Article

Localisation Across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

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Abstract
Whilst the relation between local and global levels has been a long-standing concern of humanitarian, development, and peace efforts, in recent years the term "localisation" has become a major issue in the humanitarian sector whilst peacebuilding scholarship has taken a "local turn." This article analyses the concept of localisation across the three parts of the triple nexus—humanitarian, development, and peace. It traces the long-standing concern with the local in each of these domains, considering similarities and differences in their engagement with the local and counter-veiling trends towards universalisation, before proceeding to frame four challenges common to localisation across all forms of conflict response: defining the local, valuing local capacity, maintaining political will, and multi-scalar conflict response.

Keywords
localisation, humanitarian action, peace, development, Triple Nexus

Localisation and global-local dynamics have in recent years emerged as major themes across all forms of conflict response. Whilst a commitment to the local has long been a mantra in international development and peacebuilding circles, there has over the past few years been a much louder call for genuine localisation in humanitarian policy debates. In particular, the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 signalled the emergence of localisation as a central issue on the international humanitarian agenda.

There is a need for a critical reappraisal of the concept of localisation in conflict responses, whether in terms of providing effective humanitarian relief, fostering locally rooted development in conflict-affected contexts, or in fostering peace. Whilst each of these three domains exhibits similarities and differences in how they treat scalar issues of global-local dynamics, with the rise of nexus thinking

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with its integration of humanitarian, development, and peace efforts, or the UN's New Way of Working, there is a need for integrative and holistic thinking across and beyond sectoral silos (Slim, 2017).

Calls for localisation have long been made in various guises in humanitarian action, development, and peacebuilding, yet in recent years, the spread of intractable conflict and failed interventions has led to a coalescing around the search for effective local responses to conflict. This is all the more pressing in the Arab region, which is home to a disproportionate amount of contemporary conflicts and crises. The region faces a major challenge in both translating global responses into local solutions and also in identifying existing grassroots, community-level capacities for responding to conflict and dealing with its aftermath. In short, considering the scale and nature of conflict in the Arab world, localisation has been transformed from a policy choice to a necessary, default option—which calls for a critical interrogation of its meanings, potentialities and shortcomings.

This article analyses localisation across three forms of conflict response. It begins with a brief contextualisation of the Triple Nexus concept and then examines humanitarian action, development, and peace in terms of the genealogy of the concept of the local in each form of response and competing framings of localisation. The paper then presents four challenges that cut across all forms of conflict response—defining the local, valuing local capacity, maintaining political will, and multi-scalar conflict response.

The Triple Nexus

The Triple Nexus is the latest attempt, led primarily by leading aid donors, to seek greater coherence between the humanitarian and development sectors. In the 1990s, the relief to reconstruction continuum was a leading model and reform efforts including Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development was a precursor of contemporary debates, attempting to redress the disconnect between short-term relief and long-term development that has long limited the effectiveness of conflict response (J. Macrae, 2001). In the 2000s, the concept of fragility emerged, which prompted further discussion of integrated approaches to conflict (Barakat & Larson, 2014). More recently, the conceptual prism of resilience has framed debates over linking approaches to conflict, humanitarian crisis, and disaster risk reduction, with a link to localisation in that "resilience increasingly focuses on working with and upon the capacities, capabilities, processes, and practices already 'to hand' rather than the external provision of policies or programmes" (Chandler, 2015, p. 28). Stabilisation—blending security, humanitarian aid, and early recovery to promote stability in conflict and crisis spots—also offered an integrated approach (Goodhand, 2010), albeit one more instinctively resisted by humanitarian actors concerned with losing independence through association with militarised approaches to aid.

A Double Nexus—or humanitarian development nexus—was proposed as part of the Grand Bargain—a landmark agreement between large donors and humanitarian organisations—launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. The Triple Nexus—or humanitarian development-peace nexus—was proposed by Secretary General Antonio Guterres in 2017 as part of a renewed emphasis on prevention in the UN system in the face of increasing conflict globally (International Council of Voluntary Agencies [ICVA], 2017). Proponents of the Triple Nexus hold that it could enable the breaking down of the "silos" of the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors. However, there has been significant criticism of the Triple Nexus concept and its implementation. Humanitarian actors are concerned that integration with "peace" is a guise for securitised approaches and that they will be asked to collaborate not with peacebuilding actors but rather with militaries engaged in stabilisation and counter-terrorism (Tronc et al., 2019). There is also fear that powerful Western donors are pushing reforms to

demonstrate cost-effectiveness in an era of public scepticism towards aid and to meet security rather than humanitarian or developmental objectives, principally stemming the flow of migration. Such fears were mirrored in negotiations over Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16)—on peace, justice, and strong institutions—when some states worried that SDG 16 would be abused by states looking to securitise and militarise development (Lazarus, 2020).

