviews, given our prior agreement about collaborating with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) to explore their partnerships in the context of localization. This arrangement was expected to provide access to a broader range of interviews, including both employees from DRC and their local partners. This target reflects our goal of ensuring that the data we collect is sufficient to identify recurring themes and patterns, while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis. However, due to the suspension of support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), DRC had to focus their engagement with local actors solely on supporting them through a difficult period, which prevented further collaboration. Instead, DRC connected us with the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), a movement of local and national civil society organizations (NEAR, n.d.). We reached out to NEAR, who agreed to contact organizations within their network on our behalf. Unfortunately, none of the organizations responded. NEAR explained that, given the particularly challenging time their members were facing due to significant funding cuts, they were careful not to pressure the organizations further in light of the circumstances. This further explains why we have not followed up persistently with the organizations we initially reached out to, and who ended up not responding to our inquiries.

Given the challenges in securing interviews through DRC and NEAR, we turned to our own network to focus on local organizations in Kenya and Ghana that collaborate with international organizations. This approach allowed us to connect with three organizations that provided insights into the dynamics of trust and collaboration in the context of localization. While our sample size remained small, we were able to engage with organizations that are directly involved in partnership work with international organizations, offering a closer look at the specific experiences of these local actors. As Andersen, Hansen, and Klemmensen (2012) note, purposeful sampling aims to provide an in-depth understanding of specific experiences, rather than to ensure statistical representativeness (Ibid.:161). Therefore, while our findings are not generalizable to all local organizations working with international organizations, they offer a perspective on the trust dynamics in Kenya and Ghana. This focus allows us to contribute to broader conversations about the challenges and opportunities in localization and the relationships between international and local organizations in post-colonial contexts. Therefore, while our findings, based on interviews with three specific organizations, are not generalizable to all local organizations working with international organizations, they offer a perspective on the trust dynamics for local organizations in Kenya and Ghana.

4.2.4 Gatekeepers, agendas, and narratives

The selection of our interviewees was influenced by gatekeepers within the organizations, who played a significant role in determining the ease of access to participants. One member of our research team had prior contact with these organizations through a pre-existing professional relationship. This connection likely facilitated access to participants and made the process of securing interviews smoother, but it also raised important considerations about how professional relationships may shape both participation and the responses provided. As Björklund and Kallenberg (2022) emphasize, gatekeepers act as intermediaries between us and the participants, controlling access to interviewees and potentially framing the data collection in ways that reflects and shapes the data collection (Ibid.:74).

In the light of this, it is crucial to reflect on the motivations behind the organizations' willingness to participate in our research. Given the pre-existing relationship one of our group members had with these organizations, their engagement in our research might have been influenced not only by a genuine interest in the study but also by potential strategic considerations. The organizations may view the participation as an opportunity to highlight their contributions to localization efforts, strengthen their position in advocacy and policy discussions, or increase their visibility within academic and international forums. These factors may have influenced the narratives presented in the interviews, and therefore, must be carefully considered in our study.

At the same time, we recognize the role that the pre-existing relationship plays in this dynamic, acknowledging the potential biases it introduces. By maintaining a critical and reflective approach throughout our data collection, we aim to ensure a well-rounded interpretation of the insights shared by our interviewees. This means not only considering the content of their responses, but also acknowledging the potential influences on these responses, such as our own biases, the role of gatekeepers, and the broader institutional and social contexts in which the interviewees operate.

4.3 Data collection through interviews

In this project, we are conducting individual semi-structured interviews to explore how local actors experience trust in their collaboration with international organizations. The semi-structured format allows us to examine key aspects of how local partners navigate partnership dynamics, decision-making processes, funding structures, and power relations within localization efforts, while remaining open to emergent themes. This approach provides a structured yet flexible framework, enabling us to adapt questions based on participants' responses and delve deeper into relevant areas as they arise (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:150).

By using individual interviews, we aim to capture the unique experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by local organizations. This method enables us to gain a deeper understanding of how trust is built, sustained, or potentially undermined in partnerships with international organizations. Since trust is a subjective and context-dependent concept, our approach allows for in-depth exploration of personal experiences, highlighting differences in how local actors perceive and respond to these dynamics. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that responses will be shaped by individual perspectives, organizational contexts, and past experiences. However, by gathering insights from multiple local organizations, we seek to identify common challenges and patterns that influence trust-building in localization processes (Ibid.:149).

4.3.1 Interview guide

To ensure consistency, relevance, and ethical integrity in our data collection process, we developed an interview guide (Appendix 1) prior to conducting the interviews. The guide provided a structured framework for exploring how local organizations experience trust in their collaboration with INGOs. While the interview guide offered a clear structure, we adopted a flexible approach, allowing us to adjust the focus based on the responses of our interviewees and explore emergent themes in greater depth (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:152).

Our study employed an abductive approach, meaning that our research design combined both deductive and inductive elements. Initially, we applied a deductive approach in our interview guide, in which the theoretical concepts were operationalized into concrete interview questions. These questions were informed by existing literature on localization, trust-building, and power relations, ensuring that our inquiry was grounded in prior research. However, we also recognized the importance of allowing new themes and unexpected insights to emerge directly from the data. Therefore, we incorporated an inductive approach by using open-ended questions, giving interviewees the space to share their own perspectives, experiences, and reflections without being confined to predefined theoretical categories. This abductive design allowed us to refine our theoretical understanding based on the realities described by local actors, ensuring that our findings remained both analytically rigorous and empirically grounded (Dubois & Gadde, 2002:559).

The interview guide was structured around key thematic areas relevant to our research. It was divided into different sections, each addressing a central aspect of local organizations' collaboration with INGOs. Each interview began with an introduction to the study's purpose, ensuring participants understood their rights regarding anonymity, consent, and recording. This helped establish trust and transparency from the outset. To ease the conversation, we started with introductory and information-seeking questions about the interviewee's role and their organization's collaboration with INGOs. These initial questions not only gathered relevant background information but also aimed to create a comfortable environment for discussion. As the interview progressed, we moved on to more in-depth topics, including how partnerships with INGOs were initiated and structured, the challenges local organizations faced in these collaborations, and how the local actors experienced trust in their interactions with INGOs. The questions exploring trust and relationship-building were based on Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) factors of perceived trustworthiness; *ability, benevolence,* and *integrity*. This framework guided our investigation into how local actors perceived their trust to the international partners.

The questions within the guide were intentionally open-ended, allowing interviewees to express their experiences and perspectives in their own words. For example, instead of asking "Do you think INGOs trust your organization?", we asked "How do you experience trust in your collaboration with INGOs?", allowing for a more nuanced and participant-driven discussion. This approach helped us capture a diversity of perspectives, while also uncovering themes we may not have anticipated (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:155).

When reaching out to interviewees, we presented the scope and purpose of our study, so they knew what we aimed to explore, without sharing all our questions. However, one participant specifically requested the questions in advance. During the interview, this individual referred to the questions on a few occasions, which may have influenced the responses we got. While this approach can allow for more thoughtful and deliberate answers, it can also have the possibility that the participant's responses were shaped by prior preparation rather than reflecting their immediate personal experiences and spontaneous thoughts.

4.3.2 Pilot interview

To ensure a well-informed and effective interview approach, we conducted a pilot interview before finalizing our research focus and interview guide. As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of our research, we aimed to explore the collaboration between the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and its local partners in the localization process. Therefore, the pilot interview was conducted with a colleague of one of our group members, who works for the DRC, which is an INGO actively engaged in localization processes. At this stage, we had not yet fully defined our research topic, and the pilot interview served as an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the localization process from the perspective of an INGO. This allowed us to explore key dynamics, challenges, and structures within the partnerships, helping us refine our research focus and develop more precise and relevant questions for our main study.

Although our primary research examines trust from the perspective of local organizations, speaking with a representative from an INGO helped us identify crucial themes and terminology that would later shape our study and therefore our interview guide. The discussion provided insights into how localization is structured, how INGOs approach partnerships with local actors, and which aspects of collaboration might be most relevant to explore from the local perspective. Additionally, it allowed us to test our questioning techniques, interview structure, and the clarity of our terminology, ensuring that our final questions would be both relevant and understandable to local organizations (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:319).

4.3.3 Conducting interviews

Before conducting our interviews, we established a structured approach to ensure effective communication and data collection. As a team of three interviewers, we assigned different roles during each session to maintain a clear focus and facilitate a smooth interview process. One person acted as Interviewer A, leading the conversation, asking questions, and guiding the discussion toward key themes. Meanwhile, the remaining interviewers took on a more observational role, ensuring that all relevant topics were covered, identifying opportunities for follow-up questions, and keeping track of emerging themes. This division of roles allowed us to balance structure and flexibility, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of our research topic. To avoid interviewer fatigue and to maintain fresh perspectives, we rotated roles throughout the interviews.

In order to mitigate potential bias in two of the interviews, we were particularly aware of the fact that one of the interviewers had a prior professional relationship with the interviewees. This pre-existing connection had the potential to influence the responses, as well as the overall dynamics and flow of the interviews. Recognizing this risk, we proactively implemented a strategy to minimize its impact. Specifically, we assigned a different team member to conduct the interviews and lead the questioning to ensure neutrality and reduce the likelihood of interviewer bias. While we sought to maintain an objective and open-minded stance, we acknowledge the involvement of the group member as the gatekeeper has influenced the process.

Before initiating the interviews, we reviewed Kvale’s *Interviewer’s Qualifications* (Olsen, 2002:26) to reflect on the essential skills of a good interviewer. Given our research focus on trust in localization processes, we recognized that discussions could touch on sensitive topics, such as power imbalances, decision-making autonomy, and funding constraints. It was therefore crucial that we approached interviews with sensitivity and openness, while also ensuring that conversations remained focused and structured to capture relevant insights.

To ensure the validity of our findings, we carefully considered both the structure of the interviews and the environment in which they took place (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:111). We recognized that factors such as power dynamics, personal relationships, and external expectations could influence participants' willingness to share information. To address this, we aimed to create a supportive environment that encouraged participants to speak openly and critically, while also being mindful of how their responses might be shaped by organizational constraints and personal relationships.

All our interviews were conducted in English, which is the second language of the interviewees and the interviewers. This language barrier may have introduced potential challenges, particularly in terms of expression, clarity, and nuanced meaning. Furthermore, all interviews were conducted online. While this format provided convenience and accessibility, eliminating geographical constraints, it also introduced challenges related to communication dynamics. Nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, are often important in qualitative research, yet they can be more difficult to interpret in an online setting, particularly if video quality or internet connections are unstable (Albris & Wahlberg, 2018:270). To mitigate these limitations, we paid close attention to tone, pauses, and subtle shifts in expression, ensuring that we remained engaged and responsive despite the virtual setting.

4.4 Data processing

After conducting the interviews, we transcribed and coded the data to systematically organize our empirical material for later use in the analysis. Our data processing follows an abductive research strategy, combining deductive and inductive reasoning in our analysis. At the beginning of our study, we took a deductive approach, conducting a literature review to gain insight into existing research on localization, trust, and power dynamics. This review helped us identify key challenges and themes that other scholars had explored, shaping our understanding of the field and informing the development of our research focus. Based on this, we selected a theoretical framework, which we then operationalized into concrete questions in our interview guide. This ensured that our interviews were structured around relevant theoretical concepts found through our literature review while still allowing for flexibility in participants’ responses (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012:169).

After conducting the interviews, we applied an inductive approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge naturally from the data. This process revealed aspects of trust-building and localization that were not fully accounted for in our initial theoretical framework. As a result, we identified Moyo's perspective of Dead Aid as our additional theory after the interviews to better explain and contextualize these unexpected findings. This iterative movement between theory and empirical data is central to abductive reasoning, ensuring that our conceptual framework is both grounded in existing research and informed by the perspectives of local organizations (Ibid.:180-181).

4.4.1 Transcribing

All interviews have been transcribed in full to ensure the accuracy and consistency of our data collection (Appendix 2, 3, 4). Transcribing the interviews provides us with an overview of the data and allows us to systematically analyze the material and identify key patterns and themes that are central to our research. By converting spoken words into text, we enhanced the transparency of our findings, making our interpretations of the data more visible and trustworthy to the reader. Furthermore, this ensures the reliability of the study, which refers to the consistency of our data collection and analysis across cases and instances, and contributes to its methodological rigor (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:103).

Before beginning the transcription process, we established a clear procedure to ensure consistency and accuracy (Ibid.:171). The transcription was carried out as verbatim as possible, preserving repetitions, pauses, and expressions such as "hmm." This approach was chosen due to the sensitivity of the topics discussed, as these subtle elements can provide important context for understanding the interviewees' statements. By including pauses and expressions, we allow the reader to gain a deeper sense of the tone and character of the responses as they were conveyed during the interviews. Additionally, sentences have not been reworded for grammatical correctness or readability, ensuring that the authenticity of the spoken dialogue is maintained.

However, it is essential to note that transcription is an interpretive act. In transforming spoken language into written text, we may unconsciously place emphasis on certain elements that we deem significant. Additionally, the reader cannot access non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, body language, or facial expressions, all of which can influence how meaning is conveyed and understood. These factors, therefore, have an impact on our interpretation of the interviews, highlighting the inherent limitations of transcription as a method of data collection.

To enhance the validity of our findings, interviewees were given the opportunity to review the transcriptions of their interviews. This process allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of their statements, ensuring that their responses were correctly represented. Although no changes were made by the participants, this step still contributed to the trustworthiness of our study by providing an opportunity for them to reflect on their responses.

4.4.2 Coding

Our coding approach followed an abductive strategy, combining elements of both deductive and inductive coding to structure and interpret our data. By transcribing interviews and coding the content, we could systematically organize our findings and identify key themes relevant to our research (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012:169).

Initially, we employed deductive coding, where our theoretical framework and findings from our literature review provided a structured foundation for our coding scheme (Appendix 5). This ensured that our analysis was guided by existing concepts, particularly in relation to localization, challenges, and trust (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:175). However, as we progressed, we also incorporated inductive coding to account for unexpected themes and patterns emerging from the data. This iterative process allowed us to refine and expand our coding categories based on empirical findings rather than limiting ourselves strictly to theoretical assumptions (Dubois & Gadde, 2002:559).

Theme	Description
Organizational background and collaboration	• The role, mission and history of the organization • Their view on the collaboration with international partners • Efforts made towards localization
Funding	• Financial dependence • Donors impact • Funding constraints • Impact of US Aid • Bureaucratic requirements
Power imbalances	• How project decisions are made • Who has control • How funding influences local decision-making
Trust and relationship	• Factors that build or weaken trust in INGOs including: ◦ Ability ◦ Benevolence ◦ Integrity

Tabel 1: Coding scheme (Appendix 5)

To enhance the reliability, all interviews were coded collaboratively. Each group member initially coded a set of interviews before exchanging them with others for review. This collaborative coding process ensured consistency in theme identification and minimized individual subjectivity. By involving multiple coders and enabling cross-validation, the approach strengthened the overall trustworthiness and interpretative reliability of our qualitative data analysis (Andersen, Hansen & Klemmensen, 2012:103).

4.5 Ethical considerations

As we conducted interviews, it was crucial to consider the ethical aspects guiding our research. This required us to anticipate potential outcomes and implement measures to ensure a positive experience for both participants and us while striving for the most effective research results.

Given the significant impact of the withdrawal of funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on numerous local organizations worldwide, many of which now face heightened financial uncertainty and operational risks, we carefully considered our selection of interview participants (Harter, 2025). Our approach was guided by ethical and methodological considerations, ensuring that those we engaged with had the necessary resources to participate without undue burden.

We prioritized selecting individuals and organizations that could provide valuable insights while minimizing potential risks to their operations or reputations. In doing so, we assessed factors such as their level of exposure to funding cuts, their ability to allocate time for the interview, and any possible repercussions their participation might entail. Additionally, we remained mindful of power dynamics, ensuring that interviewees were not pressured into participation and had full autonomy in deciding whether to engage with our research.

By implementing these considerations, we aimed to conduct ethical and responsible qualitative research that accounted for the vulnerabilities of affected organizations while ensuring the reliability and integrity of our data collection process.

Regardless of our choice of participants, qualitative research is inherently shaped by values and functions as a social practice, necessitating awareness of ethical concerns. Brinkmann (2015) identifies four key ethical dimensions relevant to qualitative research, which we incorporated into our study; *informed consent, confidentiality*, *consequences*, and *the researcher's role* (Ibid.:597-599).

Ensuring informed consent is a fundamental ethical principle in research, as it guarantees that participants fully understand the study's purpose before deciding to take part. This process involves providing adequate information, emphasizing voluntary participation, and allowing individuals the freedom to withdraw at any time (Ibid.:598). To uphold this, we sent an introductory email to prospective interviewees, outlining our project's objectives and explaining how their insights would be valuable. This allowed them to reflect on the subject matter and determine whether they were willing to participate.

Another key step in obtaining informed consent was the preparation of consent forms (Appendix 6). These forms were designed to ensure that participants clearly understood the nature of their involvement and what they were agreeing to. The consent form provided an overview of the project's purpose, identified the data controller, and included details about the supervisor. It also explained the rationale behind the research and outlined the specific research question.

Both informed consent and confidentiality, along with the consent form in its entirety, served as safeguards to prevent any negative consequences for participants (Ibid.:599). By clearly communicating the focus of our research, the questions we intended to ask, and who would have access to the collected data, we aimed to uphold transparency. This approach allowed participants to make fully informed decisions about their involvement, assessing whether participation posed any potential risks or significant consequences for them. Additionally, by granting them the option to withdraw consent at any stage, we ensured that they could disengage from the study should any unforeseen risks arise.

Finally, we prioritized transparency in defining our research role (Ibid.). The consent form specified that the researcher was the data controller, responsible for the handling and processing of personal data. It also acknowledged participants' rights regarding their data and ensured compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Furthermore, the form outlined the researcher's commitment to maintaining confidentiality, responding to data access requests, making corrections when needed, and securely deleting data in cases where consent has been withdrawn.

THEORY

This section presents our theoretical framework, combining Mayer, Davis and Schoorman's Model of Trust, and Moyo's Dead Aid. Furthermore, we will explain how the theories compliment each other.

5. Theory

This section outlines the theoretical framework that informs our investigation into the challenges local partners experience during the localization process and how local actors experience being met with trust in their collaboration with international organizations. We will start by presenting Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's theory on Organizational Trust following a presentation of Moyo's perspective of Dead Aid. Lastly, we will explain how we combine the perspectives of the two theories in this thesis.

Given that localization often involves collaboration between diverse actors, each with different organizational structures, cultural backgrounds, and goals, the perception of trust may be crucial for successful partnerships. We will focus on organizational trust as it pertains to local partners' perspectives on their collaborative relationships. Drawing on the work of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), we explore their model of trust, which emphasizes the role of the trustor's perception of the trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity, alongside the importance of risk-taking in relationships. This model is particularly relevant as it allows us to understand how local partners assess trustworthiness and how their willingness to collaborate may be influenced by their perceptions of the other party's competence, goodwill, and honesty.

Additionally, we will employ Moyo's (2010) perspective of Dead Aid as a theoretical framework to critically assess the impact of development aid on economic and political structures in recipient countries. This theoretical approach was identified inductively after conducting our interviews, as funding emerged as a central theme in the dynamics of collaboration. The prominence of financial aid in shaping partnerships and decision-making processes highlighted an interesting perspective on the structural role of aid in development efforts, which we wish to explore with the use of Moyo's perspective of Dead Aid. Moyo's argument, which challenges traditional notions of foreign aid as an inherently positive force (Ibid.), serves as a lens through which we examine both the intended and unintended consequences of aid dependency. By incorporating Dead Aid into our analysis, we hope to explore the structural limitations of aid-based economic models and assess whether they contribute to long-term development or perpetuate cycles of stagnation and reliance on external funding.