Whilst it remains to be seen whether talk of a humanitarian-development-peace nexus can change dominant modes of operation, the concept is a useful heuristic device for structuring discussion in this article around localisation and locally led multi-sector conflict response. A report on the Triple Nexus states that "the potential emphasis on local leadership and the development of national and local systems to accountably provide essential social services offers the opportunity for more sustainable, appropriate and transformative responses" (Fanning & Fullwood-Thomas, 2019, p. 3). The local is also a natural place for working beyond silos as crisis affected populations tend not to operate with the same distinctions between sectors that structure the international aid apparatus.

Humanitarian Action

The World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 brought the already hotly debated concept of localisation into the mainstream in its "Grand Bargain" agreement signed by 52 national and international humanitarian and development organisations. Whilst localisation is a contested term, a common theme in academic and practitioner definitions is "the need to recognise, respect, strengthen, rebalance, recalibrate, reinforce or return some type of ownership or place to local and national actors" (Barbelet, 2018, p. 5).

There are multiple drivers of the trend towards localisation. First, the international humanitarian system has been critiqued from a range of perspectives as top-down and Northern-driven (Gingerich & Cohen, 2015), centralised and bureaucratic (Spiegel, 2017), and as slow and risk-averse (Healy & Tiller, 2014). Furthermore, the international humanitarian system is criticised for ignoring local knowledge (G. Macrae, 2008), denying local and national ownership (Telford & Cosgrave, 2007), and whilst the humanitarian sector employs an estimated half a million people worldwide—the majority of whom are local staff (Clarke et al., 2019) —international staff are disproportionately represented in senior management roles. Research has shown the value of local actors in terms of more effective humanitarian operations due to culturally appropriate local knowledge and effective identification of, and communication with, vulnerable groups within conflict-affected communities (Tanner & Moro, 2016; Ward, 2020).

Second, over the past decade, the spread of conflict reversed the long-term decline in deaths due to armed conflict, leading to shrinking humanitarian space. With reduced access to conflict zones, "many humanitarian actors are now working at arm's length through local NGOs or government authorities" (Healy & Tiller, 2014, p. 4)—often sub-contracting with little present on the ground or utilising remote management (Collinson & Elhawary, 2012). In contemporary contexts, in particular the Syria crisis, the usual "big players" of Western NGOs are no longer dominating the humanitarian landscape, with local and national NGOs far outnumbering them and accounting for a significant proportion of humanitarian aid delivery. Third, there is increasing recognition that local NGOs are often the first responders on the frontline of humanitarian crises, and that "their proximity and first-hand knowledge and understanding of their own contexts cannot be matched" (McGoldrick, 2016). Yet despite this reality, "much that is local and non-western in humanitarian action goes unrecognized" (Donini et al., 2008, p. 4).

At the World Humanitarian Summit, the international humanitarian community collectively agreed to a specific, time-bound target of transferring 25% of humanitarian aid directly to local actors by 2020.

Whilst there is a growing consensus around the need for some form of localisation of humanitarian action, the process faces a number of barriers. First, a common criticism is that local humanitarian actors simply do not have the capacity to deal with such a rapid resource transfer, largely from the Global North to the South. Whilst depictions of a capacity gap in the Global South have been critiqued as self-serving, paternalistic and colonial framings pushed by a Northern-dominated humanitarian system (Jayawickrama, 2018), often there is inadequate pre-crisis capacity, and "local organisations have enormous burdens placed on them to respond, but often do not have the skills and experience required to conduct technically difficult interventions" (Healy & Tiller, 2014, p. 4). Whilst the goal of transferring power and resources is laudable, "it is arrogant to assume that national NGOs can handle 25% of funds."[1] If sufficient capacities already existed to cope with a societal crisis then the situation cannot be truly defined as a disaster—which is a shock event leading to losses "that exceed the community's or society's ability to cope using its own resources" (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2012, p. 9).

Second, localisation faces the barrier of being defined as a resource competition. The focus of debate on the 25% figure was a reductionist move that has in one sense created a zero-sum mentality between established Western NGOs and Southern NGOs, which is detrimental to the goal of humanitarian partnerships. Third, localisation is a fundamentally political in addition to a technical process (Barbelet, 2018). Some international actors fear that ceding control to local actors risks humanitarian aid not conforming with humanitarian principles, in particular through politicisation to the detriment of neutrality (Duclos et al., 2019). Whilst such fears may be well grounded, this depiction draws an overly naive distinction, casting international actors as untainted by politics when any humanitarian presence in conflict zones in inherently political.

The concept of localisation in humanitarian action differs from notions of the local in the domains of peacebuilding and development/reconstruction, primarily in that the humanitarian system is more centralised and streamlined globally with the Big Five INGOs possessing considerable power and resources. One of the major concerns of national NGOs is that large international donors and NGOs are insincere about their stated commitment to the goal of localisation, with some alleging an infantilising and colonial attitude (reference—now duplication). Localisation in this guise is viewed not as a merely technical fix but rather as a fundamentally political process and a potential means for addressing broader systemic power imbalances and decolonising humanitarian action (DuBois, 2018).

Development

This section will analyse the notion of the local in two areas—first, development in "normal" contexts and second, development in conflict-affected contexts, or post-conflict reconstruction. In terms of mainstream development theory and practice, localisation is as old as the notion of development itself. Yet over the years, this guiding principle has often only been paid lip service to, with fewer resources going into genuine participatory work at the local level at a time when more communities have developed the capacities to engage with regional and international actors. An emphasis on the local is something that has been lost in much development work. Whilst an intimate understanding of local conditions was essential for colonial officers, rapid advances in communication technology have transformed development work as head offices gained much more power over field offices, thus hastening the harmonisation of global best practice aid approaches (Eyben, 2011).

Steps towards greater understanding and appreciation of "the local" come alongside processes of universalising knowledge about, and approaches to, development. In the 1990s, development debates focused on the universal blueprint offered by the Washington Consensus on the one hand and alternatively grassroots, bottom-up development at the local level. More recently, focus on local context

features in the trend towards viewing political analysis as fundamental to effective development. For instance, recent analytical approaches such as Political Settlements Analysis, Thinking and Working Politically, and Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation all share recognition of the importance of fine-grained understanding of local political dynamics and local ownership (Laws & Leftwich, 2014; McCulloch & Piron, 2019). However, the primacy of political analysis competes with the explosion of interest in generalisable findings based on experimental Randomised Control Trials (de Gramont & Carothers, 2013).

In terms of development theories, on the one hand, global development theories emphasise the inter-relatedness and universality of issues facing the globalised world and challenge the methodological nationalism of classical development theories. On the other hand, post-development theories critique the notion of development as a Northern meta-narrative that erases the local, instead celebrating the multiplicity of local knowledge, systems, and practices (Scholte & Söderbaum, 2017). This divide can be seen in debates over the SDGs, which represent a holistic, universal framework for post-2015 development targets, and includes a conflict and governance specific goal in the form of SDG 16. Whilst the SDGs are universally applicable, the process is designed to allow for "localisation"—defined as "the process of taking into account subnational contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda"—at country and municipal levels (Global Taskforce, 2016, p. 6). Yet critics of the SDGs hold that the agenda affords insufficient space for locally-valued, endogenous approaches to development. Due to an uneasy compromise between technocratic and transformative visions for development encompassed under the SDGs:

> The contradictions facilitate the instrumentalization of SDGs as a cover for agendas that promote the economic and political interests of investors or political leaders while rhetorically calling for empowerment and inclusion of the poor and marginalized populations. (Fisher & Fukuda-Parr, 2019, p. 382)

Post-conflict reconstruction—which is essentially development in conflict-affected contexts—has by necessity always grappled with the notion of the local and viewed participation as a cornerstone of effectively working with communities affected by disaster and conflict (Barakat, 2005; Chambers, 1994; Cuny, 1983). The legendary relief and reconstruction specialist Fred Cuny—who was killed in Chechnya in 1995—"worked across silos" long before calls for a "New Way of Working" in fragile contexts. An article on his life and work states that "Cuny pressed for hard-nosed solutions that took the local culture and economy into account and could yield benefits long after the crisis passed" (Anderson, 1996).

Over the past decades, much work has been done on local-level reconstruction. One key lesson of post-Saddam Iraq is that reconstruction failure is in part explained by the "knowledge problem" that resulted from an externally led intervention lacking in knowledge of local context in terms of language, culture, history, and politics (Stansfield, 2007). Iraq's reconstruction experience contains many examples of contextually ill-suited projects and programmes, for instance, by ignoring local preference for hospital-based health reconstruction strategy in favour of building rural clinics, characterised by "insufficient collaboration with and acceptance by Iraqis" which partly explains the negative outcomes of that approach (Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction [SIGIR], 2009). Similarly, weak involvement of local actors is observed in the Gaza Strip, subjected to three wars since 2008. Gazan actors have been excluded from each round of reconstruction conception, planning, and implementation whilst Gazan civil society organisations did not even see a copy of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism agreement—the text governing reconstruction since 2014—until a full year after its implementation (Barakat et al., 2018).