While our study focuses on the local perspective, we acknowledge that this approach inherently limits our scope to one side of the collaboration. By relying solely on data from local organizations, we gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of trust in partnerships with international actors. However, this means that the perspectives of international organizations – how they perceive trust and localization – are not directly represented in our analysis. This focus aligns with our research objective of amplifying local voices, but it is important to recognize that a broader, more comparative approach could provide additional insights.

5.1 Organizational Trust

In their 1995 article, Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman emphasize the growing importance of trust in organizations, especially as workforce diversity and organizational structures evolve. The authors define trust as:

> “(..).*the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party*" (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995:712).

They highlight that trust involves taking a risk, as it requires vulnerability. Additionally, they distinguish trust from similar concepts such as cooperation, confidence, and predictability, which are often confused with trust (Ibid.).

To illustrate their concept, Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman have created a model of trust that explains how trust forms and influences risk-taking. The model highlights that trust is shaped by the trustor’s perception of the trustee’s ability, benevolence, and integrity, and that trust, when it outweighs perceived risk, leads to greater collaboration and cooperation. In this context, the trustor is the individual or entity who places trust in another, while the trustee is the person or entity being trusted (Ibid.:173).

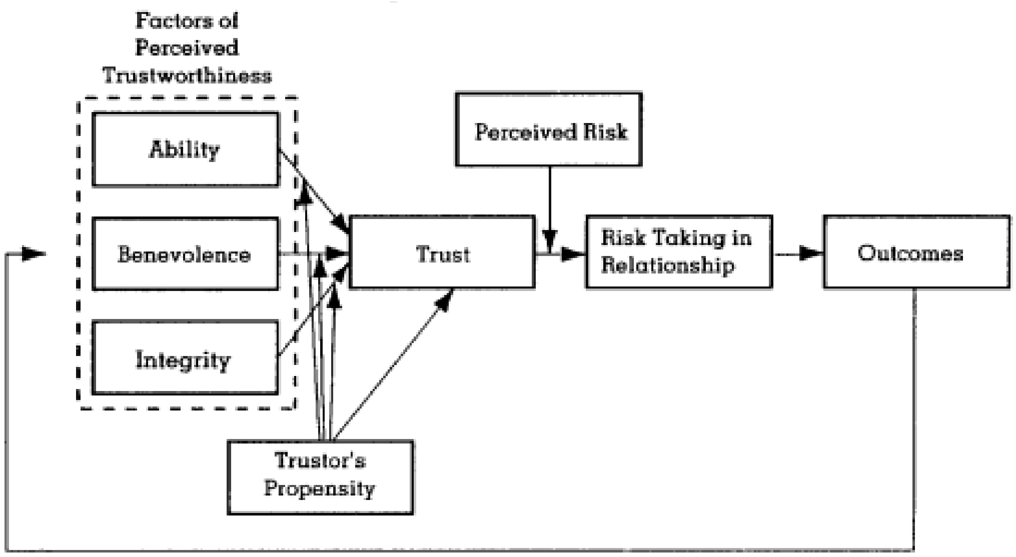

Figure 1: Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) proposed Model of Trust

In the following sections, the key components of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's model of trust will be explained.

5.1.1 Trustor's propensity

The trustor plays a crucial role in determining the level of trust they place in others. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) introduce the concept of propensity to trust, which refers to an individual's natural tendency to trust others. This tendency varies, with some individuals more inclined to trust while others are more skeptical and cautious (Ibid.:714-715). This propensity is influenced by factors such as personality, developmental experiences, and cultural background. Those with a high propensity to trust are more likely to trust others without evidence, while those with a low propensity may hesitate, even when trust is justified (Ibid.:715-716).

5.1.2 Factors of perceived trustworthiness

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) argue that trust in a party is largely influenced by the trustworthiness of the trustee, which is shaped by their *ability*, *benevolence*, and *integrity*. These attributes combine to form the foundation of trust, with trust being built on perceptions of the trustee's competence, care, and honesty (Ibid.:717).

Ability is referred to as the set of skills, competencies, and characteristics that allow a trustee to have influence in a specific domain or area. This means that someone may be trusted in certain tasks because they are skilled in that area, but not necessarily in other areas where they lack expertise. It is the trustors who assess whether the trustee has the necessary expertise and competence to fulfill expectations (Ibid.:717-718).

Benevolence reflects the trustee's genuine concern for the trustor's well-being, beyond any selfish or profit-driven motives. Benevolence reflects a positive attitude or goodwill toward the trustor, and it ensures that trust not only depends on competence but also on the intention behind actions (Ibid.:719).

Integrity involves the trustor's perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable. It involves both the trustee's commitment to these principles and the trustor's judgment of their acceptability. This perception is shaped by consistency in the trustee's actions and alignment with the trustor's values (Ibid.:719-720).

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman explain that while these factors are interrelated, they are independent and can vary. Early in a relationship, integrity is most important for trust formation, but as the relationship develops, the trustee's benevolence becomes more significant (Ibid.:722).

In this thesis, we apply these three factors to analyze how local actors perceive international organizations. Specifically, we examine whether local partners view international organizations as competent in their ability to support local efforts, whether they perceive them as genuinely committed to their well-being, and whether their actions align with stated principles. By using this framework, we aim to explore how trust is perceived by the local actors and how these perceptions influence the dynamics of collaboration between international and local organizations.

5.1.3 Risk-Taking in Relationships

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) argue that risk is a key element in understanding trust and its behavioral outcomes. They differentiate between trust and trusting behavior by explaining that trust involves being willing to be vulnerable, while trusting behavior requires actually taking a risk based on that trust. If the level of trust exceeds the perceived risk, the person is more likely to take the risk (Ibid.:724-725). They introduce the concept of *Risk-Taking in Relationships (RTR)*, where trust leads to actions that involve vulnerability. This behavior depends on both the level of trust and the perception of risk. Their model shows how trust influences risk behavior, and how context, like power balance or available alternatives, can impact the perception of risk (Ibid.:726-727).

5.1.4 Outcomes

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) highlight the importance of understanding how trust evolves over time. Trust is dynamic and influenced by past interactions and outcomes. Positive outcomes from trusting behavior increase the trustor's perception of the trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity, while negative outcomes decrease trust. This evolution of trust can be seen in feedback loops, where outcomes of risk-taking behaviors directly influence future perceptions of the trustee. In short, trust is not static but is continuously shaped by contextual factors and past interactions (Ibid.:728).

5.1.5 Context of the theory

Although Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) model of organizational trust primarily focuses on trust between individuals within organizations, we apply it in our research to examine trust between organizations seen from the perspective of the local actors. This application is not without criticism, as the model was originally developed to understand individual-level relationships, and may not fully account for the complexities involved in inter-organizational relationships, such as power imbalances, organizational differences, and varying goals. Despite this limitation, we choose to use the model because its core concepts remain highly relevant when considering trust between organizations. The model provides a solid foundation for understanding how trust is built based on perceptions of competence and intentions, which may be crucial in localization processes where local partners must navigate complex and uncertain collaborative environments.

Furthermore, it is worth considering whether the theory sufficiently accounts for cultural differences in how trust is formed and expressed. While Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman highlight the growing importance of trust in organizations, particularly in response to increasing workforce diversity and evolving organizational structures, we are aware that their model may not fully reflect the cultural variations between the Global North and South. These differences in how trust is understood and practiced may limit the model's ability to capture trust-building processes across diverse settings. Since our study focuses on the perspectives of local actors, it is important to acknowledge that trust in the Global South may be shaped by different cultural logics. However, as our analysis is grounded in the perspectives of local actors, we apply the theory with an awareness that it is their cultural understandings and expressions of trust we are interpreting through this framework.

Another important context to consider is the age of the theory. Since it was published in 1995, some aspects may not fully address the contemporary challenges organizations face today. However, we believe the theoretical framework presented by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) still holds significant relevance for contemporary research. One key reason is its significant academic impact, as evidenced by its 661 citations, some of which are as recent as 2022 and 2023 (JSTOR, n.d.). The continued referencing of this text indicates that scholars still find its insights valuable and applicable to current discussions. Furthermore, foundational theoretical texts often retain their importance as new research emerges. Many fields build upon, rather than replace, established theories. If a work continues to be cited decades later, it suggests its core ideas remain relevant.

While the theory may not capture all the nuances of modern inter-organizational trust, particularly in the context of globalization, it still offers a valuable framework for our investigation. By applying this model, we can better understand the trust dynamics that influence local partners' perceptions of collaboration and how trust can be maintained despite the challenges inherent in these relationships.

5.2 Dead Aid

In *Dead Aid – Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa*, Moyo (2010) presents a critique of development aid to Africa, arguing that aid perpetuates poverty and dependency, rather than alleviating it. The claim is, that despite receiving over $300 billion in aid since 1970, sub-Saharan African countries continue to suffer from corruption, disease, poverty, and aid-dependency (Ibid.:3). Moyo maintains that this persistent aid dependency is a key factor preventing Africa from achieving sustainable economic growth.

She describes this dependency as keeping African nations in a "*perpetual childlike state*", where they are seen as incapable of self-reliant development without Western intervention (Ibid.:32).

Moyo contends that aid has not lived up to expectations and that it exacerbates the cycle of poverty by fostering inefficiencies and corruption. She references a World Bank report which found that 85% of aid was not used for its intended purpose. This inefficiency stems, in part, from the conditions attached to aid, which often force recipient countries to spend it on goods and services from donor countries, thus bypassing local suppliers and weakening the local economy (Ibid.:38-39).

Additionally, Moyo argues that aid has a detrimental impact on social capital. She defines social capital as the 'invisible glue' that binds business, economy, and politics together, asserting that aid weakens this essential trust. She further contends that aid reduces the accountability of governments to their citizens, leading to weaker political and economic institutions. This, in turn, erodes the trust necessary for long-term development. Rather than strengthening social capital, foreign aid undermines it by making governments more reliant on external donors than on their own citizens (Ibid.:58).

Figure 2: A visualization of Moyo's critique of development aid, designed by the group.

One of the key ways we will use Dead Aid in our research is by examining the extent to which aid fosters economic dependency rather than self-sustaining growth. In our analysis, we apply Moyo's perspective to assess whether foreign aid functions as a catalyst for development or whether it, conversely, creates disincentives for innovation, entrepreneurship, and private-sector investment. Furthermore, we utilize Dead Aid to explore how foreign aid shapes economic and political dynamics at the local level. While Moyo argues that aid dependency can encourage corruption, reduce governmental accountability, and erode the social contract between governments and their citizens, our research focuses on how these effects manifest in the experiences of local organizations. By examining their experiences, we assess whether donor priorities influence decision-making and create dependencies that mirror the broader structural issues Moyo describes. Through this lens, we discuss whether aid inadvertently reinforces inefficient governance structures at the micro level rather than fostering sustainable local development and self-reliance.

Moyo not only critiques the current aid system but also offers alternative solutions. She proposes a radical shift from aid dependency, advocating for a world without aid. She suggests that Africa's development must move away from aid and toward market-driven solutions such as private-sector growth and investment. These market-based solutions, she believes, will foster sustainable growth and economic independence (Ibid.:145). Moyo envisions a five-year phase-out period during which aid would be gradually removed, forcing African nations to adopt self-sustaining economic models (Ibid.:144). She argues that this transition is "*dead easy*" to implement, requiring only political will from both African leaders and international actors (Ibid.:148).

Moyo concludes her book by condemning the historical role of the West in perpetuating Africa's dependency and calls for an end to the cycle: "*Make the cycle stop*" (Ibid.:154). She argues that the West's approach; giving "*something for nothing*", has contributed significantly to the problem. Aid has often been given without regard for its long-term effects or outcomes, resulting in a cycle of dependence and failure. To break this cycle, Moyo believes the West must take responsibility by ceasing aid and supporting initiatives that promote market-driven growth and self-reliance (Ibid.:150-152).

Figure 3: A visualization of Moyo's proposed solutions to development aid, designed by the group.

Within our research, we use this aspect of Dead Aid to assess how Moyo’s proposed solutions might function in practice, drawing on insights from the local organizations. By examining their experiences, we assess whether a shift away from aid dependency toward private-sector-led growth is feasible and aligned with local realities.

5.2.1 Context of the theory

Even though Moyo’s Dead Aid perspective provides us with the intended critical lens, it is important to consider its historical context. Published in 2010, the theory emerged when international development efforts were largely donor-driven, with limited emphasis on local ownership. As described in the introduction, the push for localization gained significant momentum following the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. This means that in the years following Dead Aid, the development landscape has shifted, with an increasing focus on localization efforts, prioritizing locally led solutions, and reducing reliance on top-down aid structures. While Moyo’s critique remains relevant, the expansion of localization initiatives raises questions about whether her proposed market-driven alternatives adequately account for these evolving development strategies. We recognize this aspect of the theory, but we still find it relevant to use in examining both the intended and unintended consequences of aid dependency.

Furthermore, it is also important to consider the one-sided nature of Moyo's argument. While Dead Aid highlights the negative aspects of foreign aid, it arguably overemphasizes these issues while overlooking the positive roles aid has played in reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, and stabilizing fragile states. We therefore use the theory with our own critical lens and with the experience of the local organizations to be able to analyze a more nuanced approach with both the challenges and successes of aid.

By applying Dead Aid to our empirical findings, we not only highlight the challenges associated with aid but also open up a broader discussion about the feasibility of alternative models. Together with the second theoretical framework used in this thesis, Dead Aid allows us to present a more nuanced analysis of the complexities surrounding localization.

5.3 How the theories work together

To address our research question—′*What challenges do the local organizations experience in the localization processes, and how does their perceived trust towards the international organizations influence the collaboration between international and local organizations?*′ we combine two theoretical perspectives that, while focusing on different aspects of international aid, complement each other in illuminating both interpersonal and structural dimensions of localization. The research question is twofold, and we therefore apply the theories accordingly: Moyo is used to explore the challenges in the collaboration, while Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) is applied to understand how trust influences the relationship between local and international organizations. In order to visualize this point, we have developed the figure below to illustrate how the selected theories can help investigate our problem area:

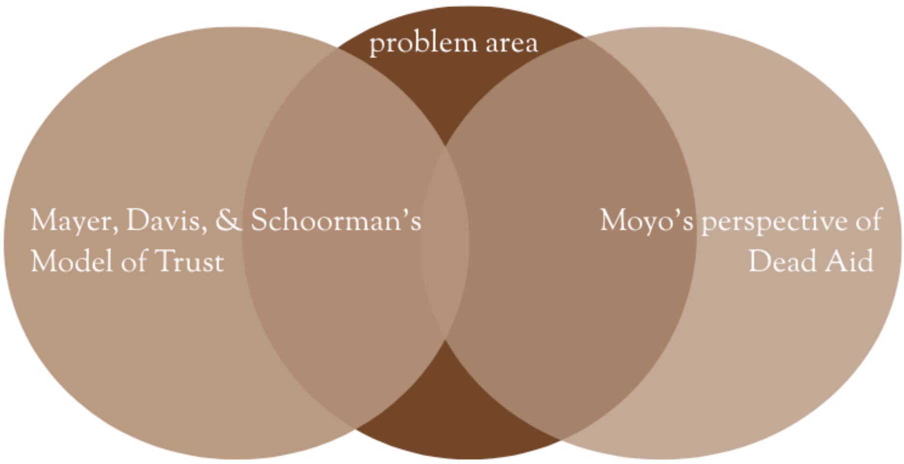

Figure 4: A visualization of how the theories may potentially address the problem area, designed by the group.

As shown in the figure, the theories intersect slightly, complementing each other in certain areas. However, they also illuminate different aspects of the problem, each focusing on distinct dimensions. Additionally, both theories touch on themes that fall outside the boundaries of our specific problem field, indicating areas that could be explored further using other theoretical perspectives.

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) Model of Trust helps us understand how local organizations evaluate their international partners based on perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity, and how these perceptions shape their willingness to engage in collaboration.

Their model allows us to zoom in on the micro-level, examining how local actors interpret the intentions and competencies of their international counterparts. It offers a relational framework for exploring how trust is formed, challenged, or maintained within localization partnerships. Importantly, it also draws attention to risk—a central factor in collaboration. Local organizations may take significant risks in trusting international partners, especially when they lack decision-making power or face uncertain funding environments.

However, trust does not exist in a vacuum. This is where Moyo's (2010) Dead Aid provides a critical macro-level lens. Her critique of the international aid system as one that perpetuates dependency, inefficiency, and power asymmetry enables us to examine the structural forces that shape localization partnerships. While Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's model focuses on trust as a function of interpersonal and inter-organizational dynamics, Moyo highlights how systemic imbalances in financial control and donor-driven priorities may erode the very conditions needed for equitable collaboration.

The integration of these two perspectives thus provides a more comprehensive understanding of localization. It allows us to explore how trust is negotiated within an uneven playing field. We use Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman to trace how trust is perceived and acted upon at the local level, while Moyo helps us question the sustainability of these partnerships within a system that may ultimately reinforce the very inequalities localization seeks to overcome.

ANALYSIS

This section presents our analysis, combining empirical insights with theoretical perspectives to explore five key themes: collaboration, funding, bureaucratic demands, power imbalances, and trust.

6. Analysis

This analysis examines the challenges local organizations face in the localization process, with particular attention to how their perceived trust in international organizations influences the dynamics of the collaboration. Drawing on qualitative interview data from three local organizations PLK, DUNK and ICRD, the analysis is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) Model of Trust and Moyo's (2009) perspective of Dead Aid, these are further supported by scholars presented in our literature review. Together, these perspectives allow for a critical examination of both the relational and structural dimensions of localization.

The analysis is structured into five key sections, each addressing a different aspect of the localization experience as described by our interviewees. The first section*, the collaboration with international organizations*, explores how local actors perceive their partnerships with international donors, covering an introduction to the collaboration. The second section, *the role of funding*, examines how financial dependency affects local autonomy and long-term sustainability, while also reflecting on the dual nature of funding as both enabling and limiting.

In the third section, *bureaucratic and external requirements*, we analyze how administrative demands and donor-driven frameworks shape program implementation and constrain local flexibility. This includes challenges related to reporting, compliance, and fitting local initiatives into standardized templates. The fourth section, *power imbalances*, engages more directly with questions of control and authority, considering how decision-making processes and donor influence affect local ownership.

In the final section, *trust*, we apply Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's Model of Trust to explore how local organizations assess the trustworthiness of their international partners. We focus on perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity, and examine how this shape local actors' willingness to engage in collaborative relationships.

By integrating a relational understanding of trust with a structural critique of aid dependency, this analysis aims to present a nuanced account of localization in practice. The dual theoretical lens enables us to highlight both how local organizations navigate trust within collaboration, and how broader systemic conditions such as funding, bureaucracy, and power frame the possibilities and limitations of equitable partnerships.

6.1 The collaboration with international organizations

To set the scene for the collaboration between local and international organizations, this section explores how local organizations experience their partnerships with international actors. Drawing on insights from our interviews, this section explores how these partnerships are initiated, with a focus on the roles of financial support, knowledge exchange and visibility, and the role of time in shaping partnerships. These dimensions provide a practical entry point for understanding the collaboration context, laying the foundation for the rest of the analysis.

As described in the literature review, Taithe (2019) highlights the importance of local actors in humanitarian efforts, emphasizing how local organizations, driven by personal connections and community networks, are better positioned to respond to crises. This emphasis on local knowledge and community engagement is reflected in the ways that local organizations initiate collaborations with international partners. For both DUNK and PLK, the collaboration can begin from both sides reaching out. The interviewee from PLK explains that there have been instances where they have proactively reached out to international organizations, as well as several cases where international organizations have approached them (Appendix 4:3). This reflects a more balanced approach, where both local and international organizations actively reach out to each other based on mutual interests and needs. The interviewee from DUNK describes their experience where international organizations actively seek out local partners:

"Most of their international partners are actually on the lookout for organizations that are working in developing countries. So we have had a lot of the collaboration started more from people finding us either on LinkedIn or social media" (Appendix 3:3).