Recognising the shortcomings of such top-down exclusionary reconstruction processes, Community-Driven Development (CDD) has become a major approach in post-conflict societies, for instance, in Afghanistan, Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sierra Leone. CDD programmes aim to deliver a wide range of services in line with local needs and "operate on the principles of transparency, participation, accountability, and enhanced local capacity" (World Bank, 2019). Whilst such national-level approaches can foster ownership at the district and village levels and foster greater trust, legitimacy, and state-society relations, the empirical record shows that CDD has delivered mixed results, in particular in improving service delivery (King, 2015; Saguin, 2018). There has also been significant interest in endogenous recovery processes that have occurred largely outside of the scope of international interventions. For example, research has examined Somaliland's reconstruction led by local initiative.

Peace

One major challenge facing the Triple Nexus is that the category of Peace is the least clearly defined and understood, in particular by the humanitarian sector. Peace is a diffuse category that encompasses a wide array of international, regional, and local actors and institutions including on the "soft" side of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and the diplomatic architecture of the international system, and the "hard" side of peace in terms of security, stabilisation and peacekeeping efforts. This section will trace global-local dynamics across these and other areas—illustrating how a concern for "the local" inflects recent thinking in both "soft" and "hard" approaches to peace.

First, theories of conflict causation have grappled with locating the scale of drivers of conflict. In the 1990s, the greed versus grievance debate largely internalised the causes of conflict to within conflict-affected contexts on both poles of the argument (Ballentine & Sherman, 2003). This reflected the widely noted spread of intra-state conflict following the end of the Cold War. Yet recent research has challenged prevailing notions that African conflicts are primarily civil wars, finding that 70% involve some form of internationalisation, with interference by other regional powers and proxy warfare common characteristics (de Waal, 2019). With the Syrian conflict highly internationalised, proxy warfare spreading through the Middle East, and rivalry between the Saudi Arabia/UAE axis and Qatar affecting conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere, there is a need to understand local, regional, and global levels of conflict causation.

Autesserre (2014) argues that international peacebuilders share a common culture that perceives conflict as resulting from national and international level tensions. As a result, a dominant top-down, diplomatic, and macro-political peacebuilding apparatus is fit to address the nation-state and international system, but is not geared towards addressing local-level tensions that are the deep-lying drivers of conflict. Research on conflict patterns in Sierra Leone finds that national-level metrics hold little explanatory weight, with variations in local politics and customary authority the most significant factors determining subnational conflict manifestations (Raleigh & De Bruijne, 2015). Similarly, third-party mediators and their approaches to conflict mediation have been criticised for in many cases being ignorant of the complexities of local context (Brahimi & Ahmed, 2008). Yet in contrast, the importance of understanding local context is seen as less important than generalisable findings from quantitative theory-driven conflict research. The quantitative perspective is advocated by Regan (2013, p. 183) who invokes the "average principle," writing that:

> While there might not be a case that falls precisely on the 'average' line, the whole idea of an average operates from the premise that each randomly picked conflict—or peacebuilding effort—is very much like the others that we observe.

Yet despite these shortcomings of international conflict prevention and mediation, in terms of academic research, there have long been calls for a more ethnographic and cultural approach to understanding local mechanisms of negotiation, mediation, and other practices (Avruch, 2018). Ethnographic research has produced knowledge of these, for instance, the institution of Sulha in the Middle East (Irani & Funk, 1998), the survival of precolonial communal conflict resolution mechanisms in Burundi (De Juan, 2017), and tribal governance in Yemen (Al-Dawsari, 2012), where traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have brokered ceasefires and negotiated humanitarian access at the local level.[2] Such local practices have in many contexts been developed over long periods and offer workable and contextually appropriate means of resolving conflict (Zartman, 2017). Whilst conflict mediation as a practice has been challenged for the application of Western-centric approaches in non-Western contexts and ignoring local indigenous mechanisms, there is a concomitant danger in fetishising and romanticising the notion of authentic, indigenous practices as axiomatically superior to global approaches (G. Macrae, 2008).