This indicates that DUNK's collaborations tend to start with international partners identifying them as potential collaborators. This dynamic mirrors Taithe's assertion that international organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of local knowledge and the role of local organizations in providing context-specific, responsive aid.

6.1.1 Collaboration for funding

When asked how they collaborate with international partners, all three organizations highlight the role of financial support provided by their international counterparts. As described by the interviewee from ICRD, international partners play an essential role in the funding process, assisting with the development of project applications, budgets, and overall frameworks (Appendix 2:3). Also, the interviewee from PLK states that funding is a major challenge in their collaboration with international organizations. The interviewee explains that they engage with these organizations to access international funding, as "*most of the funding for NGOs in Kenya comes from abroad*" (Appendix 4:2). This underscores their financial dependency on external sources and the crucial role that international partnerships play in sustaining their work. Similarly, the interviewee from DUNK highlights the role of international partnerships in securing funding, stating:

"*If you have international partnership it is quite easy with the funding because most of their administration of the funding is done by the international partners so there is not much heavy responsibility on you*" (Appendix 3:4).

This illustrates how international partnerships can ease the burden of financial management for NGOs, enabling them to focus more on their core work rather than administrative tasks. Furthermore, the financial support can be viewed as crucial for enabling local organizations to carry out their initiatives, as without these external funds, many local actors would struggle to meet the demands of their communities. However, as noted in the literature review, financial dependence can also perpetuate the intermediary role of international organizations, where they function as gatekeepers between donors and local actors. Frennesson, Kembro, de Vries, Jahre and Van Wassenhove (2022) highlight how INGOs, while aiming to promote localization, continue to control access to funding due to donors' preference for working with larger organizations. This gatekeeping role restricts local organizations' ability to independently access resources, ultimately stifling their long-term capacity building.

6.1.2 Collaboration for knowledge exchange and visibility

In addition to financial resources, knowledge exchange and visibility are further aspects of the collaboration between local and international organizations. The interviewee from PLK emphasizes that international partners bring technical expertise, especially in areas where local organizations may lack capacity (Appendix 4:2). The interviewee from PLK further elaborates:

> *"We have worked with international organizations in the areas of volunteership. We've had those exchange programs, volunteers, students and all that for the purpose of sharing knowledge and learning. Finally, we've also worked with international organizations for visibility"* (Appendix 4:2).

This exchange of resources can be seen as beneficial, as local organizations gain access to technical expertise and global networks, which help to build their capacity. However, a more critical lens can be used to understand the potential risks of such collaborations. While the sharing of knowledge and visibility can be empowering, some may argue that it can also perpetuate dependency on international organizations.

As described in the theory chapter, Moyo critiques how aid – whether financial or technical – can reinforce a cycle of dependency. She posits that aid keeps African countries and local organizations in a "*perpetual childlike state,*" perpetuating the idea that these entities cannot independently thrive without external support. In this context, technical support and visibility provided by international partners may unintentionally hinder the development of local capacities, reinforcing the belief that local organizations cannot lead on their own without assistance.

6.1.3 The impact of time in the collaboration

Our interviews revealed that the longevity of partnerships between local organizations and international actors may play a crucial role in shaping the collaboration. In the early stages of collaboration, local organizations can often find themselves in a dependent position relative to international partners, as illustrated by the interviewee from DUNK's reflection on their early experiences:

"*Previously when we started working with international organizations, it was pretty much whatever they proposed, you say yes to it because you are in need. Its a small organization and there is this power dynamic and all of that stuff. But after a while, given our experience over the last decade, we also started having negotiations about what the project should look like, considering the context and the needs of the local partners*" (Appendix 3:2).

This statement illustrates the initial imbalance in power dynamics, where international organizations, holding financial and technical resources, can intentionally or unintentionally dictate the terms of collaboration. In such cases, local partners have limited influence over decision-making, reinforcing a hierarchical relationship. This dynamic aligns with Contu and Girei's (2014) argument that partnerships between INGOs and local NGOs are often shaped by an inherent power asymmetry, with INGOs setting the agenda and controlling the flow of resources in the early stages.

However, DUNK's experience also demonstrates that these dynamics can evolve over time. Long-term engagement enables local organizations to build expertise, confidence, and negotiating power. Instead of passively accepting predefined projects, they gradually become active participants in shaping initiatives that align with their needs and local realities. This reflects Contu and Girei's observation that, while INGOs often dominate partnerships at the outset, local organizations may gain more control as they establish credibility and develop stronger negotiation capabilities.

Both DUNK and PLK emphasize the crucial role of long-term partnerships in fostering sustainability, stability, and mutual understanding. The interviewee from PLK underscores the limitations of short-term engagements, arguing that frequent shifts in international partnerships disrupt project continuity and weaken long-term impact. The interviewee argues that the international organizations should work towards long-term relationships with local organizations (Appendix 4:5). This reflection highlights that without continuity, local organizations may struggle to build a good partnership. Furthermore, the interviewee from PLK argues that sustained partnerships foster deeper mutual understanding and stronger collaboration over time:

“Because you just come in (...) and then you are gone(..). So, I keep shifting between understanding organizations, but if we can build long-term relationships that are funded even 10-20 years, then you find that we get to understand each other” (Appendix 4:5).

The quote highlights the challenge of short-term engagements between organizations and the need for long-term relationships. The interviewee points out that when organizations come in briefly and then leave, it becomes difficult to develop a deep understanding of each other. However, if partnerships are funded for 10–20 years, they allow for stronger relationships, better mutual understanding, and more sustainable collaboration. This perspective underscores the benefits of extended engagement, where both parties gradually develop a shared working culture, refine strategies based on experience, and navigate challenges collectively. Long-term collaborations not only enable continuous capacity-building and shared learning but also create opportunities to address power imbalances that often characterize initial stages of partnerships.

6.1.4 Summary of the section

The section, *the collaboration with international organizations,* examined how local organizations experience their partnerships with international actors, focusing on the roles of funding, knowledge exchange, visibility, and the importance of time. Drawing on interviews with DUNK, PLK, and ICRD, the analysis highlighted that financial support emerged as a central element of their collaborations with international organizations. While international partnerships ease administrative burdens and enable local organizations to implement their work, the analysis also revealed a strong dependence on external funding.

Beyond funding, collaborations also involve knowledge exchange and visibility. International partners provide technical expertise and global networks, which can enhance local capacity. However, following Moyo's critique, the analysis also raised concerns that this support may unintentionally perpetuate dependency, limiting the autonomy and long-term development of local actors.

Finally, the section emphasized the role of time in shaping collaboration dynamics. Early-stage partnerships may reflect power asymmetries, with local organizations accepting externally driven agendas due to financial need. However, long-term engagement allows local actors to gain confidence, build negotiating power, and shape projects in ways that reflect local needs. As noted by both DUNK and PLK, sustainable, long-term partnerships foster mutual understanding, continuity, and more equitable collaboration.

6.2 The role of funding

As seen in the previous section, funding plays a critical role in shaping the relationships between international organizations and local actors, influencing trust, autonomy, and long-term sustainability. Our research highlights that local actors have encountered both positive and negative aspects of funding processes, as well as the challenges that may arise from these dynamics. In this section of the analysis, we will examine the consequences, benefits, and challenges associated with funding in greater depth. This analysis will be framed through the perspectives of scholars from our literature review and analyzed with Moyo's (2009) discussion on aid dependency.

6.2.1 Financial dependence and its consequences

When examining local organizations' perception of the collaborations with international organizations, a recurring theme that emerged was the challenges related to funding. This issue was highlighted in our research, where interviewees from DUNK, IRCD and PLK expressed an ambivalent standpoint over their reliance on external donor funding.

In our interviews, all of the organizations particularly noted the dual nature of donor funding, while it provides essential resources, it also imposes significant constraints. As an example of this the interviewee from DUNK states, "*I would say it is a blessing but it also has its own curse*" (Appendix 3:4). This comment reflects the contradictory nature of financial dependence, where external resources are necessary for operations but simultaneously constrain the organization's ability to set and pursue its own agenda.

This theme aligns with Moyo's theory on aid dependency, which critiques the financial relationship between Western international organizations and local entities, particularly in Africa. Moyo's work provides a valuable framework for understanding how continued reliance on donor funding perpetuates cycles of dependence, ultimately limiting the autonomy of local organizations.

The statement mentioned above from the interviewee from DUNK, echoes Moyo's argument that financial dependence on aid creates an environment where local actors are subordinated to the priorities and restrictions set by donors, which limits their capacity for independent decision-making and self-determined development.

The constraints imposed by donor funding can also lead to a loss of decision-making power, as Moyo suggests. In our research, the interviewee from ICRD (Appendix 2:6), PLK (Appendix 4:2) and DUNK highlights the challenges they face due to the lack of governmental support for local organizations in their countries. The interviewee from DUNK specifically remarks:

"*We do not have government subventions in Ghana and maybe in other African countries we do not have this, so we also heavily rely on either local donations or international relations to direct this funding" (*Appendix 3:6).

This quote highlights the limited funding options available to local organizations, emphasizing their reliance on either local donations or international donors. The absence of government support forces them into a dependency on external funding sources. This lack of government funding further reinforces their dependency on international donors, which can restrict the scope of their activities and force them to align their goals with donor interests rather than the specific needs of their communities. This dependence underscores Moyo's argument that prolonged reliance on aid prevents organizations from developing sustainable, locally owned solutions. Instead, local organizations become increasingly dependent on external funds, weakening their capacity to innovate and grow independently.

Moreover, the dependency on external funding can perpetuate a form of economic and political inequality, as the priorities of donor organizations often reflect the interests of the donor countries rather than the needs of local communities. The interviewee from ICRD states:

"Finally, they will give you the money, but when you start implementing, doing things, they start sneaking in some of their agendas that they have not discuss, so, yeah, it happens many

times that donors come in with their own interest without declaring, and then they start manipulating" (Appendix 2:1).

This statement underscores how donor funding can come with hidden conditions, gradually shifting the focus of local organizations away from their original missions. The interviewee from ICRD highlights how donors initially present their support as neutral but later introduce undisclosed agendas, ultimately manipulating the direction of projects. This manipulation can not only diminish the autonomy of local organizations but also force them to prioritize donor expectations over the actual needs of the communities they serve. As a result, rather than fostering genuine partnerships, these funding relationships can create imbalanced power dynamics where local actors have little control over the initiatives they implement. In line with Moyo's theory, the ongoing cycle of financial dependence creates an environment where local organizations are trapped in donor-driven priorities, weakening their ability to advocate for the interests of their constituents or pursue independent and context-specific solutions.

In contrast, the interviewee from DUNK shared a more balanced perspective on donor funding. While acknowledging both the benefits and challenges of these partnerships as previously mentioned, they ultimately expressed a positive experience, stating, *"so far the experience has been good for us"* (Appendix 3:4). This suggests that, despite the potential constraints imposed by donors, some organizations are able to navigate these relationships in a way that supports their objectives and capacity building.

Our findings demonstrate that financial dependence on international donors can limit local organizations' autonomy and long-term sustainability, reinforcing Moyo's critique that aid sustains a cycle of reliance rather than fostering true empowerment. However, perspectives on donor funding are not entirely negative. The interviewee from DUNK acknowledged both challenges and benefits, ultimately describing their experience as positive (Appendix 3:4). This suggests that, while aid dependency can be restrictive, some organizations successfully navigate these partnerships.

6.2.2 The benefit from donor funding

While our interviewees expressed frustration with the constraints imposed by donor funding, as highlighted in the previous section, our research also revealed a more nuanced perspective that acknowledges its significant benefits. Despite Moyo's (2009) critique that donor funding creates power imbalances and cycles of dependency, it is also evident that financial support from international organizations plays a crucial role in sustaining local organizations. All of our interviewees emphasize that, in the absence of substantial alternative funding sources, international aid is an important resource for their survival and operational capacity as mentioned in the previous section (Appendix 3:6, 2:6, 4:2).

The interviewee from PLK points out that while financial dependence on international donors creates structural limitations, local organizations often have no viable alternatives, the interviewee states:

"First of all, there is the major issue which is funding. We work with international organizations as a leeway to seek international funding because then, as you know, most of the funding for NGOs in Kenya comes from abroad" (Appendix 4:2).

This statement highlights the reality that local organizations, particularly in regions where domestic funding opportunities are scarce, rely on international partnerships not out of choice but out of necessity, as we also addressed in the last section. Moyo critiques these financial relationships as reinforcing donor dominance, but her perspective does not fully account for the lack of domestic infrastructure to support local organizations. Without international funding, many local organizations would struggle to operate, let alone provide essential services to their communities.

Beyond just financial survival, all of the interviewees also described donor funding as an enabler of institutional growth and capacity-building. The interviewee from PLK elaborate on how they gain technical capacity in the collaboration with the international organization (Appendix 4:2). The interviewee from ICRD also emphasizes that the role of international donors is very crucial to strengthen the capacity of local organizations (Appendix 2:6). Furthermore, the interviewee from DUNK shared their experience of how international partnerships have strengthened their internal operations, the interviewee states:

"We invested in developing a strategic plan and put all the policies and procedures in place, which is also one of the benefits of working with international partners because you also start developing your internal capacity" (Appendix 3:4).

This insight challenges Moyo's argument that donor funding inherently weakens local autonomy. While financial dependence can create restrictions, it can also serve as a mechanism for strengthening organizational structures, improving governance, and enhancing long-term sustainability. Through strategic planning and policy development, donor funding has, in some cases, provided local organizations with the tools to operate more effectively and independently in the long run.

Moreover, as earlier described, the interviewee from DUNK acknowledged that financial relationships with international organizations do not have to be solely transactional, DUNK also sees the benefit of building strategic plans together (Appendix: 3:4). Furthermore, the interviewee from PLK also stressed the importance of partnerships that extend beyond monetary support, fostering collaboration and long-term impact. The interviewee states:

> *"It must not necessarily be through financial benefit, we can relate beyond donor funding. So, that then we are, we are addressing these challenges over a long period of time and that will really bring a lot of impact"* (Appendix 4:5).

This perspective suggests that while donor funding is often essential, sustainable change requires deeper, more meaningful partnerships between international and local organizations. Instead of focusing solely on financial transactions, there is potential for collaboration that fosters knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and long-term impact.

In contrast to Moyo's argument that aid perpetuates dependence, our research reveals that donor funding can also function as an empowering force when structured effectively. While financial reliance on external donors does present challenges, it is also a necessary and beneficial resource for local organizations, particularly in regions where alternative funding sources are scarce. Furthermore, when these partnerships go beyond financial support and include capacity-building efforts, they can contribute to the long-term development and resilience of local organizations. Thus, rather than viewing donor funding as purely restrictive, it is essential to recognize its dual nature both as a potential source of dependency and as a tool for growth and empowerment.

6.2.3 The challenges of donor funding

When talking about funding, and in the context of our research, it is unavoidable to address the current withdrawal of USAID. As mentioned in the introduction, the withdrawal of USAID has a big impact on global humanitarian and development efforts, which also had an impact on our collaboration with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), as mentioned in the methodology section. This was further discussed by the interviewee from ICRD, and therefore a concern in discussions of aid dependency.

As previously mentioned Moyo (2009) argues that reliance on international aid creates an inherently unstable financial foundation for local organizations, leaving them exposed to external political and economic decisions beyond their control. This perspective is reflected in our research, where the interviewee from ICRD expressed concerns about the consequences of funding cuts, particularly in cases where a large percentage of an organization's budget is dependent on a single donor. For instance, when asked about the challenges when working with international organizations, the interviewee from ICRD described their reliance on U.S. government funding. The interviewee states:

"50% of our budget came from the US government. So, to answer your question, it is now becoming very, very hard" (Appendix 2:6).

This illustrates the financial vulnerability inherent in donor dependence. When international funding is reduced or withdrawn, organizations face immediate operational challenges, often struggling to sustain essential programs. Moyo's critique is particularly relevant here, as she argues that donor dependency fosters an artificial sense of security, leaving organizations without a stable, self-sustaining financial base. However, while Moyo sees this as a necessary correction that should force local actors to develop alternative funding models, our research suggests that the most immediate consequence is a crisis for both organizations and the communities they serve.

The interviewee from ICRD emphasizes how funding cuts are often dictated by the political decisions of donor governments rather than the needs on the ground. The interviewee states:

"So, it is going to become very, very hard for us to work with international donors, because they are also dictated by their governments" (Appendix 2:7).

This quote highlights how aid dependency may not just be about financial reliance but could also be about political vulnerability. In this perspective local organizations are not only financially dependent but also structurally constrained by the shifting priorities of donor governments. As the interviewee from ICRD explained, when donor governments cut funding, local organizations are left scrambling for alternative solutions. The interviewee states:

"So, if those governments are cutting funding, because their funding comes through this international organization, (...) we are going to be very, very much affected. We have to rethink how we do our fundraising, and how we do our grants" (Appendix 2:6).

This statement aligns with Moyo's critique in an unexpected way. While she argues that donor funding discourages local actors from developing independent financial strategies, the interviewee's response suggests that funding cuts can act as a catalyst for change, forcing organizations to rethink their fundraising approaches. However, as the interviewee from ICRD pointed out, without external funding from governments like the US and Denmark, local organizations are not prepared to sustain essential sectors such as health, education, and security (Appendix 2:8). Similarly, the interviewee from PLK stressed the importance of governmental accountability, emphasizing that governments must take responsibility for funding critical social services, including HIV/AIDS programs, rather than relying on international aid (Appendix 4:4).

This aligns with Moyo's argument that local governments should step up when aid is reduced. However, the reality described by our interviewee from ICRD suggests that this shift is not happening voluntarily but is instead forced by abrupt funding cuts, leaving organizations unprepared. While Moyo envisions a transition toward financial independence, her theory does not fully account for the destabilizing effects of sudden aid withdrawal, particularly in essential sectors such as health, education, and security. This raises a crucial question: if reducing aid dependency is necessary, how can it be managed in a way that does not disproportionately harm the most vulnerable populations?

This highlights a key contradiction in Moyo's perspective. While she advocates for the reduction of aid dependency, the sudden withdrawal of funding does not immediately lead to local resilience or self-sufficiency. Instead, it can exacerbate instability, particularly in critical areas such as health, education, and security. It can be argued that Moyo's theory does not fully account for the transitional period in which organizations and communities must adapt to the loss of aid. The question then arises, if aid withdrawal is necessary, how can it be managed in a way that does not disproportionately harm the most vulnerable populations?

Beyond the financial consequences for organizations, the interviewee from ICRD also highlights the devastating effects of funding cuts on the communities they serve. The interviewee from ICRD further emphasizes the far-reaching social consequences of losing donor funding:

"90% will depend on donor aid, so what that does is that now it will affect human resources, as I was saying, it will now destroy the gains that we had gained over the years, in terms of health programming" (Appendix 2:7).

The interviewee from ICRD underscores the heavy reliance on donor aid, noting that a 90% dependency on external funding places critical sectors at significant risk. They emphasize that funding cuts would not only impact human resources but also reverse years of progress in health programs. This aligns with the perspectives which were described in the introduction, where The Guardian presented how the United States' decision to freeze foreign assistance through USAID, has played a key role in global humanitarian and development efforts. The freeze has also disrupted health services, education programs, and crisis responses, in Ethiopia, where it halted critical health programs and created life-threatening conditions. Similarly, The New York Times, as mentioned in our introduction, describes how in sub-Saharan Africa, the suspension of funding led to severe consequences in HIV care, forcing clinics in countries like Malawi, Uganda, and Kenya to turn patients away, cancel treatments, and lay off staff due to missing medical supplies. These examples highlight how the abrupt withdrawal of donor aid can send shockwaves across regions, exacerbating vulnerabilities and undoing hard-won development gains, particularly in essential services like health.

This raises a crucial counterpoint to Moyo's critique. If aid dependency has led to meaningful progress in areas such as healthcare, what happens when that aid is abruptly removed? The argument that donor funding fosters dependency overlooks the fact that many local organizations have leveraged these resources to build programs that have had tangible benefits. Therefore, a sudden loss of funding can not only encourage self-reliance, it can also risk undoing years of progress, particularly in sectors where consistent investment is necessary for long-term impact, as demonstrated by the case of USAID.

The interviewee from ICRD further describes how funding cuts can create a domino effect, leading to increased social instability. The interviewee emphasizes that without sufficient funding, critical social issues such as gender-based violence, human rights, and crime prevention would deteriorate, with the absence of advocacy and resources exacerbating these challenges (Appendix 2:8). This may highlight that donor funding is not merely a financial resource but also a stabilizing force that helps maintain social structures. When funding is cut, it is not just organizations that suffer, but entire communities face setbacks in human rights, crime prevention, and social welfare. This suggests that Moyo's critique of aid dependency, while valid in its concern for fostering independence, does not fully account for the unintended consequences of funding withdrawal.

Another significant consequence of shifting donor priorities is the perception that funding decisions are imposed by Western actors without regard for their impact on local communities. The interviewee from ICRD articulated this frustration:

*"So, in terms of the relationship changes, we think of the West, as the people who have sent us these pieces, who are now making us suffer" (*Appendix 2:9).

The interviewee expresses a sense of betrayal, suggesting that what was once offered as assistance has become a source of hardship. There is an implied expectation that the support would be sustained, and its withdrawal is experienced not just as a practical loss, but as a moral failing on the part of the donors. The use of *"making us suffer"* points to a feeling that the current difficulties are a direct consequence of donor actions, reinforcing a view of the aid relationship as externally controlled and potentially harmful when priorities shift. This reflects a broader critique of international aid structures, as something that not only creates dependency, but also reinforces power imbalances between donor and recipient nations.

This perspective is echoed in Mulder's (2023) analysis of localization efforts, which argues that even initiatives designed to strengthen local ownership often reproduce top-down structures. As described in the literature review, his study of aid delivery in Ethiopia highlights a structural contradiction between two dominant paradigms; *the resilience paradigm*, which emphasizes empowerment and local self-reliance, and t*he surveillance paradigm*, which centers on monitoring and compliance with donor standards. Mulder shows how local actors navigate these conflicting expectations through impression management, adopting the appearance of alignment with donor goals while attempting to maintain some degree of agency. This paradox reinforces both the strengths and limitations of Moyo's critique. She identifies how aid dependency weakens local agency, making organizations vulnerable to external influence. However, as our research demonstrates, abrupt funding cuts do not necessarily lead to empowerment, instead they often trigger financial crises, forcing local organizations to scramble for alternative funding sources without adequate preparation. The question remains: if dependency itself is a form of structural oppression, what viable alternatives exist?

Moyo advocates for a five-year phase-out period during which aid would be gradually withdrawn to promote self-sufficiency, but our findings suggest that most local organizations are not yet equipped to replace donor funding in such a short timeframe. When donor governments shift priorities, the consequences are severe. Specifically, it can cause staff layoffs, halted health programs, and increased instability in areas such as gender-based violence prevention and human rights advocacy, as described by the interviewee from ICRD (Appendix 2:8).

While Moyo argues that withdrawing aid forces local actors to take responsibility, our data suggest that this shift primarily affects those most in need, reversing developmental gains rather than fostering sustainable growth. Moreover, while Moyo promotes private-sector investment as a replacement for aid, this is not necessarily an immediate or universal solution. Many social services, such as healthcare and human rights advocacy, do not generate commercial profits and therefore struggle to attract sustainable private investment. Mulder further illustrates how even well-intentioned efforts to localize aid often reproduce top-down control structures, limiting the ability of local actors to achieve genuine financial autonomy. Ultimately, the core contradiction in aid debates is that while reducing reliance on international donors is theoretically beneficial, the immediate consequences of funding cuts disproportionately harm the most vulnerable populations.

6.2.4 Summary of the section

The section, *the role of funding,* explored the complex and multifaceted role of funding in shaping the relationships between local and international organizations. Drawing on both empirical data from our interviews and theoretical perspectives, particularly Moyo's critique of aid dependency, the section highlighted the dual nature of donor funding as both an essential resource and a potential constraint.

The analysis explored how financial dependence can limit local autonomy and reinforce donor-driven agendas. The perspectives shared by interviewees from DUNK, ICRD, and PLK illustrated the ways in which donor funding can restrict organizational freedom, echoing Moyo's argument that continuous reliance on aid perpetuates cycles of dependence and undermines self-determined development. However, the analysis showed the significant benefits that donor funding can bring, including organizational growth, capacity-building, and access to technical expertise. These points challenged Moyo's one-sided critique by emphasizing that, when structured as genuine partnerships, international collaborations can empower local actors and contribute to more sustainable operations.

Lastly, the section addressed the real-world consequences of donor withdrawal in the Global south, with a particular focus on the impact of the current withdrawal of USAID. The interviewee from ICRD articulated the vulnerability of local organizations when donor priorities shift, particularly in the absence of governmental support. The analysis shows how sudden funding cuts can destabilize essential sectors like health, education, and human rights, leading to a reversal of developmental progress. Moyo advocates for a five-year phase-out period, during which aid would be gradually withdrawn to promote financial independence. Our findings suggest that such transitions must be carefully managed to avoid adversely affecting the most vulnerable communities.

6.3 Bureaucratic and external requirements

The interviews reveal that local organizations face some bureaucratic and administrative requirements when partnering with international organizations, particularly in accessing funding. These requirements often involve strict financial reporting, adherence to safeguarding policies, and compliance with detailed implementation frameworks. The interviewee from DUNK describes experiencing site visits where donors assess compliance with international standards, ensuring that the project meets prescribed criteria (Appendix 3:3). Similarly, the interviewee from ICRD highlights that donors impose strict requirements, including having bank accounts, audited financial records, and limitations on how funds can be used (Appendix 2:9). The interviewee further elaborates:

"There are a lot of guidelines, there are a lot of requirements for you to do that, and that is in terms of finance. When you are implementing (...) we have what we call safeguarding policies, child protection policies. So, you cannot get the money without having those documents" (Appendix 2:10).

While these requirements are likely intended to ensure responsible spending and adherence to international standards, they may inadvertently limit the autonomy of local organizations. In this context, the policies could be seen as a mechanism of control rather than support for local leadership and ownership. From one perspective, such measures are essential for maintaining accountability, particularly in environments where there is a higher risk of corruption or financial mismanagement. However, from the perspective of Mulder's (2023) *surveillance paradigm,* as described in the literature review and in the section above, such bureaucratic demands can be seen as mechanisms of control. The emphasis on financial transparency and restrictions on how funds can be used can indicate an underlying mistrust in local organizations' capacity to manage resources independently.

According to Hoffman (2002), *oversight mechanisms* are a key indicator of trust dynamics between organizations. As described in the literature review, he argues intrusive oversight suggests a lower level of trust, while less oversight signals greater trust. The strict financial and administrative controls described by the interviewees from ICRD and DUNK align with Hoffman's predictive trust approach, where donors minimize risk through close monitoring rather than granting autonomy. However, as described in the literature review, international organizations themselves operate under constraints. They must meet the accountability standards set by their own donors and, in some cases, the expectations of the local communities they serve. From this perspective, oversight mechanisms are not solely about control but also about ensuring legitimacy and maintaining trust with multiple stakeholders.

Beyond the financial restrictions, local organizations can face additional challenges in adapting to externally imposed bureaucratic systems and new technological platforms. The interviewee from PLK explains that when international organizations introduce new technology for monitoring work or ensuring tasks are carried out as intended, they must invest in proper employee training. The interviewee emphasizes that if organizations want processes to be followed in a specific way, they need to make that investment (Appendix 4:4). The interviewee elaborates:

"*You should invest in enhancing the capacity of that organization to understand (...) Investing in the know-how, the technical capacity of the entire organization is very important, because then at the end of the day it makes the implementation very difficult and it takes a lot of time*" (Appendix 4:4).

This observation suggests that the introduction of new technologies or platforms is often framed as an opportunity for improvement, yet without adequate local capacity-building, it can end up being more of a burden than a tool for empowerment. From one perspective, it could be argued that this is an opportunity for growth and efficiency, ensuring that local organizations are brought up to speed with global best practices. However, from another perspective, the lack of investment in local capacity development means these new requirements can exacerbate the already existing capacity gaps and increase administrative burden, especially when local staff are expected to quickly adapt to unfamiliar systems without sufficient training or resources. As described in the literature review, Barbelet (2018) critiques how donor-driven capacity-building requirements often emphasize compliance over genuine local empowerment. This is evident in the interview with PLK, who are tasked to implement reporting and monitoring systems, but without a concerted effort to strengthen their internal capacity.

6.3.1 Summary of the section

The section, *bureaucratic and external requirements*, explored how local organizations experienced the bureaucratic and administrative demands imposed by international partners, particularly in relation to funding. Interviewees from DUNK and ICRD described how compliance with detailed financial, safeguarding, and implementation standards, such as having audited accounts or child protection policies, was a prerequisite for accessing international funding. While these measures aimed to ensure accountability and transparency, they also risked limiting local autonomy and reinforcing unequal power dynamics.

Drawing on Mulder's surveillance paradigm and Hoffman's predictive trust theory, the analysis suggested that strict oversight mechanisms reflected an underlying mistrust in local organizations' ability to manage resources independently. At the same time, the section acknowledged that international organizations themselves were under pressure to meet the standards of their own donors and stakeholders, which helped explain their emphasis on control and compliance.

Another layer of complexity arose with the introduction of new technologies for monitoring and reporting. The interviewee from PLK highlighted that while these systems were meant to improve project delivery, they often became a burden when not accompanied by sufficient training and support. Without meaningful investment in local capacity-building, such initiatives risked widening existing gaps rather than empowering local staff. As Barbelet critiqued, donor-driven capacity-building efforts frequently prioritized compliance over genuine development of local capabilities.

6.4 Power imbalances

Across the interviews, and in continuation of the previous analysis, a recurring theme emerges around the influence of donor funding on local autonomy. This section builds on earlier discussions by examining more closely how power imbalances manifest in the relationships between local organizations and international donors. Specifically, it explores how financial control can not only shape but also override local decision-making processes, limiting the ability of local actors to define their own priorities and strategies.

6.4.1 Decision-making in the projects

While international funding remains a critical resource for many local organizations, our interviews can suggest that it often comes with embedded power dynamics that can shape – and sometimes constrain – local decision-making. The interviewee from ICRD, for example, describes how donors previously choose to send their own experts to oversee financial management and operational structures. As the interviewee from ICRD explained, "*90% of the budget goes to them, 10% to us*" (Appendix 2:10), highlighting an imbalance in both resource distribution and administrative authority. Rather than investing in the capacity-building of local actors, this approach positions the local organizations as implementers rather than equal partners, and this could undermine long-term sustainability.

This aligns with Lilja and Höglund's (2018) perspective that financial resources are often wielded as instruments of control, as described in the literature review. They argue that by attaching rigid structures to the funding, donors effectively limit the autonomy of local organizations, dictating not just what gets funded but also how projects are carried out. This can create a top-down dynamic where local actors must adapt to external expectations, even when these do not align with on-the-ground realities. This disconnect was echoed by the interviewee from DUNK, who pointed out the difficulty of persuading international partners to recognize the importance of deviating from standardized program models in order to meet local needs (Appendix 3:5). Similarly, the interviewee from PLK and ICRD (Appendix 2:11) expressed how efforts to adapt programming to the African context are often stifled by the need to conform to externally imposed frameworks. As the interviewee from PLK put it:

"*Most international organizations have come to Africa to work with PLK, but then you find that in some instances they have not taken their time to understand the context in which they are working*" (Appendix 4:3).

Together, these statements can explain how financial dependency can translate into a loss of control, where project implementation becomes more about fulfilling donor criteria than addressing the complex and evolving needs of local communities. Rather than fostering equitable collaboration, such dynamics reinforce a hierarchy in which donors maintain the upper hand – not only through their resources but also through the managerial systems they impose.

A central issue raised in the interviews, particularly raised by the interviewee from PLK, was the extent to which local organizations are genuinely included in shaping project priorities or whether they function primarily as implementers of externally defined agendas. The interviewee from PLK suggested that local voices are often marginalized in the early stages of project development. The interviewee states:

"*We end up not doing what exactly we are supposed to do, because we are trying to fit in a context that is not Africa*" (Appendix 4:3).

This is also a point that has been raised by the interviewee from ICRD, who stated that they have become aware of this from earlier experiences, and now carefully check the backgrounds of their coming international partners (Appendix 2:11). These statements capture the tension between donor-driven frameworks and locally grounded approaches. Instead of being able to design initiatives that directly respond to local needs and realities, organizations are often forced to reshape their work to align with external expectations in order to secure or retain funding. Building on this point Harris and Tuladhar (2019) highlight how the slow progress of localization is largely due to international actors' unwillingness to relinquish control. While local participation is often encouraged in rhetoric, it rarely translates into genuine influence over key decisions. Instead, international organizations continue to dominate both decision-making and the distribution of resources, with financial structures reinforcing these imbalances by limiting local actors' access to funding. This dynamic is rooted in a persistent belief that international organizations are better equipped to assess needs on the ground – even when local communities possess a deeper, more context-specific understanding of their own situations. As a result, local partners may appear to have ownership, but in reality, they are frequently excluded from shaping the core aspects of interventions that directly affect their communities. This misalignment was also underscored by the interviewee from PLK, who noted that:

"*They have come in and they want the support to be implemented in their context. Yet, the people we are helping are not in that context*" (Appendix 4:3).

This point can reflect not only a lack of cultural and contextual sensitivity, but also a deeper issue of epistemic injustice, in which the knowledge and lived experiences of local actors are systematically devalued. Bian (2022) explores how such dynamics are sustained through hidden power hierarchies rooted in racialized perceptions of expertise. In humanitarian spaces, the distinction between 'expat' and 'local' is not simply professional, but functions as a racialized tool of power, where expatriate, often white and Western, status is equated with competence, while local expertise is dismissed or ignored, regardless of its relevance. Even when local input is formally invited, it frequently fails to shape project design or strategic direction in any substantive way. As a result, local organizations are relegated to the role of implementers, rather than active partners. Bian further notes that these hierarchies are reinforced through colorblind ideologies that obscure racial inequalities, allowing unequal power relations to persist unchallenged within aid structures.

In this context, funding can become not just a source of support, but a mechanism of control. The need to align with donor expectations can limit innovation, prevent context-specific problem-solving, and reinforce a one-size-fits-all model that often fails to address the complexities of local realities. While donor frameworks may be grounded in good intentions, their rigid application without meaningful collaboration can inadvertently undermine the very goals of empowerment and sustainability they seek to promote.

6.4.2 Do equal partnerships exist?

As reflected in the previous sections, interviewees from both PLK, ICRD and DUNK acknowledge the presence of power imbalances in their interactions with international donors, yet these inequalities are seldom framed as something to be directly challenged. Instead, they are treated as structural conditions to navigate realities of working within a global aid system that is both enabling and constraining. This pragmatic stance may reflect a broader calculation; resisting these dynamics could risk not only funding but also access to the networks and legitimacy that often accompany donor partnerships. As Moyo (2009) argues, aid inherently distorts accountability structures, redirecting them away from local communities and toward external funders, thereby reinforcing vertical hierarchies rather than supporting locally accountable systems.

This dynamic prompts an important question: is power imbalance always inherently problematic, or can some asymmetry be justified, particularly when disparities in financial resources or technical expertise exist? While Moyo sees power asymmetry as a core dysfunction of the aid system, the interviewee from DUNK presented a more nuanced view. Rather than advocating resistance, the interviewee emphasizes the importance of open-minded and responsive partners, stating:

"*If you find partners who are willing to listen and not just impose their way of doing things (...) if they are not very like, you know, in a box and not listen at all. I think that's what is very important for us. It's that kind of progressive thought where we build a relationship together*" (Appendix 3:5).

This quote highlights how, even within unequal relationships, space for meaningful collaboration can exist if donors approach the partnership with humility and flexibility. Yet, this still relies on donor willingness, not structural change – underscoring the possible fragility of such partnerships. As Roepstorff (2019) argues, even well-meaning efforts at localization can reinforce hidden hierarchies when the terms of engagement continue to be dictated by donors. Local actors may be included on paper, but strategic and financial decisions often remain centralized in the Global North. In this context, symbolic inclusion risks masking enduring asymmetries of power. Without a shift in whose knowledge counts and whose priorities are centered, the deeper structures of inequality persist. Ultimately, power imbalance in the aid system cannot just be seen as who holds the money, it can shape who sets the agenda.

6.4.3 Summary of the section

The section, *power imbalances,* has explored how power imbalances shape the relationships between local and international organizations, particularly in the context of decision-making, program design, and resource allocation. Drawing on both empirical data from our interviews and perspectives from the scholars mentioned in our literature review, the analysis shows how financial dependency often results in restricted autonomy for local actors, who are required to operate within externally defined frameworks.

The analysis focused on how control over financial and operational structures can marginalize local voices in project planning and the decision-making process. Interviewees from ICRD, DUNK, and PLK revealed how donor-imposed financial structures, such as allocating most of the budget to donors' own experts, place local organizations in a subordinate role. This dynamic may undermine local capacity-building and result in local organizations functioning more as implementers rather than partners in the development process as outlined by Lilja and Höglund. Moreover, this financial dependency often forces local organizations to conform to donor-driven frameworks, which may not be suited to the local context. The interviewee from PLK underscored how international actors often fail to adequately understand or adapt to local contexts, reinforcing epistemic injustices where local knowledge is overlooked or devalued, which is an issue further elaborated by Bian in his discussion of hidden power hierarchies rooted in racialized perceptions of expertise.

Furthermore, the section explored whether equal partnerships between local organizations and donors are possible. While all of the interviewees acknowledged the existence of power imbalances, especially the interviewee from DUNK highlighted the potential for meaningful collaboration if donors approach partnerships with flexibility and a willingness to listen. However, these efforts can be fragile and depend on the donor's willingness to engage in genuine partnership, rather than simply imposing their frameworks.

6.5 Trust

In the following sections, we explore how trust, or its absence, influences the local organizations' ability to operate effectively in collaboration with international actors. This section begins by examining the perceived trustworthiness of the international organizations, using Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) three factors of trustworthiness. Through this lens, we will explore how local actors evaluate the trustworthiness of their international partners based on perceived competence, intentions, and value alignment. Following this, we will explore the key factors that local actors identify as important for building trust, such as capacity-building, transparency, and cultural understanding. Finally, in the last section we will discuss how trust influences the quality of collaboration, even in the face of structural and relational challenges.

6.5.1 The perceived trustworthiness of the international organizations

Understanding how local actors perceive trust from international organizations may be essential, as trust can underpins successful partnerships. As argued by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), trust is important as it leads to greater collaboration and cooperation. As described in the theory chapter, Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman argue that trust in a party is largely influenced by the trustworthiness of the trustee, which is shaped by their *ability*, *benevolence*, and *integrity*. These attributes combine to form the foundation of trust, with trust being built on perceptions of the trustee's competence, care, and honesty. By examining trust through the lens of these factors, we can gain insights into how the local organization we interviewed assess the trustworthiness of their international partners.