Second, tensions between universal approaches and the local have figured prominently in debates over peacebuilding (Lidén, 2009). The peacebuilding industry underwent a major transformation in the early 1990s with a professionalisation of the field (Sending, 2010) and an increase in multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations that widened their scope to encompass peacebuilding tasks (Hazen, 2007). Alongside this trend, attention to global-local peacebuilding dynamics emerged strongly in the 1990s with the rapid acceleration of globalisation and the enthusiasm for civil society as a grassroots alternative to top-down external peacebuilding (Barakat & Zyck, 2009). Yet whilst peacebuilding as a concept has its roots in community development and social work, the standardisation and expertisation of approaches around a top-down, externally driven "liberal peacebuilding" template of elections and free market reforms gave rise to a critique of liberal peacebuilding (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). A common contention is that "activities undertaken in the name of peacebuilding have often marginalised local actors, proceeded in ways that did not adequately respond to local expectations and needs, and at times replaced one set of problems with another" (Funk, 2012, p. 392). The "local turn" in peacebuilding scholarship focuses much more on grassroots, bottom-up peacebuilding practices, local resistance to externally led peacebuilding efforts, and the everyday life of local communities affected by conflict (Mitchell, 2011). In contrast with liberal peacebuilding, many of these scholars share a communitarian peacebuilding ethic, with acceptance of local contextual specificities and identities as the basis for local self-determination in peacebuilding trajectories (Donais, 2012).

Third, statebuilding—which since the turn of the millennium emerged as a leading approach to peacebuilding—has also dealt with global-local issues. Weak "local ownership" and gaps between local and international priorities are major factors explaining the poor record of international statebuilding interventions (Brinkerhoff, 2005; Donais, 2009). As de Coning (2013, p. 5) writes, "the key to successful statebuilding and peacebuilding lies in finding the appropriate balance between external security guarantees and resources, on the one hand, and the degree to which the local system has the freedom to develop its own self-organisation, on the other." More forcefully, the plausibility of statebuilding as an externally imposed endeavour has been called into question, with state formation proposed as a more localised, historicised and endogenised alternative (Boege et al., 2008). Whilst the first of the Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness is ownership (von Billerbeck, 2010), this is often paid lip-service to in conflict-affected contexts, with the g7+ grouping of fragile states calling for The New Deal for Fragile States, and a shift to a localised, contextualised approach to issues of fragility.

Finally, whilst many of the approaches considered so far under the category of peace deal with the "soft" side of peacebuilding and conflict resolution, "hard" issues of security are also central to international approaches to peace and stability. International peacekeeping, whilst associated with top-down coercive power, has been shown to be effective at reducing violence at the local level through

facilitating inter-communal dialogue (Smidt, 2020). Stabilisation emerged as a leading security approach to dealing with conflict-affected states following the twin interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The experience of those two cases has led to extensive critique of as a top-down military led intervention that undermined crucial aspects of local legitimacy in post-conflict societies. Yet stabilisation approaches have evolved with greater attention paid, at least in terms of policy, to local conditions and dynamics. For instance, a U.S. government review of stabilisation operations defines them as an "inherently political endeavour involving an integrated civilian–military process to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence" and emphasises the importance of local actors throughout its report (Department of Defence, 2018).

Cross-Cutting Challenges in Localisation of Conflict Response

In this section, four key challenges facing localisation of conflict response across the areas of humanitarian action, post-conflict reconstruction, and peacebuilding are presented: defining the local, valuing local capacities, maintaining political will, and multi-scalar conflict response.

Defining the Local

Contexts of protracted conflict render the operational environment increasingly complex with many new dimensions. Various actors are, out of necessity, placed in a situation in which they must make value judgements on who is a good local and who is a threat to aid delivery or peace. In this environment, the definition of the local can change quickly. The concept of localisation is in essence about scale, not only geographical but also in sociological, political, or economic terms. Localisation is also a relational concept dealing with power relations between the local and the international, the local and the regional, or the local and the national—although the "local" actor is not always the least powerful actor in contexts of conflict response (Al-Abdeh & Patel, 2019).

Much work on localisation of humanitarian action operates with a binary division between the local and the international that is reductive and gives rise to "analytical blind spots" (Roepstorff, 2019). Reflecting on the work of women's NGOs in Syria, where many Syrian-led organisations must register in other countries in order to operate and often also work in neighbouring countries, Al-Abdeh and Patel (2019) ask a pertinent question:

> What do we mean (and what do international humanitarian actors and the rest of the international community mean) when we say an organisation is 'local'? Because some 'local actors' in practice may actually have quite complex transnational organisational and regulatory frameworks so they can do their work.

Recent research challenges reductionist binary categories of "international" and "local" peacebuilding actors, with attention rather paid to complex processes of internationalisation and localisation (Daho et al., 2019). The label of "international" is usually applied to Northern actors, yet, especially in the Arab in which regional powers such as United Arab Emirates and Qatar have recently played a major role in all forms of conflict response, the definitions of regional and international interveners are blurred. Many "local actors" including experts and staff from capital cities or distant areas of a conflict-affected country may be viewed as just as much of an outsider as international staff by residents of conflict-affected locales.

Simply by virtue of recruiting nationally does not mean that you are doing things properly in terms of localisation. For instance, the United Nations recruitment of pro-Assad officials was carried out under pressure to rapidly enlist English speaking experts but delegitimised aid efforts in many contested

areas, with claims that every UN agency operating in Syria hired at least one direct relative of a Syrian official (Ghanem, 2020, p. 101). This underlines the point that identification of the "local" as an untainted, pure category is problematic, for instance, due to elite capture of locally driven processes and the hybridisation of the "local"—whether governance, customs, or actors—with subnational, national, or international influences. A more typological approach to identifying local actors is important to "distinguish between community-based women groups, religious associations, or traditional authorities on the one hand, and formalised, capital-based civil-society organisations on the other" (Van Leeuwen et al., 2019, p. 4). To this we may add that municipal authorities and other forms of local-level governance are often missing in analyses of local-level conflict response.

On the one hand, research has examined how local peacebuilding institutions and ideas are produced through encounter with the international. A cross-national study of peacebuilding organisations finds that rather than reflecting a variety of functions appropriate to the various stages of post-conflict transitions, civil society initiatives were geared towards the early transitional stages in the aftermath of violence, reflecting a focus on conflict resolution workshops, dialogue promotion, and peace education which are inscribed in the dominant liberal peacebuilding model (Paffenholz, 2010). On the other hand, research has focussed on how externally designed peacebuilding strategies are mediated by local actors and local context to produce hybrid outcomes (Millar et al., 2013). For instance, research on norm localisation in a United States Agency for International Development-funded good governance project in Tajikistan finds that whilst the project was viewed as a failure from the donor perspective, it was perceived by local actors as successful norm localisation through the reappropriation and contextualisation of good governance norms in ways congruent with local beliefs and practices (Kluczewska, 2019).

Valuing Local Capacities

Whilst it is challenging to compare across widely varying contexts and across the humanitarian-development-peace divide, as has been seen, the issue of capacity is a recurring theme. Explanations of failure in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding often identify global-local decoupling as a primary causal mechanism, yet much analysis does not distinguish between local actors with capacity but no political will to implement externally-prescribed policies and local actors with the will to do so but not the capacity (Gizelis & Joseph, 2016). There is consequently a need for a contextualised and differentiated approach. Whilst local capacity gaps have been long perceived by local actors as an excuse invoked by the international community for not ceding control over conflict response, which undoubtedly has an element of truth, it would be naïve to dismiss the reality of major capacity gaps in many contexts. The ever-shifting grounds of conflict can lead some local actors in a matter of hours or days from operating at the very local level to being expected to play a role at the provincial or district level, which requires rapid adaptation and an increase in resources. Recourse to local capacities as the primary means of resolving conflict may be unfeasible in areas unprepared for it. As Menkhaus (2013) writes:

> For those of us who work in conflict zones, who watch local communities struggle with insecurity, political violence, armed conflict and displacement over long periods of time, the resilience of some neighbourhoods and districts is extraordinary. This is not true everywhere, though—the capacity to prevent, mediate and resolve conflict varies greatly from one locale to the next.

The observed pattern under which international funding tends to flow most to post-conflict societies early on in a transitional phase rather than later on once local capacities to absorb spending have been built can lead to ineffective resource utilisation and the creation of parallel capacities led by external interveners (Paffenholz, 2015). Yet existing capacity is also often over-looked. In post-Saddam Iraq,

the massive post-war reconstruction effort was largely led by international expatriate professionals in engineering, consulting, and other areas which excluded the very substantial Iraqi professional class (Herring & Rangwala, 2006), with a report at the time finding that "too small an amount of U.S. reconstruction funds is being used to hire Iraqis, capitalise Iraq's economy, and build local capacity" (Crocker, 2004, p. 87). This neglect of one of Iraq's most developed capacities not only missed an opportunity for Iraqi employment at a moment of economic collapse but also perpetuated the "knowledge gap" in understanding local context in many reconstruction projects and delegitimised international efforts in the eyes of many of Iraq's middle class. Similarly, a study of localisation and human resources management in Afghanistan finds that lack of qualified local staff is a major barrier to localisation of the professional humanitarian and peacebuilding workforce. Yet localisation is proceeding because in the hostile environment of Afghanistan, various attributes of local staff related to linguistic capacities, contextual understanding, and relatively greater freedom of movement provide them with a competitive advantage over international staff (Dickmann et al., 2017).