6.5.1.1 Perceived ability

To analyze ability in the context of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's factors of perceived trustworthiness, we can look at how local organizations perceive the competence and expertise of international organizations. As described in the theory section, ability refers to the set of skills, competencies, and characteristics that allow a trustee to have influence or fulfill expectations in a specific domain.

The interviewee from ICRD highlights that the ability of their international partners depends on "*the capacity of the international organization, how much they can give*" (Appendix 2:14) this suggests that an international organization is perceived as more trustworthy when they demonstrate resourcefulness based on money. As demonstrated earlier in the analysis, funding is one of the main reasons why the local organizations engage with international partners. This indicates that international actors are perceived as having the competence and resources to fulfill a specific need. While this trust may be limited to financial capacity, it nonetheless may reflect that local actors view international organizations as reliable within that domain, which forms a foundational component of trust in the relationships, as argued in the factor of ability. Another aspect of ability is seen when the interviewee from ICRD states:

> *"Because you people are so much more developed than us, so, it is not like we are poor, we are less human. So, I would call that discrimination, and do not discriminate*" (Appendix 2:13).

This statement speaks to the perceived expertise of international organizations. "*You people*" is referring to people from the north and therefore their international partners. The phrase "*you people are so much more developed than u*s" suggests that the local actor acknowledges the knowledge and skills that international organizations bring to the table, especially in areas where local organizations may lack resources or capacity. However, there is also an underlying warning against assuming superiority or treating the local actors as inferior. The interviewee emphasizes that while international organizations might have more developed resources and technical know-how, equal respect is essential to fostering trust. This highlights a dual perception that international organizations are recognized for their capabilities, but their ability must also be tempered with humility and respect for local knowledge.

Overall, the interviews show the perceived ability of international partners is considered high to some extent. In line with Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's framework, international actors are seen as competent primarily because of their financial capacity and technical expertise. Their ability to provide resources is a central reason local actors engage with them, and this capacity can be seen to form a foundation for trust. However, the interviews suggest that ability alone does not guarantee trust. While international partners are seen as competent due to their resources and expertise, trust depends on how this ability is brought into the relationship. If competence is perceived to come with superiority or disregard for local knowledge, it risks undermining trust rather than building it.

6.5.1.2 Perceived benevolence

To assess benevolence in the context of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) factors of perceived trustworthiness, we focus on how local actors interpret the intentions and goodwill behind their international partners' actions. As described in the theory section, benevolence refers to the extent to which a trustee is believed to genuinely care about the trustor's well-being, beyond any selfish or profit-driven motives.

Across the interviews, there is a recurring perception that many international organizations operate with sincere and well-intentioned motives. The interviewee from DUNK describes how he believes that their international partners have a passion for what they do (Appendix 3:8). This passion can be interpreted as an indicator of benevolence, suggesting that international partners are emotionally invested in the cause rather than motivated solely by strategic gain or institutional reputation. From the perspective of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, such perceived sincerity strengthens trust, as local actors are more likely to believe that their partners are genuinely committed to shared goals rather than merely fulfilling donor expectations or enhancing their public image. Furthermore, the interviewee from ICRD also describes a sincerity in their international partner. The interviewee states:

"*I think most of those intentions are genuine (...) they are very committed to the children, the youth, and the children's rights"* (Appendix 2:15).

This further points to a high degree of perceived benevolence, where the actions of the international organizations are not seen as merely transactional or strategic, but as grounded in a genuine concern for marginalized groups, which the local actors themselves are working to support. This aligns with Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's idea that trust builds not only on competence, but also on the belief that the other party has good intentions. The interviewee elaborates on how the international organizations intentions are very good and genuine from the heart, however he adds that "*of course, organizations look for organizations that have their own vision and values*" (Appendix 2:15). This implies that while the intention of the partners is perceived positively, there is also an awareness that the partnerships are never entirely free from organizational self-interest. According to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, this awareness may suggest that the level of trust, specifically benevolence-based trust, could be somewhat reduced, as the perception of self-interest may create doubt about whether the international partner truly prioritizes the well-being of the local organization over their own goals.

Following this, the interviewee from DUNK also acknowledges that while international organizations often have sincere motivations, their work is also shaped by broader institutional priorities. The interviewee points out that international actors are often guided by broader agendas, whether international (e.g., human rights, education) or national (e.g., development priorities of donor countries like Denmark). The interviewee states:

"*So let's say the government of Denmark wants to expand education to developing countries and (...) start looking for partners in Africa to partner with them on this agenda (...) That I think is just normal and that is how it is. That is the world of international development. I think the important part also is if that agenda aligns to their local agenda of whoever you are a partner with, I think that is just perfect partnership, right?*" (Appendix 3:8).

The interviewee is acknowledging that international development is often driven by the priorities of donor governments, using an example like Denmark deciding to support education in developing countries. When this happens, these governments or their affiliated organizations seek local partners who can help implement that specific agenda. The statement may reflect a pragmatic understanding and acceptance of how global development systems typically function. Rather than perceiving these agendas as inherently problematic, the interviewee appears to suggest that what matters is whether the external priorities align with local ones. This suggests that the good-well can be viewed as entangled with other agendas of the international organization, particularly international and national interests. PLK echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of the passion for the people they wish to support. The interviewee states:

"*We align at the point of the problem. We are both addressing something that we believe in. For example, talking about children. You will find that some of these international organizations are very passionate about children. PLK are very passionate about children, and therefore in that regard we align*" (Appendix 4:7).

This statement suggests a high degree of perceived good-well and genuine passion, as the international partners are seen to share a genuine commitment to the same cause. When there is alignment in purpose and passion, local actors may interpret the international partners' intentions as sincere and supportive, rather than instrumental. This perception of shared moral commitment reinforces trust, as benevolence, according to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, is built on the belief that the trustee genuinely cares about the trustor's interests, in this case the children, how they are supported.

However, it is worth noting that the perceived goodwill appears directed primarily toward the problem, not necessarily toward the local organization as an independent partner. While the international actors are described as passionate and values-driven in relation to their mission, it remains somewhat ambiguous whether this benevolence extends to the organizational level. It does not address whether international organizations genuinely care about the well-being, autonomy, or long-term interests of the local partner. In this way, trust based on benevolence may be strong in relation to shared goals, but more fragile when it comes to the relational dimension of the partnership.

Overall, the interviews indicate that benevolence plays a role in shaping how local organizations perceive international partners. Passion, emotional commitment, and moral alignment are seen as signs that international actors are not just competent, but also caring. This is a key component of the trustworthiness in Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's factors of perceived trustworthiness. Yet, local actors also recognize that benevolence is often shaped by broader institutional agendas. While the intentions of the international partners are largely viewed as genuine, the goodwill appears directed primarily toward the shared cause, not necessarily toward the local organization itself. It remains unclear whether international actors truly care about the partner's autonomy, well-being, or long-term development. In this way, trust based on benevolence may be strong in relation to shared goals, but more fragile when it comes to the relational dimension of the partnership.

6.5.1.3 Perceived integrity

To assess integrity in the context of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) factors of perceived trustworthiness, we focus on whether local actors perceive international organizations as adhering to principles and values that align with their own. As described in the theory section, integrity involves a perception that the trustee consistently acts according to a set of values that the trustor finds acceptable. It is not only about honesty, but also about consistency and alignment between words and actions, and between organizational values.

Across the interviews, perceptions of integrity are shaped largely by the degree to which international partners' values align with those of local organizations. The interviewee from ICRD underscores that integrity is often a prerequisite for collaboration, stating:

> *"If it is not aligned, maybe you do not work with them (...) So, it depends on the values, the mission and goals*" (Appendix 2:16).

This suggests that ICRD actively assesses value alignment before entering partnerships, and that divergence in integrity-related principles can be a dealbreaker. Trust, then, is not only about what international partners do, but whether they do it in a way that reflects shared ethical or programmatic values. This is further echoed by the interviewee from DUNK, who explains that they have declined collaboration with international partners due to a lack of alignment (Appendix 3:6). As argued by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, integrity involves the trustor's perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable. In this context, if local organizations do not find the principles of the international organization acceptable, they are unlikely to engage in a partnership. This further suggests that the partnerships that do exist are based on principles that the local actors deem acceptable. This could further indicate a high level of trust looking from the perspective of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, as integrity is closely linked to shared values.

The interviewee from PLK adds nuance by noting that while partners often align on the problem level, for instance the passion for children as described in the above section, misalignments emerge when broader organizational values are compared. The interviewee explains how the values of the international organization and the values of PLK as a local organization most of the time do not align with each other. (Appendix 4:7). However, the interviewee elaborates:

> *"We are different organizations and our values and beliefs do not necessarily have to be the same, but in that regard, I do not believe there can be a hundred percent alignment. About that we should have just an issue of understanding of each other"*(Appendix 4:7).

This statement suggests that full value alignment is not always necessary, as long as there is enough common ground to work effectively. This insight acknowledges the practical reality that organizations, especially those from different cultural or structural backgrounds, will not always have identical values. What is more important, according to the interviewee, is that both sides can understand and respect their differences. This highlights that while complete alignment may not be possible, fostering trust and effective collaboration relies on understanding and negotiating these differences.

However, according to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, integrity is higher when there is strong alignment of values. The lack of full alignment, even if not seen as problematic by the interviewee, could still be viewed as a form of subtle mistrust, as it raises questions about whether the trustee's actions are consistent with the trustor's values. While mutual understanding can maintain collaboration, this misalignment may still lower the perception of integrity and introduce uncertainty about the consistency of principles in the partnership.

Overall, the interviews indicate that integrity is viewed as important to how local organizations assess trust in international partners. Following Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's framework, trust is fostered when international organizations act according to values that align with those of their local counterparts. The interviewees from DUNK and ICRD explicitly emphasize that value alignment is often a prerequisite for collaboration, as partnerships are rejected when core principles diverge. However, full alignment is rarely expected. As the interviewee from PLK noted, differences in beliefs are acceptable as long as there is mutual understanding and respect. This reflects a more pragmatic view of integrity, where trust can be maintained even when values differ, as long as there is openness and dialogue. Still, according to the theory, lack of full alignment may subtly weaken the perceived integrity, and consequently weaken the perceived trustworthiness of the international partners.

6.5.2 Important factors for building trust

Several key factors emerge from the interviews as essential for building trust between local organizations and international actors. These include capacity-building, transparency, cultural understanding, and local engagement. When interviewees were asked what actions international organizations should take to foster trust, these factors were highlighted as important for the interviewees in promoting mutual respect and collaboration.

The interviewee from PLK emphasizes that one of the key ways international organizations can build trust is by focusing on capacity-building. As analyzed in the section on *Bureaucratic and external requirements*, local organizations are often expected to meet strict financial and administrative demands, without sufficient investment in their capacity to do so. The analysis also showed that such requirements are only effective when accompanied by meaningful support in developing local capacity. This is echoed in the interview with PLK, where the interviewee highlights capacity-building as an important factor in trust-building. The interviewee explains how he noted that international organizations offer not only financial support but also opportunities for local organizations to 'catch up' with necessary skills and knowledge, creating a more level playing field. The interviewee from PLK states:

"I have seen international organizations coming in with projects, but also setting aside some funds for the purpose of bringing us up to speed, so that we are at the same level" (Appendix 4:5).

This statement illustrates how international organizations, through investments in capacity-building, enable local organizations to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to operate on an equal footing. By allocating funds and time to empower local actors, international organizations demonstrate a commitment to long-term partnerships rather than focusing on short-term project completion. As discussed earlier in the analysis, the longevity of partnerships between local organizations and international actors may be crucial for shaping effective collaboration. This approach aligns with Zaheer and Harris's (2006) concept of interorganizational trust, which emphasizes that trust is built through shared experiences, mutual dependence, and reputation. As trust deepens, local organizations become more self-reliant, reducing transaction costs and enhancing cooperation. This collaborative model can be argued to ultimately strengthen trust and ensure a more sustainable partnership between local and international actors.

Another factor, which was highlighted as important for building trust in collaboration, is transparency. The interviewee from DUNK emphasizes transparency as one of the most important factors. The transparency of actions, intentions, and operations on both sides of the partnership may help create an environment of mutual accountability. The interviewee from DUNK explains:

"*One of the things is really transparency. Um, when partners see that level of transparency or partners are able to exhibit some level of commitment and passion for the work that you do*" (Appendix 3:6).

This statement highlights that transparency and commitment are seen as crucial for building trust. It suggests that when partners exhibit a high level of transparency and show dedication to the work they do, trust can be fostered. This aligns with Zaheer and Harris's concept of interorganizational trust, where trust is cultivated through shared communication and mutual dependence. This suggests that both emotional investment and transparency are fundamental to establishing strong, trusting partnerships.

A significant factor, which all of our interviews emphasized as important in the collaboration, is that their partners have an understanding of the cultural context. That their international partners are willing to invest time and effort into the local communities and understanding the specific cultural, social, and economic dynamics. The interviewee from PLK emphasizes that international organizations should "*invest in understanding the context of the problem within the communities that they come to staff*" (Appendix 4:5). Similarly, the interviewee from DUNK emphasizes the importance of their international partners to come to Ghana and to talk with the beneficiaries, because "*it makes it much easier when you work together when people have seen a bit of the context*" (Appendix 3:7). Finally, the interviewee from ICRD also highlights the importance of international organizations coming down to the local level and understanding local practices, culture, and context. The interviewee from ICRD emphasizes:

> "*It is just coming to our level, and understanding how we do our things. That is the best way. (...) at that level, you kind of become part of them. (...) So, once you become part of them culturally, even the language and everything, that is a requirement (...) In that way, you are going to work together and get better results"* (Appendix 2:12-13).

The insight here is that cultural sensitivity and understanding the local way of life are crucial in building trust. When international actors approach partnerships with a mindset of cultural humility, recognizing the unique needs, challenges, and strengths of the local context, they demonstrate respect and a willingness to work alongside local actors as equal partners. As ICRD highlights, by immersing themselves in the local context, international actors are able to break down barriers and create more authentic relationships.

Interestingly, this view contrasts with some broader interpretations of localization, as showcased throughout the introduction and literature review. Localization typically emphasizes empowering local organizations without necessarily requiring international actors to engage directly in the local context. However, for the interviewees from PLK, DUNK, and ICRD, the ability of international actors to visit, immerse themselves in local practices, and understand the community firsthand is a critical element in building trust and establishing effective partnerships. It seems that for these organizations, direct engagement by international partners is not just a bonus but a fundamental part of fostering meaningful collaboration. This underscores that localization, in their view, is not solely about shifting power and resources but also about ensuring that international actors fully understand the context in which they are working.

6.5.3 Trust influence on the collaborations

Based on the preceding analysis, a complex picture emerges of the localization process, in which local organizations experience both opportunities and constraints in their engagement with international actors. While the localization agenda aims to transfer power, resources, and responsibility to local actors, our interviews reveal that this process is often hindered by different challenges. These include limited recognition of local knowledge, top-down decision-making, and rigid requirements, all of which may complicate the realization of localization in practice. At the same time, the interviews also highlight several positive aspects of localization. As expressed by the interviewee from DUNK, despite the challenges, their overall experience has been constructive. The interviewee states:

"*(...) that has been some of the challenges, but there's more positive to it than the challenges, that's for sure" (Appendix 3:6).*

This duality suggests that localization is not only shaped by systems and structures but also deeply influenced by the quality of relationships between actors – bringing the role of trust to the forefront. As Zaheer and Harris (2006) argue, which is mentioned in the literature review, trust plays a key role in improving cooperation, reducing transaction costs, and enabling more effective governance. Trust, in this sense, is not just a relational ideal, but a concrete factor that can shape how organizations collaborate.

For the interviewee from DUNK, the relationship with international organizations has been largely positive. The interviewee emphasizes the value of the partnership, particularly in terms of strengthening internal capacity and enabling the local organization to meet international agendas. As the interviewee from DUNK describes that their experience with local partners has been good, even though the interviewee expresses a lot of challenges (Appendix 3:6). The interviewee elaborates:

"I recall more of the positive, and also the benefit we have received as an organization, not specifically the funding, but the leverage of working with international organizations to strengthen our local system"(Appendix 3:6).

The statement highlights the value of working with international organizations beyond just financial support. The interviewee mentions leveraging the partnership to strengthen their local system, suggesting that trust in the relationship allows DUNK to build capacity and enhance autonomy. This aligns with Zaheer and Harris (2006), who emphasize that trust facilitates collaboration. In the line of this, DUNK's experience suggests that there is some kind of belief and trust in the international partners to strengthen their local system. Therefore, it can be argued that when this trust exists, local organizations are more likely to engage in meaningful capacity-building, which directly aligns with the goals of localization.

In contrast, the interview from PLK presents a different, more challenging scenario. The interviewee emphasizes the constraints they face in the relationship with international organizations. The interviewee form PLK states:

"*If our relationship is not good, then it will also not help the beneficiary. So, most of the time we are forced to align with the donor. And yet our people who should be enjoying these services are suffering"(Appendix 4:5).*

The interviewee describes a feeling of being pressured to prioritize donor agendas, even when they do not align with local needs, indicating power imbalances and limited autonomy for local organizations. As described in the literature review, Contu and Girei (2014) argue that such dynamics often occur when INGOs control funding and set agendas, undermining local actors' ability to act independently. Additionally, as Roepstorff (2019) highlights how donor accountability often takes precedence over local needs, which may explain why PLK feels compelled to comply with donors instead of focusing on beneficiaries.

Furthermore, as analyzed in the section of power imbalance, such donor-driven frameworks can override local priorities and reduce local actors to implementers of externally defined agendas. The interviewee's sense of being *"forced to align"* points to a perceived lack of autonomy, where compliance is prioritized over collaboration. This undermines not only organizational integrity but also the potential for building trust-based partnerships. From the perspective of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) model of trust, this scenario suggests a low level of perceived benevolence and integrity, which are two components of trust. If international organizations are seen as prioritizing their own agendas over local needs, trust is likely to erode. As a result, the collaborative relationship becomes transactional, and the core goals of localization, which is mutual accountability, local leadership, and responsiveness, are compromised. Consequently, this lack of trust can compromise the effectiveness and impact of localization efforts.

These contrasting experiences of DUNK and PLK can underscore the role of trust in determining the success of localization. DUNK's positive experience illustrates how trust between local and international actors can enhance the capacity of local organizations, enabling them to meet both international goals and local needs more effectively. In contrast, PLK's experience reveals that without trust, local organizations may find themselves compromising their objectives and working in ways that are not fully aligned with their core mission. This highlights a fundamental challenge in the localization process, while financial resources and decision-making authority are often emphasized as key challenges, trust may be an equally crucial, if not overlooked, factor influencing the effectiveness of localization.

6.5.3.1 Funding and Risk-Taking in Relationship

As previously discussed, funding from international partners plays a central role in the operations of local organizations. While this support is crucial, it often comes with conditions that require local actors to adapt to external agendas or reporting systems. Engaging in such relationships involves a degree of uncertainty, particularly when donors may shift priorities or withdraw support as of the example with USAID. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) concept of Risk-Taking in Relationships (RTR) helps shed light on how trust functions in this context. According to their model, trust is not just a belief in another party's reliability, but also a willingness to accept vulnerability by taking action that involves risk.

Seen in this light, local organizations' engagement with international donors can be understood as an act of trust in itself. By entering into partnerships where they are not in control of the funding or decision-making structures, they expose themselves to potential harm, whether in the form of shifting priorities, delayed payments, or hidden agendas. That they are still willing to accept this risk could suggest that they do perceive their partners as trustworthy to some extent. As such, risk-taking may not only reflect necessity or lack of alternatives, but also demonstrate a form of confidence in the relationship.

This idea appears particularly relevant in cases where local organizations continue to engage with donors over time, despite experiencing previous frustrations or power imbalances. For instance, as earlier mentioned, DUNK describes how collaboration has evolved, allowing them to gradually influence project design. This suggests that trust has been built through repeated interactions, making it easier to take the risk again in the future.

However, trust and dependency are not mutually exclusive. While the act of entering into a funding relationship may demonstrate trust, it is also shaped by structural conditions. As mentioned earlier, some of the local organizations described feeling pressure to align with donor expectations even when they conflicted with local priorities. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman note that the perception of risk is influenced by contextual factors, such as power balance and available alternatives. In settings where domestic funding is limited, local organizations may have no choice but to take the risk, regardless of their actual level of trust. Still, recognizing that the local organizations take these risks repeatedly – and often with the hope of building long-term relationships, as found previously in the analysis – may suggest a strategic and hopeful choice to build trust, even under unequal conditions.

6.5.4 Summary of the section

This section, *trust,* has explored how trust shapes the relationships and collaboration between local and international organizations. Drawing on interview data and theoretical perspectives from Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, we examined how trust is formed and maintained through perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity, while also identifying key practices that help build and sustain trust in partnerships.

First, the section analyzed how local organizations assess the trustworthiness of their international partners, focusing on perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity. Interviewees generally viewed international organizations as competent, particularly in their capacity to provide financial resources and technical expertise. However, this ability-based trust was considered fragile when accompanied by perceptions of superiority or lack of respect for local capacities. Similarly, trust based on benevolence emerged when international partners were seen as passionate and sincere in their commitment to shared causes. Yet, this goodwill was often directed at the mission rather than the local organizations themselves, raising questions about whether international actors genuinely care for the autonomy and development of their partners. Perceptions of integrity were closely tied to value alignment. While interviewees emphasized that full alignment was rare and not always necessary, shared principles and mutual respect were seen as essential for trust to develop. Partnerships were often rejected when core values diverged, suggesting that trust depends not only on shared goals but on a deeper understanding of each other's frameworks and beliefs.

Beyond these dimensions, the section also identified key factors that contribute to trust-building, including capacity-building, transparency, and cultural understanding. The interviewee from PLK highlighted the importance of international partners not only meeting compliance demands but also investing in the growth and sustainability of local organizations. Furthermore, the interviewee from DUNK expressed the importance of transparent communication and emotional commitment to the shared work were seen as foundational. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees emphasized the importance of their partners engaging directly in the local context – through visits, dialogue, and immersion – as it was described as essential for building mutual understanding. This emphasis on cultural sensitivity challenges narrower perspectives of localization that focus solely on shifting power and resources, suggesting instead that relational and cultural investment is equally critical.

Finally, the section explored how trust influences the overall quality of collaboration. While the interviewee from DUNK described largely positive partnerships where trust enabled capacity development and long-term planning, the interviewee from PLK expressed frustration with donor-driven agendas that undermined local priorities. These contrasting experiences highlight how trust, or its absence, can either enable meaningful collaboration or reinforce dependency and marginalization. Additionally, the analysis shows how entering into funding relationships represents a form of risk-taking, where local actors place trust in partners despite structural imbalances. While this may reflect strategic hope for long-term partnership, it also reveals the vulnerability embedded in aid relationships, particularly when local alternatives are limited.

CONCLUSION

This section concludes the key findings of the thesis, highlighting the challenges faced by local organizations in the localization process and the impact of their perceived trust towards international organizations on the nature of their collaboration.

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the challenges that local organizations experience in the localization process, as well as how their perceived trust towards international organizations influences the nature of their collaboration. Drawing on existing literature, the theoretical frameworks of Mayer, Davis and Schoorman's Model of Trust and Moyo's Dead Aid, this study combined empirical insights from interviews with three local organizations from Ghana and Kenya, named DUNK, PLK, and ICRD.

As the reader engages with the conclusion, it is important to keep in mind that while this study provides insights into power imbalances, collaborations and trust dynamics in the localization processes, it also carries certain limitations. These include the potential for confirmation bias due to our own backgrounds, as well as the epistemological constraints of a constructivist lens that emphasizes contextual interpretation over generalizability. The findings should therefore be read not as definitive claims, but as situated perspectives shaped by the voices and experiences of local actors within a particular humanitarian context.

Taking a standpoint in our research question: *What challenges do local organizations experience in the localization processes, and how does their perceived trust towards international organizations influence the collaboration between international and local organizations?* We can conclude that our findings reveal that local organizations face a variety of challenges in the localization process, in particular the financial dependency on international donors. However, our findings also indicate that trust can play an important role in shaping how these challenges are perceived and navigated. Through a qualitative analysis, we find that trust is a component of the localization processes which can play a factor influencing both its challenges and the collaboration.

The localization agenda, as defined in global frameworks like the Grand Bargain, envision a shift in power and resources from international actors to local organizations. However, our analysis reveals that in practice, local organizations continue to face different challenges that undermine their ability to act as equal partners.

One of the most pressing challenges is the local organizations' strong dependence on external funding. The interviewees from DUNK, PLK, and ICRD all emphasized that without international financial support, they would struggle to carry out their work. This funding enables activities, capacity-building, and access to broader networks, which reflects the clear benefits of collaboration with international organizations. However, echoing Moyo's (2009) critique, our analysis also shows that this support can perpetuate cycles of dependency. Donor funding often arrives with externally defined objectives, external requirements, and accountability structures, which limit local organizations' influence over priorities and decision-making. This dynamic creates persistent power imbalances, where local actors must adapt to international frameworks in order to remain eligible for continued support.

As a result, financial support becomes a double-edged sword, as it brings significant benefits to the local organizations and sustains operations, however it also limits local autonomy and reinforces externally driven agendas. Especially the interviews with PLK and ICRD indicate how international donor frameworks override local priorities, pushing the local organizations into the role of implementers rather than co-creators. Furthermore, this dependence on external funding creates a vulnerability for local organizations, a challenge that becomes especially apparent in the wake of the recent USAID withdrawal. The sudden disruption illustrates how aid reliance can undermine long-term resilience and expose critical sectors to instability when donor commitments are withdrawn without adequate transition planning.

Despite these challenges, trust emerged as a somehow powerful force shaping the quality of the collaboration between international and local organizations. Using the lens of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), we can conclude that the local organizations perceived trustworthiness of their international partners through the dimensions of ability, benevolence, and integrity, is high to some extent. The interviewees perceived the international partners as skilled and well-funded, but trust was fragile when they lacked cultural awareness or did not adapt to local needs. Furthermore, the international partners were seen as committed to shared goals, however our analysis raised doubts about the international actors' sincereness towards the local organizations. Moreover, the value alignment between the local and international organizations was seen as a precondition for sustained partnership. While full agreement was not expected, mutual respect and shared principles were essential for trust to develop.

Beyond these core dimensions, transparent communication, capacity-building, long-term partnership, and cultural engagement were perceived as important for the local organizations in building and maintaining trust in the collaboration. All of the interviewees emphasized that trust grows when international partners show genuine investment in understanding the cultural context that the local organizations are in. This emphasis on cultural sensitivity challenges narrower perspectives of localization that focus solely on shifting power and resources, suggesting instead that relational and cultural investment is equally critical.

Ultimately, we found that the local organisations' perceived trust can influence how the challenges are experienced, which affect the perception of the collaboration with the international organisations. Especially, in the case of DUNK, a high level of trust fostered understanding and acceptance of the power imbalances, which were not necessarily seen as problematic. When trust is actively nurtured through mutual respect, value alignment, and cultural sensitivity, collaboration is more likely to become meaningful and sustainable. Conversely, when trust is shallow or one-sided, it risks reinforcing the very dependency localization aims to overcome. However, this trust do not resolve deeper structural issues, such as financial dependency and donor-driven agendas, which continue to limit the transformative potential of localization. Even when trust is high, the persistence of these underlying inequalities suggests that trust alone cannot shift the power dynamics needed for truly equitable collaboration.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated, through existing literature, the theoretical framework and qualitative interviews, that local organizations face a range of structural and relational challenges in the localization process. Despite these obstacles, local actors remain committed to engaging with international partners, motivated by the resources, visibility, and opportunities such collaborations can bring. Our analysis further shows that the perceived trust in international organizations is generally high to a certain extent, although it remains fragile when the local context is overlooked or value alignment is weak. While trust is not the sole factor shaping the quality of collaboration, it clearly plays a positive and enabling role. As supported by our theoretical framework and empirical findings, trust contributes to more inclusive, flexible, and sustainable partnerships, and can help mitigate, though not eliminate, the deeper structural inequalities within the international aid system.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Appendix 2: Transcription of the interview with ICRD

Appendix 3: Transcription of the interview with DUNK Grassroot

Appendix 4: Transcription of the interview with PLK

Appendix 5: Coding scheme

Appendix 6: Consent form

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Introduction to the interview and the purpose (informed consent)	
Introduction: ● Thank you for meeting with us. We are studying Global Refugee Studies in Denmark ● Our motivation is to understand how local actors experience the collaboration with international organisations and how they are being met with trust by their partners. ● The interview will focus on your experiences, so there are no right or wrong answers. ● If there are any questions you find unclear, please feel free to let us know, and we'll adjust them accordingly. Anonymity: ● Consent Form - do you wish to be anonymous in this project or may we use your name? ● You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time ● Is it okay that we record the interview?	
Theme	**Question**
Introduction	● Do you have any questions for us before we start? ● Can you start by telling us a little about your organization and your role in it?

Introduction to the organizations collaboration	● How does your organization work with international organizations?
	  ○ How does it start?
	● How long has your organization been collaborating with international partners?
	● What types of projects or programs have you worked on in partnership with an international organization?
	  ○ How is a project decided?

Challenges	● Do you experience any challenges when working with international organizations? ○ Could you describe a specific instance?
Effect of funding	● How do you experience the funding of a project? ○

Effect of INGOs requirements	● Do your international partners set any requirements for your work (ex. reporting, evaluation)? ○ How does that affect your work? ○ How does that impact your trust in the partner?
Power imbalance: equal decision-making	● How do you experience the collaboration between your organization and the international organization? ○ How are the decision-making processes within this collaboration?
Trust and relationship building	● What actions do you believe international organizations can take to build trust with local organizations in an international partnership?
Model of trust. Ability, Benevolence, Integrity	● How do you experience the ability of the international organization to meet your needs and expectations in the partnership? ○ Do you feel they have the right skills and resources? ● What do you think are the main intentions of the international organization in partnering with your organization? ○ Do you feel they genuinely care about your organization's well-being, or are their interests more focused on their own goals? ● How do you perceive the international organization's commitment to principles that are important to you?
Closing	● We do not have any more questions, so is there something you want to add or do you have any additional comments or insights you believe are relevant? ● Do you have any questions for us?

Appendix 2: Transcription of the interview with ICRD

Time: 42:36

The interview participant is referred to as 'IP' and the group member conducting the interview is called the 'Interviewer'. If another group member is speaking, they will be called 'Interviewer B', and so forth.

IP:
Can you hear me clearly?

Interviewer:
Yeah, we can hear you clearly.

IP:
Okay. Okay.

Interviewer:
All right. So, yeah, as Sarah said, I'm Elena and I will do the questions, and both Emilie and Sarah will follow up with questions if they think it's needed. But I can start by asking if you have any questions before we start?

IP:
No, I don't have questions. I think Sarah had prepped me well before. So, I think we are good to go here. Let's get to it.

Interviewer:
Perfect. Alright, so can you start by telling us a little bit about your organization and your role in it?

IP:
Let me start, I met Sarah and Peter when I was working at Positive Life Kenya, through a CISU-funded projects, that is a Danish funded project, and they came in through Positive Life Kenya as students. That's how I met them.

At that time, I used to be the grants and communication specialist. That was around 2020, right Sarah? 2021, they got here, and i was their supervisor. So basically, that was Positive Life Kenya, but now I'm working for a regional organization, called Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd Sisters, whereby we are actually in three countries. We are in DRC, we are in Uganda, and we are also in Kenya with a total of 12 programs. In Kenya, we have about 10 of those, scattered in different regions in Kenya. Also, we have a big project in Kampala in Uganda. We also have a big program in a place called Kolwezi. Kolwezi is in Luanda province in DRC, where there's war.

Apart from that I'm also doing some managementwork with the International Center for Research and Development, which Sarah knows very well. That's a pilot project that I do work, whereby we do a lot of supporting of grassroots organizations to develop, to form structures in terms of management, to kind of do fundraising, to do kind of do monitoring and evaluation, and to capacity build the staff to have these necessary skills in terms of financing, in terms of project management and all that. So that is me in a nutshell. So that's what I do. There's a lot of work at the global south of that. So, it's like you guys are the North, us here are the South. So, there's a lot of work. With local organizations, here in Kenya, or here in Africa, we call them grassroots organizations or community-based organizations or self-help groups. Just people trying to come together to work against their poverty, to work against their injustices, to work against a lot of other things. There, a lot of injustices around them, and around their communities. Yes, in a nutshell that's what I do.

Interviewer:
And how does your organization work with other international organizations?

IP:
Let me talk about the Good Shepherd Sisters, where I am now sitting. Basically, we have a wing seated in Italy. In Italy, we have what they call Good Shepherd International Foundation, that is supporting 72 countries in the world. But now, here I am seated, we are organized into the four countries I said - in Kenya, in Uganda, in DRC, and now we are getting a bit of South Sudan. It's coming on board.

So how we work with them is that now we have to really manage communications with them in terms of donor. We do a lot of donor mapping with them, we do a lot of joint applications with them, which means the proposals. We do a lot of joint management with them and so, over and above they have more skills than we have, so, they support us to write grants, to manage the projects, to comprehend in terms of finances, to do monetary and evaluation and to do overall objectives at the international level. For example, if we are doing an application for the European Union, or for the Italian government, or for the Danish government, which is very complex and complicated, the Good Shepard International, or others that we work with there, they help us now develop the application.

But for us, we support them with putting together the context, the local context, the geographical context, or the context of the people and the needs of the people here. So, we work with what we have, but then they help us to develop that application, the budgets, and then the frameworks, things like that.

Interviewer:
Do they work with you on the ground - like, do they come visit?

IP:
Most of the time, the capacity of this work is done online, but they do come to support physically - to monitor, to check the needs on the ground, and to help us gather the impact. You know there is a social transformation, there is a change. They help us now to document. If the funds came from the EU, if the funds came from the Italian Government, or other donors, they come and help us to document that whole process, how it has been done and all that.

Interviewer:
Okay, so mostly they help you with funding and creating a document to get funding?

IP:
Yeah. And also, to monitor and to do the reporting, and also to report, to document the impact.

Interviewer:

Yeah, okay, and how long has your organization been collaborating with international organizations?

IP:

This office is very new, but for Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd Sisters, they've been there for five years.

Interviewer:

Yeah, so quite some time. And, if you have like one specific project you are working with, with an international organization, how is this project started or how is it decided to begin? Who decides it?

IP:

What normally happens, we do what we call the baselines.

Interviewer:

The what?

IP:

The needs assessment. Baselines - the needs assessment - it's assessments. So, if it may be something to do with water and sanitation, it's something to do with education, and women empowerment. We go to the slums, or we go to the rural areas, where the need is. We take a good look at the needs assessment. Who work with the communities? We collect the data, and we document that. So, we now document the needs and now design a project from there. Maybe it is for children with a disability like somewhere in Meru, things like that. So, we go to do the needs assessment and then now develop a program as part of the community. So, mostly the community driven. For us, we have the community document and document that needs assessment.

Interviewer:

Just out of curiosity, can you tell like a specific, very grounded project, you're working with at the moment?

IP:

For this program, yes. Like now, even if you Google it, you go to see maybe Euphorisha women's center for example. This is in Ngong, yeah, so the needs of that program is that the women there - the girls there, the youth - are in need of economic empowerment. So, what we do, we have a vocational training, whereby we give them skills - we give them catering, we give them hairdressing, we give them adult literacy, because people they are illiterate, they have not been good to go to school very well. So, basically, we empower them, to go out there and then get a job. Sarah, it's more or less what we did with you in Positive Life Kenya.

Interviewer B:

Yeah, it's some of the same things with Faraja and all that.

IP:

At Positive Life Kenya, we used to have a Farraja house**,** just to let you know, whereby the women in Molongo - there was a center where they were being taught how to do dressmaking, how to do hairdressing, and they were given other skills, including financial literacy skills. So, with that, that's the project now we're working with, to ensure that the youth and the women and mothers are very, very well equipped to go out there and get an income, and maybe raise the budgets of their families. Just that financial kind of thing, serving the family.

Interviewer:

Okay, and in that specific project - of course you said that the international organizations helped you with monitoring and getting the funding - but is the funding still coming in or is there anything else you collaborate with these international organizations about this project?

IP:

Apart from funding, the donors in the North are now very hands on, including 100% of the Children, where Sarah sits. 100% for the Children, you know, it is in Denmark, its Danish people managing your money. So, also this donor, they are like that. They normally can make follow up on the finances. They can follow on the implementation, to see that all the activities that were planned for, they are being implemented, and if there are challenges, they work with us, like in that project in Gondwa, to help us now to mitigate. If you have any challenges in terms of implementation, in terms of maybe accounting, maybe in terms of even reporting. So, this now international partner will come in and help, even if it's remotely. Over and above, just like 100% for the Children, Sarah, they normally come for an annual project visits. They are called supportive supervision visits. So, these donors, they normally come to support us in that, and also with that to track how the project is going. So, the role of international donors or partners is very crucial to strengthen the capacity of organizations in Kenya at the grassroots here, to ensure that they are moving on very, very well. So, there's that kind of working together, even if it's not like hands-on - not demanding or like pushing, but they are there to, even if it's remotely, to support, including the financial aspects.

Interviewer:
Do you see any challenges when working or collaborating with international organizations?

IP:
Let me talk about the current situation. You know there is the war in Russia and what do you call this country?

Interviewer B:
Ukraine.

IP:
Russia and Ukraine. You know what has happened with the US government - Donald Trump. Like, if you look at Kenya, where we are seated, 50% of our budget came from the US government. This is in terms of malaria programs, HIV programs. You know HIV? Issues to do with medicines. That is one, and if you look at the agriculture project, about 20% of that came from the US money, for example. So, to answer your question it is now become become very, very hard, because if the US is not funding here - Denmark, I have seen a document from the Danish Government that even they are now cutting funding to the Global South to take care of the Danish people. That is their communication. So, if those governments are cutting funding, because their funding comes through this international organization, so definitely where we are sitting, we are going to be very, very much affected. We have to rethink, how we do our fundraising, and how we do our grants. So yes, right now, for the past three months, this is having a lot of - I would call it a paranoid shift, to think how we are going to get funding for health, for education, for the economic environment, for the

women, for the children, like the one you were with in Tumaini, for all that, yeah. So, it's going to become very, very hard for us to work with international donors, because they're also dictated by their governments. What I mean, for example, to be very specific, CISU gets money from the Danish Government, The US AID gets the money from the US Government. So, the government is the one that gives CISU money, or gives UK the money, so it's the whole position altogether for Africa - not only for Africa, even for other many, many countries.

Interviewer:
And, now of course, I can see that the funding of course affects your project or your projects or also the international organizations projects, but do you believe, or do you think that the funding could affect, how you can make decisions for your project, what you want to do?