For localisation to fulfil its potential will require not just an imminent shift of resources to local actors but also a much more sustainable, long-term approach to nurturing local capacities. Yet the nature of emergencies is marked by their short-termism, which is problematic for a sustained and genuine commitment to the local. The hallmarks of effective capacity building, in particular developing on the job and giving locals the freedom to make mistakes and learn can get thrown out. Moreover, in contexts of protracted emergency, whilst there is a need for international response to scale down and recognise the emergence of local capacities, too often endless international crisis responses deskill local communities. For instance, in post-war Bosnia, the large-scale humanitarian and reconstruction response both fostered skills and capacities whilst simultaneously de-capacitating local structures by incentivising highly skilled locals into relatively well-paid jobs as drivers or interpreters (Barakat & Kapisazovic, 2003).

The limits of how far donors should get involved in guiding localisation is still an open question. In many cases, donors retain arms-length control of reform processes from outside. It is crucial that donors accept some risk and learning-on-the-job by permitting local actors the necessary latitude to make their own mistakes and create their own successes. Furthermore, pursuing localisation on the assumption that it offers a route to cheaper services is based on a wrong-headed assumption. Around the time of the World Humanitarian Summit, "it was widely recognised that national and local actors should become a central part of humanitarian aid due to low structural costs and geographical and cultural proximity to the populations in need" (Manis, 2018, p. 2). Whilst efficiency may be a secondary consequence—and in some cases genuine localisation may prove more costly—localisation should be primarily about empowerment and effectiveness.

Maintaining Political Will

A major barrier is insufficient political will both nationally and internationally. At the national level, where localisation involves working with communities, state authorities must cede some control and resources to allow localisation to take root. At the international level, a psychological shift may be needed to accept the reality of locals playing a leading role in conflict response. Maintaining political will is particularly challenging for joined-up responses across the different cultures of the "Triple Nexus." Whilst the humanitarian sector has historically been averse to working with the state, development and security actors operate primarily in and through national and subnational state structures. Across all nodes of the Triple Nexus, there are obstacles to locally led action posed by counterterrorism legislation and the demands on local organisations of meeting global standards of accountability (S. Gordon et al., 2018). There is a need to maintain political will to confront such obstacles through openness to taking risk and trusting local actors.

Somewhat paradoxically, the localisation agenda is itself threatened by the rise of anti-globalist forces that support more localised, nativist ideologies. There is concern amongst donors and INGOS in the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors that the rising tide of populist, right-wing, and anti-globalist leaders in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Latin America is undercutting political support for foreign aid and for tackling global issues through multilateral global governance mechanisms (Maietta et al., 2017). Decreasing aid levels at a time of rising conflict and crisis internationally could threaten existing commitments to localise aid spending. The localisation agenda is also being utilised by incumbent elites in conflict and crisis affected countries to serve nationalist agendas that shut out international aid actors whilst restricting operating space for local actors that challenge ruling ideologies. Leaders such as Duterte in the Philippines and Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka have reduced space for international humanitarian, development, and peace efforts. This has posed new challenges to maintaining political will towards localisation in the face of unsavoury actors.

In the context of Syria, the language of a bottom-up approach delivered through local community councils is already being employed by analysts to recommend reconstruction assistance that operates in non-regime held areas and "helps Syrians—without helping Assad" (P. Gordon et al., 2017). Yet recent research has shown how the Syrian regime is allowing the expansion of the NGO sector to create a local network of vetted and regime approved local actors, through which external reconstruction funding can be channelled (Khaddour, 2017). This co-optation of the local into national systems of control should not come as any surprise. Localisation is a useful label for donors and agencies that wish to engage in vital humanitarian and reconstruction aid in in hard-to-reach areas in Syria without working through the Assad regime.

Multi-Scalar Conflict Response

Finally, at a time of rising anti-globalism that threatens global governance and international norms, there is an equal need for more thinking about internationalisation, regionalisation, nationalisation, and localisation as concomitant processes. More research is needed on how the global, regional, national, and local levels interact—or what we may consider as the multi-scalar governance of conflict response. In a study of community policing in post-conflict Liberia, Zanker (2016) convincingly shows how hybridity theory produces a local-global binary that cannot capture the complexity of policy implementation and legitimation, which is better explained as a multi-scalar process of adaptation at local, national, and international scales. Yet the current system of conflict response is facing major disorder and disruption to global governance institutions and norms, which is complicating efforts to resolve conflict or deliver humanitarian aid, whilst facing a major challenge in terms of coordination and coherence between international and local scales, due to "the inability of many agencies to coordinate among themselves and with local populations and authorities to engage local responsibility" (Zartman, 2019, p. 11).