IP:
Yes, I get that, Elena, very well. Yes, it has. Let me use that example for the USA Government. These top projects funding for Kenya, for example, in January, there was no clear communication. It was not communicated before that the project. You know, Sarah, programs like in CISU, they have timelines. You know now you have money for one year, for two years, so you are very sure that you have money for the implementation for all that, like two-three years. Now, this is different. We have given authorization for funding for maybe five years, they come in January and tell you they're not going to fund. It affects the whole programming. Number one, it will affect the human resource, all the staff, like in Kenya, I hear there are over 40,000 staff who have been laid off. The medicines, for example, for those who are working in the health programming - you can continue searching about what is happening - for people, who don't have medicines now including the HIV that is the one that used to be funded, the economic environment is the one which we do need help. So, to answer your question, is that now, yes because 90% will depend on donor aid, so what that does is that now it will affect human resources, as I was saying, it will now destroy the gains, that we had gained over the years, in terms of health programming. If people had HIV, all those gains now will be lost. People are going to start now, you know. If the issue of empowerment, Sarah, the one we are doing with you in Faraja, there is no longer now that funding, so the women will go back to the slums, to Mulorang, where it used to be. GBV will continue, you know, human rights, girls' rights. So, everything now becomes chaotic. Crime - crime now is very high, because now again, there's no advocacy, there's no money flowing,

there's no everything. So, it really affects everything. So, as people working with grants, we have to think and to change it, the way we think.

I know that there has been a lot of sustainability. Sarah, when I was with you in Positive Life Kenya, we used to think about sustainability. Thinking how if 100% does not support PLK, can PLK stand on its own even without that support from 100%? If we don't have money from the US government or Danish government, how do we stand on our own? That we continue financing our health, our education, our agriculture, our security and everything. So, we are not prepared for that. So, a lot is happening. So, it really affects the whole. It's a game changer.

Interviewer:
And how does all of this you describe; how does that affect your relationship with the international organizations?

IP:
Now, the whole relationship changes. If you are my mother or you are my parent, you've been giving me money, or school fees and you gonna say, you're not going to give me more. So, in terms of the relationship changes, we think of the West, as the people who have sent us these pieces, who are now making us suffer. And you look at it, the psychological part of it, is that now, Sarah, you remember we used to call you Mzungu?

Interviewer B:
Yeah, all the time.

IP:
Yeah, all the time. So, Mzungu is the one who makes us suffer. Be it Donald Trump, be it, because he was the one who was giving, now he's not giving. So, that now changes how we view ourselves as human beings. That's number one. Number two, it changes even the relationships in terms of trade. So, it's like the trade imbalances. So, if I was working now - this is a bit technical - if the US AID, the US government, has cuts its funding, so Kenya would want to go to China or to India. We look for another, what do you call them, other partners. So, now there's that kind of international diplomacy to refocus other than what came with the Americans. We're going to work with other people. These are examples I'm giving

here. So, I'm just, not to mention the USAID. So, if the international organization is not giving us money, so we tend also to go to China, we tend to go to even UAE, United Arab Emirates, actually Kenya is now already going to the United Emirates down there in the Arab world to seek for more funding. So, there's a whole change of the relationship. You are my friend, you are not helping me, so now I go to the East, to my friends. So, that's the whole thing that's changing now.

Interviewer:
Yeah, of course. This is a little bit another part of it. When you have a project or anything with an international partner, do they set any requirements?

IP:
Do they set what?

Interviewer:
Requirements or anything you have to do. Or do they set some rules of how to do it or stuff like that? Like reporting or maybe work methods, like do they set some requirements on what you have to do or how to work or how to, you know do some kind of project more specifically maybe?

IP:
Yes, every international partner or donor has their own guidelines yeah, and i want to use an example. The guidelines from the US are very strict, before you get their money. The experience from the EU, the guidelines from Denmark, that I have worked with before, they are not strict as such. So, donor requirements depend with this, there are donors - international donors - with very, very strict guidelines. So, yes there are guidelines in terms of, even the way you do the application itself, the proposal itself, even the way they design. There are a lot of guidelines, and a lot of requirements, so, you can have a guide and a lot of supporting documents, and you have to stay with that.

Number two, in terms of even the implementation, let me give you an example finances. Donors are very categorical with requirements. You must have bank accounts, you must have audited accounts, there's some money you cannot expand to some limit without talking to them, there are some things you cannot buy with their money. They give you guidelines, actually there's a document there, where you cannot spend their money and Sarah, you know you know this very well, there are some requirements that you cannot buy goods from people who are terrorists, who are maybe not friends of us on everything and everything. So, there are a lot of guidelines, there are a lot of requirements for you to do that, and that is in terms of finance. When you're implementing it, like, let me go back to Sarah and PLK. We have what we call safeguarding policies, child protection policies. So, you cannot get the money without having those documents. And your organization has to sign those documents saying, I will protect the girls, I will not harm the girl or the children, and we respect the rights of the marginalized and the poor. So, there are a lot of guidelines, and they are there just to ensure that we are working within a framework of human rights, because again, Kenya has signed the the U.N. Declarations, the International Laws, and all that. So, yes international donors have different sets of requirements, but the standard ones are those ones I've said - the finance, the implementation and also the guidelines in terms of how you use their money.

Interviewer:
Have you experienced some requirements from an international organization that you found like not useful or maybe limiting?

IP:
Limiting, yes, many, many times. In my field - I have worked in this field for 15 years - and many times, we have refused donor money. I will give like three or four examples. Number one, when the donor really, they become very hands-on. For example, they would want to send an expert to come and run your finances or your management. So, instead of building the capacity of the locals to work, they now say, we are bringing our people to come, and you guys are going to be like our people working on the hands. So, 90% of the budget, it goes to them, 10% to us. In terms of administration, that's unfair. Because they could have given us opportunities for capacity building and all that and all that.

Number two, every organization - I've worked in different organizations, and every organization has its values, its mission and goal, right? So, there are some donors, I’m not saying LGBTQ is bad, Sarah, this is a conversation i've had with you and Peter for many, many times, when you were in PLK, but there's some organization that is not their inclination. If this donor gives you the condition, that you have to really empower the girls and the boys into that space, LGBTQ - I know in Denmark you people are very exposed, you are very ahead and all that in human rights, so, there are donors who have their own interests - their money - so, the interest of their money does not align with our mission, our goal and value, so, sometimes you have to say no. And sometimes you find out when it's too late, when you've already started using the money. So, you've started implementing, and then now, they come, and again you see projects, that are very good at that. Finally, they'll give you the money, but within, when you start implementing doing things, they start sneaking in some of their agendas that they have not discuss, so, yeah, it happens many times that donors come in with their own interest without declaring, and then they start manipulating.

Interviewer:
And how does that affect like the trust between your organization, and how you perceive the trust from the international organization?

IP:
From my end I would now, the trust, everyone who comes we view them, we call it due diligence. Do you know due diligence?

Interviewer:
No, I don't.

IP:
Sarah, maybe you can explain what it means?

Interviewer B:
I'm actually not sure how to explain it.

IP:
You are my student, and you scored very highly, now i want to remove some masks from you. Due diligence is that now, we become very suspicious. Due diligence means, we start now checking the background of the organization - whom they have worked with before, how they have worked with, what are the sources of their money and all that. Because even you can get money from terrorists. You know in Kenya, do you remember it, Sarah, when there were a lot of bombing in Nairobi?

Interviewer B:

Yeah, I thought you asked if you wanted to take money from them? I remember in Nairobi, and in the malls and yeah.

IP:

And the malls yes, the terrorists who is bombers, yes. So, like now they can give you, but you don't know they are terrorists. So, when we get money from any international, we become very suspicious. So, they can be terrorists, they can be maybe human traffickers. Sarah, what is human trafficking?

Interviewer B:

It's a lot of things. It can be with sexual trafficking, it can also be with work, it can be with, yeah.

IP:

Good, now you are a good student. So, the organizations who hide themselves with all this this background, so I said Due diligence, you can google it later, is to find out the organization, its mission, its values, and where they're getting their money from. So, there's a lot of suspicion, before we partner yeah with international organizations.

Interviewer:

And what actions do you believe that an international organization can take to build up this trust between them and like a local organization like yours?

IP:

For now, it's just about partnership, I mean when you're looking at the partnership, it's you have the money, and I have Kenya right? This is the community, right? And maybe the children that we are supporting. It is just coming to our level, and understanding how we do our things. That's the best way. When Sarah came to Kenya, I want to use her example a lot, and Peter, I sat them down and told them, you're not in Denmark, this is Kenya. This is how people act; this is how people culture. You remember cultural things, Sarah? This is how people think, this is how people eat. So, at that level, you kind of become part of them. Not like you are here, and they are here. You understand? So, once you become part of them culturally, even the language and everything, that is a requirement. It is not that you are in Denmark, giving me the money and you are looking at me as a poor person - a person who doesn't think, as a poor person, a person who doesn't think, as a person who has no brain, no. So, like for the partnership to work, I would use, what Sarah and Peter did. When they came, I told them, you have to be one of the community members, as part of them. In that way, you're going to work together and get better results. You remember Sarah? I remember even you are getting into a Matatu. You can explain, a Matatu is what?

Interviewer B:
Yeah, the local busses.

IP:
Yeah, just give an example, so, for us is is accepting the peoples culture and accepting their level of poverty and then align with that, because you people are so much more developed than us, so, it's not like we are poor we are less human. So, I would call that discrimination, and don't discriminate. That's the best thing you can do about it. Number two, be very intentional - be very intentional. Intentional means that to build the capacity of the locals, to help them work in finance, in implementation and in the budget. So, that way you work in a very, very better way. Let them do their things but give them the capacity. I know, Sarah, you have done this many times, building the capacity of Positive Life Kenya and other organizations in the town. That's a very good way to partner with international organizations, to approve the lacking holes and all that. So, for me, I would think, not discriminate, to build the capacity of the people, and then the respect.

If Emilie was here, I will tell you know, and Sarah will tell you this, I have not been able to conduct a training or I have not been able to conduct a house visit, because of one, two, three things, Sarah knows in Kenya and in Africa we do things differently. We can say that this thing will happen on a Monday, it will happen on when?

Interviewer B:
If its planned on Monday, maybe Thursday.

IP:

Yeah, you have to respect the people around, and their culture and everything. If it's not happening on Monday, it's happening on a Thursday, there's so many things that might have happened. It's not that we don't know how to do it or want to do it or are able to do it, there are so many other things that happens, so, respect people's cultures, respect people's way of doing things, and have more of you people come here to learn and understand. These things are very important, because the way - Emilie have you been to the Global South?

Interviewer C:

I have been to Ghana, and Kenya too actually.

IP:

You went to Ghana? So, having people - more students - coming and learning, not only from Denmark, it now changes, because if you are a manager, Emilie, for an organization here, you will say these people are like this - I understand them, I know them, so that now goes back to what Elena was asking here, how do we work together and how do we build it? So, having more close border are very, very important.

Interviewer:

And how would you experience the ability of the international organization to meet your needs in your organization?

IP:

It depends. You can't give what you don't have. So, the ability to me also depends with the capacity of the international organization, how much they can give. So, what many of them do, from where I'm seated, they can say our budget is 60.000 crones, for example, we can only give you 20. And they look for two other partners who can sponsor the projects. But for smaller organizations, like PLK where Sarah was from or from Ghana where you are from, the money is budgeted together that can meet the needs of that particular project. So, 100% will give the money that fits the needs of that organization at that particular time. So, planning together now helps to meet the needs. We can say we are going to take care of the children; we are going to take care of the medical, we are going to take care of the loop cups for example. But the needs of the loop cups are met at that level. So, it depends on how you you communicate, how you design your project, and how you fundraise for your project.

Interviewer:

What do you think is the intention of the international organization to start up a partnership with for instance your organization?

IP:

I think most of those intentions are genuine. For example, let me just use 100% for the Children, they are very committed to the children, the youth, and the children's rights.

Interviewer:

I don't think we can hear you. Now, it helped.

IP:

You can hear me now?

Interviewer:

It's a bit low but try to say something now.

IP:

Is it okay now? can you hear me?

Interviewer:

Yeah, it's okay.

IP:

So, typically what normally happens is that the intentions are normally very good for example. So, if you are dealing with children, and they want to help the children, so, the intentions are normally very genuine from the heart. If it is children with disability, it is okay if it's the youth, you are marginalized, it's okay, it's the women, so, the intentional are normally very, very good. Of course, organizations look for organizations that have their own vision and values.

Interviewer:

And do you think the international organization commits to the same principles as you have?

IP:

Yes, most of them. Maybe a few who are not aligned.

Interviewer:

And if an organization is not aligned, as you said, what would you then do?

IP:

If it is not aligned, maybe you don't work with them. For example, maybe if you're not working with men - men may be in the workforce, men may be in the mines, and the organization that here is working with the children, so maybe they won't be able to work. So, it depends on the values, the mission and goals.

Interviewer:

Well, I don't have a lot of more questions. I'm not sure if you have anything that I missed or anything you want to elaborate on.

Interviewer B:

I think you worked around the questions nicely. I think we got some really good answers and a lot of good stuff to work further from, from now.

Interviewer:

I'm not sure if is there anything you want to add that we haven't asked you about or anything you want to elaborate on?

IP:

No, I think Sarah had prepped me very well for this, so, though I don't remember the questions that you had asked, but now what we normally do is that we just talk from our hearts and our minds what the reality is. So, basically, I think I've said the much that I can and you guys what you can do, if you need any information, I can just provide on that email, about the organization and all that and maybe explanation, I can really provide for you guys. I really want you guys to make it.

Interviewer B:

Thank you. We really appreciate it. I think it would be nice, I'm thinking about maybe contacting Mary or one of the others, maybe Kate from PLK. Do you think they would want to answer some of the same questions?

IP:

I think, Sarah, contact Kate directly. Kate can provide time. I know she can provide some answers.

Appendix 3: Transcription of the interview with Dunk Grassroot

Time: 23:56

The interview participant is referred to as 'IP' and the group member conducting the interview is called the 'Interviewer'. If another group member is speaking, they will be called 'Interviewer B', and so forth.

Interviewer:
Nice. So Emilie will ask the questions. And if you have any questions for us or if there's something you don't want to answer, you just let us know.

IP:
I will do that.

Interviewer:
Okay, great. And do you have any questions before we start?

IP:
No, I actually looked at the questions briefly. I didn't have much time to look at it, but I'm super open and very interested about the topic. So let's get right into it.

Interviewer:
Perfect. Perfect. Okay. So can you start by telling us a little bit about your organization and about your role in it?

IP:
Right. So my name is [redacted], but I prefer to be called [redacted]. And I've been with Dunk Grassroot, which is a local organization for the last 14 years uh i am one of the co-founders but currently my role is centered around partnership community activation and urban lifestyle kind of stuff... uh currently so more related to like youth development.. uh in the

organization.. uh dunk started as a social movement for young guys who were, you know, basketball players and just wanted to give back to young children, who may be at risk or being exploited. And that's how the program started. Currently, it has expanded to three main locations in Accra. But we also have four other locations spread across Ghana and also partner with other community to expand the program. So we have one in Tamale and then the rest in Accra. So we're basically in the north and south of Ghana.

We have three program areas. One is sports for development. And you can talk about all the inclusions and getting girls into sports and gender equality, life skills and all of that stuff. Folks under our sports for development program. We also have an after-school support program where we are focusing more on the formal education... so helping young kids to get scholarships so they can stay in school using sports as a tool to get them these scholarships and then the last part is centered around youth development and youth economic empowerment program... so after all the sports and all the leadership skills they learn they need to be an outlet and this is where this program kind of focus on. So basically that's what we do we have multiple projects that fit into these three different program areas.

Interviewer:

It's very interesting. And how does your organization work with international organizations?

IP:

It's pretty much project-based. We've worked with different international organizations, some that are quite big, some also that are medium-sized. And most of the time we look for a partnership that feeds into one of our program development areas and then we develop a project based on that. Of course, previously when we started working with international organizations, it was pretty much whatever they proposed, you say yes to it because you are in need. It's a small organization and there's this power dynamics and all of that stuff. But after a while, given our experience over the last decade, we also started having negotiations about what the project should look like, considering the context and the needs of the local partners and all of that. But so far, their working relationship has been more project-based. Some organizations want to expand to Ghana, but they don't want to start a whole organization on their own. So they will run through our program of course considering that similar values similar vision and and and address the same needs uh in different countries. So that has been some of their relationship that we've had with international partners.

Interviewer:

And how does the collaboration start? Do you make like a written agreement or ?

IP:

yeah yeah first of all you know most of their international partners, they have an office or a resource person who is always looking out for different partners based on whatever opportunity they have. So most of their international partners are actually on the lookout for organizations that are working in developing countries. So we've had a lot of the collaboration started more from people finding us either on LinkedIn or social media and then it's followed by a lot of online meetings. Sometimes they do a site visit, they will come to the site and get to see what you're doing and also check all the compliances if you meet this international standard requirement for whatever project you guys are developing. And then before projects start, usually you sign an agreement. So all the partnerships, we have an agreement. It also depends on the type of agreement we sign. Some of it is just project-based. So you sign specifically for the project and then when the project ends, the agreement automatically also ends. And there are also partners who sign like an open-end kind of MOU. So you're working together either with or without a project you're still partners and depending on whatever that comes up you can just implement right away without having to sign another agreement

Interviewer:

And for how long have you been collaborating with international organizations?

IP:

I think i think it will be about 10 years now.. um since we've been working with international uh partners if i recall. If I recall, it would be after our third year already. We had some international organizations. It's been quite a journey.

Interviewer:

And you already mentioned a bit of a challenge with deciding the project. But do you experience any challenges when working with international partners?

IP:

Yeah, you know, I would say it's a blessing but it also has its own curse, you know, because if you're an international organization, it's like you have a very strict frame and some get out of that frame is very difficult. All the processes that they have to go through to get out of that frame is so difficult and it's so long. So it's very easy for them to stick with the frame. But if you're a grassroots organization or local organization like us, the decision making is quite easier. So it's easy to adjust and move things around and be flexible. Sometimes it's very, very difficult to get international organization or international partners to understand your need and the reason why, the relevance of getting a bit out of that frame to meet the need.
And those can be very challenging. So sometimes you may have a project that repeats itself for many years and there is no kind of room to get out of the project design to include other ideas. Perhaps maybe it's an area where they don't have methodology for and they don't want to get out of that comfort zone because it requires a lot of steps and stuff to change that. So they'd rather stay in that area where they've done for many years and they are comfortable with. And I think this is with many organizations, nobody wants to get out of that quickly. And that can be very challenging.
And what we suffer from that is if the project is designed for youth and youth have been in the program for many years and they don't see the next step of it, then you start losing them, right? So then we have to deal with that. But that has been some of the challenges, but there's more positive to it than the challenges, that's for sure.

Interviewer:
Well, that's good. And how do you experience the funding of a project?

IP:
I mean our funding… we're trying to diversify our experience so far.. you know if you have international partnership it is quite easy with the funding because most of their administration of the funding is done by the international partners so there's not much heavy responsibility on you. Of course you also need to report to their the partner and they report to whoever fund projects. But so far our experience with the funding hasn't been that difficult because we also worked a bit on our system. We invested in developing a strategic plan and put all the policies and procedures in place, which is also one of the benefits of working with international partners because you start also developing your internal capacity. So far, the experience has been good for us. We've not really faced any big challenges in administering funding with international partners.

Interviewer:

So do you experience that the funding of a project can affect the decision making of your project?

IP:

Yeah, if I understand your question, so if the one providing the funding is having more influence in the decision?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

IP:

Something like decision?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

IP:

Unfortunately, yes, it does. And it's the truth, you know, if somebody is the donor and they have to meet a certain criteria, no matter what happens, no matter the discussion, one way or the other, they won't find a way to meet that criteria. So unfortunately, that's the challenge there. There's the experience there and we have to accept it one way or the other.

But I think what is more important is if you find partners who are willing to listen and put that into consideration for future projects and not be very like, you know, in a box and not listen at all. And I think that's what is very important for us is that kind of progressive thoughts where we build a relationship together over years that we start also compromising and being flexible with each other.

Interviewer:

So how do you experience the collaboration between your organization and the international organizations that you are working with?

IP:.

And this is more like the relationship, like the experience between the two?.. um the experience for us like I said um has been good.. um all the challenges that I have mentioned... um but I recall more of the positive and also the benefit we have received as an organization, not specifically the funding but the leverage of working with international organization to strengthen our local system to also start understanding, you know, if we want to step the game up and we want to meet certain projects and and international agendas that we also need to strengthen some of our internal capacity and that has been the most remember... like vividly helping us with this relationship with international partners.

Apart from that, you know, the second thing is the funding of course, because we don't have government subventions in Ghana and maybe in other African countries we don't have this, so we also heavily rely on either local donations or international relations to direct this funding. so that has been uh the experience yeah

Interviewer:

and what action do you believe that your international partners can take to build trust with uh with your organization?

IP:

I think for me is one of the things is really transparency.. um when partners see that level of transparency or partners are able to exhibit some level of like committed and passionate for the work that you do and I think that's something we've also been able to exhibit because most of the guys in the program are all basketball players and they're just enjoying the sports and being around the sports. But we also came to realize that it's bigger than sports and we can use that the way to impact our community so we also had to learn you know about our organizational leadership of our project management and and all of that stuff, which we also learn, of course, through some partners. But for me, number one is really transparency. And that's why for us, it's very important. And in everything we do, we have their involvement of the youth that we work with. So sometimes when we go to meetings, we have the youth there. We're doing a report, we have the youth there. When we are developing a project, the youth are the voice of the project before we even come in. And that has been one of the things that I think we've excelled at. And that's why we've had this building of trust with most of our international partners.

Interviewer:

Have some of your partners been to Ghana and seen your projects? Or is it mostly online?

IP:

All our partners so far have been to the program. They've been to Ghana, they've been to the center they've talked to the beneficiaries so it makes it much easier when you work together when people have seen a bit of the contest

Interviewer 2:

Can i ask a question it's just something i thought of and now, you have been in dunk for a lot of years, so you have seen like the the development of the organization and you also mentioned in the beginning that at first when you had collaboration with a partner you really also took what was given kind of. Do you feel like at some point that dunk had to compromise your values in order to match?

IP:

I think maybe you also have some strong personalities in the organization and a bit of a positive ego for the program. Because like I said we started as a social movement, so none of this international stuff was planned, right, it came. So for us we were okay with our social program right, so that means if somebody came and they were giving us whatever and making us bend our values a bit, then we were not okay with that because we were meant to be a social program and we were fine with that so we didn't need to bend that much. But I have to mention it's not all roses there's been some partnership that we had to cancel. And i think that's also a skill yeah um and a tough position uh to have. I've seen many organizations in Ghana who are upcoming and they have to deal with a lot of stuff that may not be the best for them. One of it is around volunteering-sending-organizations. And there's just a lot of values that they temper with in that process. For some of them it is business. For some of them it is for their clients that are coming to Ghana for them is tourism which we do respect. But the values and the main reason for that project, which is coming to Ghana for an internship or whatever it is, needs to be respected. So we've had some things that we had to say no to them because of their value to volunteering and international cooperation and stuff like that. We just had to say no. It took us some time, but I believe we got to a point where we felt we had a strong voice and we could push back some people. We had to stop that.

Interviewer:

So now, how do you experience the ability of your international partners to meet your needs and expectations in the partnership?

IP:
I think one thing that we always leverage on is coming back to the transparency. I think we're in part able to see that, you know, the target group are very involved in the project. One way or the other, they start listening to you. I don't know how that works. It does work. It's not me sitting at the computer and just telling them stuff. They've been to Ghana and where we have partners visiting, we have a whole structure on how they can meet the community. So we set meetings with them and the community and they go and speak with the community. We are not influencing that meeting. So we stay away. They speak with their group. They speak with whoever that needs to be talked to so it gives them a sense of like okay these people have a very strong community support so whenever we're talking about project and being the voice of the community they are most likely obliged to listen so for us it has worked really really well that our partners actually come to Ghana we actually like them to come together see the program speak with the target group and then we can develop something. Then it's the voice of the people that we represent and that has really worked well for us uh so far. So hopefully it doesn't change

Interviewer:
What do you think the main intentions of your international partners is with partnering with with you?

IP:
I think one of it is um... I mean they have passion for the work they do and I think one of it is to meet like an international agenda on whatever topic either human rights, education whatever it is I think one of it is to meet that international agenda and of course they have their own national agenda so let's say their government of Denmark wants to expand education to developing countries and there is a funding for partners who start looking for partners in Africa to partner with them on this agenda. So there is that. So that I think is just normal and that's how it is. That's the world of international development. I think the important part also is if that agenda aligns to their local agenda of whoever you're a partner with, I think that's just perfect partnership, right? So the intentions are very diverse, but for me, there's always their international agenda, there's always the national agenda.

And for us, it just needs to meet our own national agenda.

Interviewer:
And do you feel like they also, even though they come with some of their own interests or goals, do you feel like they also genuinely care about your work?

IP:
Yeah, they do. I think all the organizations we've worked with, besides the one we had to say no to, I think all of them really have a strong passion in what they do and they believe in the work they do.

Interviewer:
That's nice. And how do you perceive the international partners' commitment to the principles that are important to you in your organization?

IP:
I think when we develop the projects, we try to build it around this principle in terms of administering the project. I think that so far has been very well respected. We respect all our partners' values and their requirements as much as we also want them to respect ours. So far it's been quite respected, but I think a lot of it is based on dialogue because if you also... you cannot assume a partner to know your values and respect them if you're not sharing it right, so I believe once we are developing the project we also say 'you know okay we do this that way, you do this this way, how do we do it for this project'. That kind of dialogue is very important and with most of our partners we do that every month or every quarter with them.

Interviewer:
And how long do you often work with an international partner? Is there like a typical time limit?

IP:
It's open as long as the project needs expansion, as long as we still need to develop the program. One of them, we worked with for over five years now. We keep developing the program every, year so.. sometimes you might even think they have a branch in Ghana. There's also that benefit. So it's really open it depends, sometimes you may not have an active

project but you still believe in the partnership so you still stay in touch until you're potention develops.

Interviewer:

I actually don't have any more questions. I don't know if you have?

Interviewer 2:

I think we've run around all the questions pretty well. Do you have anything you think we missed?

IP:

Not so much. But if you're transcribing and maybe a follow-up question comes up, you feel free to email me. I'll try to answer that.

Interviewer 2:

If you want the transcription you we can send it to you

IP:

yeah yeah that'd be good

Appendix 4: Transcription of the interview with PLK

Time: 19:08

The interview participant is referred to as 'IP' and the group member conducting the interview is called the 'Interviewer'. If another group member is speaking, they will be called 'Interviewer B', and so forth.

Interviewer:
Yeah, so and of course if at some point you feel like you don't want to have your answers in the study, you can always tell us and we can remove them. Yes, so do you have any questions before we start?

IP:
Not really. How long will it take?

Interviewer:
Around 30 minutes I think, 20-30.

IP:
That's fine, that's fine.

Interviewer:
That's good. Okay, so can you start by telling us a little bit about PLK and your role in PLK?

IP:
I think generally in a nutshell, PLK is a non-governmental organization in Kenya, working in more than five counties across the country, but our major presence is in Machakos. Our focus is purely on the issues of children. And because of our project supporting children, we have found ourselves supporting many other things; women, women empowerment. We have found ourselves in climate change, we have found ourselves in civil and economic rights and we have generally found ourselves in the governance issues because of the political situation in our country.

Interviewer:

So, how does your organization work with international organizations usually?

IP:

Okay, our work with international organizations is **???? (01:36)**. Ah, we work in various areas. First of all, there's the major issue which is funding. We work with international organizations as a leeway to seek international funding because then, as you know, most of the funding for NGOs in Kenya comes from abroad. So that is number one. Number two is we have worked with international organizations in the areas of volunteership. We've had those exchange programs, volunteers, students and all that for the purpose of sharing knowledge and learning. Finally, we've also worked with international organizations for visibility. The organizations that we don't generally work for the purpose of getting money, but through them we get visibility both at home and abroad because of the networks that, that they have. We've also worked with a number of other organizations in the areas of technical assistance. There are very many areas where you find that we may not have the capacity, but we come across organizations that are good in that field, so then they are coming to offer the technical support and the expertise of which cuts both ways. We can also offer technical support in issues regarding our country and in Africa and they can offer us technical support in the areas that they are good at. I think those are the major areas where we work with international organizations.

Interviewer:

Okay, so when you start a collaboration or partnership with this organization? How does the partnership start? Like, do you reach out to them? Or do they reach out to you? Like, how does such thing happen?

IP:

I don't know, I don't know how you want me to answer the question. Is it in the context of working only with the PLK or in the overall context? Because other than working with the PLK, I've also worked with international organizations in other capacities. So I don't know if you want me to restrict my answers to PLK?

Interviewer:

Yeah, maybe in the context of PLK. Yeah.

IP:

Okay, so you can come up with the question again?

Interviewer:

Okay, so when PLK starts a partnership with an international organization, some, maybe funding wise, for example, how does such partnership begin? Like how is it established? Who reach out to who?

IP:

I think for us it is both ways. We've had cases where we have reached out to the organizations, but we also had a number of cases where they have reached out to us. Through maybe recommendations from other organizations that have worked with us, so we've had these organizations reaching out to us so it is both ways, it has worked both ways. Yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay. So do you experience any challenges working with the international organizations or do PLK experience any challenges maybe?

IP:

Yeah, this engagement cannot be devoid of challenges. The challenges are - there are so many. One, being looking at the context. Most international organizations have come to Africa to work with PLK, but then you find that in some instances they have not taken their time to understand the context in which they are working. And therefore they have come in and they want the support to be implemented in their context. Yet, the people we are helping are not in that context. So, at the end of the day, I think you know what happens. We end just maybe, we end up not doing what exactly we are supposed to do, because we are trying to fit in a context that is not Africa. That is number one. Uh, number two, we have also seen international organizations coming in and they are also organizations in their countries in their own rights, okay? And they have, they have their own targets to achieve and therefore at times it becomes very difficult to learn those targets, okay? So, you find yourself pushed to the wall to actually fulfill targets that are applying to another organization and not really the targets that align with your organization. You see? So, those are issues we have also dealt with. The other challenge that we seen with international organizations is relating to our cultures. The cultural differences at times also makes it a bit challenging for us to reach a level ground in terms of addressing what we seek to address. You see? Something else is the technical know-how and the technical expertise. We are living in a highly technological world, a lot of things have changed. The world has turned into a global village, but it does not necessarily mean that this is applying everywhere, okay? The fact that technology and advancements have penetrated the world does not mean that it has penetrated everybody. So, then you will find international organizations coming in under, in the process of you implementing together, they come in with with platforms. They come in with new ideas. It would be necessary that as you come in with the new these new ideas, you must be **cognizant (??? 08:10)**, but the organizations that you are dealing with, are at another level in terms of the expertise, okay? So, if you are introducing a new a new technology to be used for the purpose of you maybe monitoring your work or making sure that everything is in place the way you want it, then you should invest - you should invest in enhancing the capacity of that organization to understand, okay? When you want these people to start using QuickBooks, you want them to start using Airtable, you want them to start using all these new platforms, okay? Investing in the know-how, the technical capacity of the entire organization is very important, because then at the end of the day it makes the implementation very difficult and it takes a lot of time. You see? So, I think those are some of the major issues that I have observed.

Interviewer:
Okay, and how do you experience that affecting the relationship between, or the partnership between, PLK and the international organizations, like these challenges that is a big part of collaboration and do challenge the projects, I can assume. How does that affect the relationship?

IP:
Emh, I think it affects both the relationship both ways. If we look at it just from the perspective of the donor, then I think that would also be a bit narrow. I would like to look at it both ways. At times, at times in attempting to satisfy, to satisfy the international needs of the donor, we find ourselves at crossroads with the community. Also as posted on our social media it is crucial that we hold our governments accountable for its lack of commitment in ensuring HIV/Aids funding, and other social areas, and not just other countries doing this.

So, you find that you are giving, you are trying to conform to some things that are internationally aligned, but which do not necessarily align with the community. So, either way, then as an organization, we find ourselves in the middle. If I please you to make sure that I fulfill what you want, I go against the needs of my community. If I insist on serving the community, then I strain our relationship with the donor. So, it becomes a very delicate balance and it is something that I think should be done about, because at the end of the day, when we are spending this money, who matters the most? I think it's the beneficiary. But again, if our relationship is not good, then I will also not help the beneficiary. So, most of the time we are forced to align with the donor. And yet our people who should be enjoying these services are suffering. Yeah, I think that is it.

Interviewer:
Yeah, wow. So what actions do you think the international organization could take to strengthen this relationship or to build more trust with, for example, PLK. What actions do you think they should take?

IP:
I have seen a number of organizations taking action in the right direction, and I really appreciate. Ah, key in that regard is the issue of capacity. I have seen international organizations coming in with projects, but also setting aside some funds for the purpose of bringing us up to speed, so that we are at the same level. That is number one. Something else that international organizations should do is, it is important that they invest in understanding the context of the problem within the communities that they come to staff, and not only insisting on meeting their targets. International organizations should find a way of striking a balance between the international targets and the local targets, so that we can play, we can be at a level playing field. Something else that I think international organizations should also do is, these organizations should work towards long-term relationships with local organizations. Because you just come in, we have known each other for two years, and then you are gone, and I'm with another organization. So, I keep shifting between understanding organizations, but if we can build long-term relationships that's funding even 10-20 years, then you find that we get to understand each other. It must not necessarily be through financial benefit, we can, we can relate beyond donor funding. So, that then we are, we are addressing these challenges over a long period of time and that will really bring a lot of impact.

Interviewer B:

That makes sense.

Interviewer:

That makes sense, yeah. Do you think the collaboration is equal?

IP:

In terms of?

Interviewer:

Like, do you think it's an equal collaboration that between, let's say PLK and some international organization, do you think that you give as much as they give? Like, it's an equal collaboration, an equal partnership between the two?

IP:

I don't think the collaboration is equal. In most cases, it is not. And this you can observe in so many ways. There still exists a form of bureaucratic relationship between local organizations and international partners.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

IP:

And this speaks to the fact that we are not at the same level, which is a very sad thing. For me it is very sad. I wish we could always work on that, but there is still bureaucracy.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Okay. Okay, so do you feel like that the international organizations care about PLK's values? Do you think they align with the international organizations values? I think you put it in a challenge, like you mentioned it in some of the challenges previously, how that it could be difficult to align the values. Do you think that the partners you have now co-align with the values that PLK have?

IP:

There are instances where they align. There are instances where they align. And you'll find that in most cases we align, especially at the point of the problem. We align at the point of the problem. We are both addressing something that we believe in. For example, talking about children. You'll find that some of these international organizations are very passionate about children. PLK are very passionate about children, and therefore in that regard we align. But then, when you get out of that space of the problem, now coming and looking at our personal values as organizations - the values of the international organization, the values of PLK as a local organization - most of the time we don't align. Most of the time we don't align on that. There are very few instances where there is that alignment.

Interviewer:
Do you think that is an issue or do you think that is something that you can work with? Do you think that affects the partnership?

IP:
Um, I don't think it is a big issue. However, it affects the partnership just up to the extent that we fail to deliver on the problem.

Interviewer:
Yeah.

IP:
Because, uh, we are different organizations and our values and beliefs do not necessarily have to be the same, but in that regard, i don't believe there can be a hundred percent alignment. About that we should have just an issue of understanding of each other.

Interviewer:
Okay, so do you feel like they also accept the values you have and appreciate those?

IP:
Yes, I think in many instances, yes.

Interviewer:

That's good. I don't know what to... I think we've been around most of the questions here. Do you think we're missing something?

Interviewer C:
No, I think you went around it really well, and you had really good answers. Yeah, really good answers. Something we can think about and use. So that was really nice.

Interviewer:
Yeah. Yeah.

IP:
Thank you so much.

Interviewer:
I think it went around a lot of the questions that we had. So, if you don't have any more questions - do you have questions, Teddy?

IP:
Not really. Not really. I am good.

Interviewer:
Okay, you're good. We can send you the transcription - is that what it's called - after we're done so you can check.

IP:
Yeah, the transcription. Yeah, the transcription. I'll appreciate that.

Interviewer:
We will send it to you, so you can see what we are writing, right?

IP:
Okay. Thank you so much.

Interviewer:

Thank you so much.

IP:

It was nice meeting you.

Interviewer:

Have a good day.

IP:

You too, bye.

Interviewer:

Bye.

Appendix 5: Coding scheme

Theme	**Description**	**Color Code**
Organizational background and collaboration with international organization	• The role, mission and history of the organization • Their view on the collaboration with international partners • Efforts made towards localization	
Funding	• Financial dependence • Donors effect • Funding constraints • Impact of US Aid • Bureaucratic requirements	
Power imbalances	• How project decisions are made • Who has control, and how funding influences local decision-making	
Trust and relationship	• Factors that build or weaken trust in INGOs including: ○ Ability ○ Benevolence ○ Integrity	

Appendix 6: Consent form

Consent to the processing of personal data

Data controller student: Elena Fyrstenborg Offersen

Title of project: Trust in localization processes

Supervisor of the project: Danny Raymond

Description of the project:

Our motivation is to understand how local actors experience the collaboration with international organisations and how they are being met with trust by their partners.

I hereby give my consent for the above-mentioned student to process data about me in connection with his/her education at Aalborg University. My personal data will be included in the above-mentioned project. I hereby consent that:

- My data may be processed in the project.
- My data may be disclosed to one or more students who write the project together. The students have a joint data responsibility.
- My data may be disclosed to Aalborg University and to a possible external examiner in connection with supervision and assessment.
- My data may be published in anonymized form in connection with the publication of the project. This point can be removed completely if it is deemed unnecessary. The assessment must be made for each individual project.

Date:

Name:

Signature:

Consent can be withdrawn at any time with effect for the future. This can be done by contacting this email: Sarahjuuls@gmail.com

Information to the data subject
According to the rules of the General Data Protection Regulation, the student as data controller must inform the data subjects of their rights in connection with the processing of the data. The student registers and processes personal data on the basis of Article 6(1)(a) of the GDPR. Sensitive data, i.e. whole-body data or data concerning racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs or trade union membership, are registered and processed on the basis of Article 9(2)(a) of the GDPR. Both rules allow for the processing of data when the data subject has given explicit consent.

Processing and storage
The student treats the personal data confidentially. The information will be stored until the project has been assessed and the deadline for appeals in connection with the assessment has expired.

Disclosure of information
Data subjects may contact the student at any time to obtain a copy of the information.
The information will not be disclosed to others unless consent has been given.

Data access
Data subjects may contact the student at any time to obtain a copy of the data.

Rectification of data
If the data subject believes that incorrect information has been registered, the student can be asked to rectify the information. This means that the student corrects the information or notes that the information is incorrect and registers the correct information. The data subject is entitled to have the student disregard the information until it has been determined which information is correct.

Withdrawal of consent and deletion of data
If the student has obtained consent from the data subject to process the data, the data subject will be able to revoke the consent at any time. Therefore, the student cannot continue to process the data after the consent has been withdrawn.

The data subject has the right to have information that the student has registered about him or her deleted if the information is no longer necessary for the purpose for which it was collected. The data must also be erased if the data subject withdraws consent to the processing or if the data has been processed unlawfully by mistake. The data subject is not entitled to erasure of data that has been archived in accordance with the rules of the Danish Archives Act in the university's archive system.

Complaint to the Danish Data Protection Agency
Data subjects may complain about the processing of their data to the Danish Data Protection Agency dt@datatilsynet.dk.