The micro level of localisation is usually analysed alongside the macro level process of internationalisation, whilst an analytical blind spot exists as to the meso-level of regionalisation. In the Arab region, the spillover of the conflict in Syria to its neighbourhood and beyond has truly regionalised the effects of war, although regional structures such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council are beset by their own contradictions and unable to play an effective role in conflict response. A greater role for regional institutions in conflict response is in the spirit of localisation, in that it is often a step towards a humanitarian-development-peace architecture located at a scale closer to affected communities than the existing international system. Yet rather than institutionalised regionalisation, conflict response in the Arab world—in terms of humanitarian, developmental, and security responses—increasingly falls to individual middle powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia seeking to protect their interests and as such risks being polarised and feeding into conflict dynamics.

Meso-level institutions play an important role by connecting micro realities with macro structures, enabling the scaling-up of innovative local responses. For instance, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis is lauded by UNDP (2016) as a "paradigm shift' in that it blends humanitarian and development approaches and enabled the emergence of a joined-up regional framework integrated with national-level response plans. Similarly, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been successful in 'helping to mobilise political attention and commitment for action on displacement issues" in the Horn of Africa at the governmental level—in particular the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework—although implementing more effective refugee policies at the local level and involving local actors remains a major challenge (Research and Evidence Facility [REF], 2019, p. 1). More broadly, theories of multi-scalar conflict response can learn much from migration research, grounded as it is in geographical and spatial concepts.

Attempts to resolve the tension between the global and the local can be observed in processes of norm localisation related to conflict response. For instance, research has examined norm localisation of the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect in terms of efforts to ensure congruence between that Western liberal interventionist doctrine and local values, beliefs and context in affected societies (Vaughn & Dunne, 2014; Wolf, 2012). Furthermore, the turn in peacebuilding scholarship towards valorising local context and understanding emerged alongside a coalescing of donor and practitioner understandings of conflict, notably with the publication of the World Development Report 2011 that provided a universal diagnosis of countries mired in negative cycles of violent conflict and fragility.

In order to truly work horizontally beyond silos and at the same time vertically across multiple scales of conflict response will require a shift in analytical frames and a more holistic approach. Yet much scholarship on conflict response, in particular in terms of peacebuilding, has reached an uneasy divide between opposing camps—with supposedly orthodox problem-solving work set against critical theory (Heathershaw, 2013). This has led to dismissive attitudes on both sides. On the one hand, there are common critiques that the "orthodox school" are simply servants of the predominant liberal peace framework that has failed to produce peace, sidelines local agency, and favours depoliticised technical reforms (Roberts, 2011). On the other hand, scholars argue that the "hypercritical" rejection of liberal peacebuilding has become dogmatic and insular whilst often rejecting the scope for reform within the peacebuilding enterprise (Paris, 2010). Meanwhile, much insightful, policy, and practitioner knowledge production on peacebuilding at the local level is dismissed as producing "mere technical knowledge" operating in a depoliticised framework.

Calls to working beyond silos must be met with a newfound sense of openness not just to interdisciplinarity but intersectorality. Conflict is an all-pervasive feature of the societies it affects, which renders the scope of disciplinary or sectoral responses to conflict and its effects at times bewildering. This has the impact of scattering expertise relevant to these areas thinly across institutions and industries with different research and practice cultures. There is also a pressing need to localise knowledge production at all levels of the global research and evaluation architecture on conflict response and end the domination of the field by Northern knowledge funders and producers (Mwambari, 2019).

Conclusion

This article has traced the evolution of approaches to localisation across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and it has been seen that a concern with the local and localisation, whilst not defined and understood in the same manner, has been ever-present in each node of the nexus. The analysis focused on four common challenges in defining the local, valuing local capacity, maintaining political will, and multi-scalar conflict response. One central conclusion is that whilst localisation has become a "buzz word" in recent years, the newness of the concept should not be overstated and there is

much can be learned from the vast literature and empirical investigation of the local and localisation in past conflict responses.

Another conclusion is that the increase in discussion and analysis of the local in conflict response has raised expectations over what can be achieved solely at the local level. Whilst valuing and supporting locally led conflict response is a laudable goal, there is a need for realistic expectations and a clear, unsentimental assessment of local needs, capacities, and context. Localisation should not be seen as axiomatically peace promoting. Rather, the current wave of interest in the issue is a chance to "get the local right" in terms of its integration with national, regional, and international conflict responses.

Finally, the central contribution of the local turn in conflict response is the message that knowledge of local context is a crucial aspect of understanding, resolving, and transforming conflict. As calls grow for integrated and joined-up conflict response across the Triple Nexus, there is a need for a pluralistic, pragmatic, and transdisciplinary approach to knowledge production in order to support mutual learning across the "silos" that currently structure global conflict response.

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Notes

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2. Author observations as adviser to the European Union on Track 2 conflict mediation in Yemen, 2017–2020.

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