



## Karamoja Resilience Support Unit Briefing Paper



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# Localized Approaches to Measuring Localization

## Introduction

In November 2021 United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced a new global localization agenda that aims to shift more funding and decision-making to local organizations and groups. Under this agenda, USAID positioned local leadership over development and humanitarian assistance as important for aid effectiveness, equity, and sustainability. USAID’s initial goals for localization were twofold: to channel a quarter of its funding directly to local partners by 2025; and “by 2030 half of the Agency’s programs will be locally led, creating space for local actors to exercise leadership over priority setting, activity design, implementation, and defining and measuring results.”<sup>i</sup> These aims were reflected in the emerging narratives of European aid donors around the same time.

To assist USAID missions to operationalize localized programming, USAID produced an extensive set of guidance notes and other resources, including guidance on integrating local knowledge in development practice,<sup>ii</sup> collective action,<sup>iii</sup> and co-creation.<sup>iv</sup> USAID also noted the importance of linking localization efforts to its Local Capacity Strengthening Policy.<sup>v</sup> In terms of measuring

progress towards localization, USAID initially focused on the amount of funds assigned to local organizations, but in October 2023, it developed the Locally Led Programs Indicator<sup>vi</sup> based on four categories of good practice for local leadership and 14 good practices<sup>vii</sup> (see Annex 1). The indicator is for internal use by USAID and is designed to enable USAID missions and Operating Units to report internally on localization efforts.

The Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU) provides coordination, analytical, research, and technical support to aid donors in the Karamoja sub-region of northeast Uganda, as well as to partners in the Government of Uganda and local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Since 2015 the KRSU has produced reviews and studies across various technical sectors and made recommendations to improve programming and policy. A common finding was that program design, implementation, and evaluation needed to be far more participatory and based on local aspirations, perspectives, and capacities. This general finding closely aligned with the emerging USAID localization agenda and, for example, the notion of programs being co-designed and co-created. USAID’s Locally Led Programs

Indicators often notes the importance of participatory approaches in relation to good practices.

In mid-2024 a provisional survey by KRSU listed 48 local organizations in Karamoja, distributed over the nine districts. These notes offer suggestions for how these organizations can measure localization in the Karamoja context and in terms of their relationships with the donors or partners who fund them.

When developing the notes it is assumed that:

- Localization should be measured by an organization working in diverse technical sectors.
- A common framework for measuring localization would enable comparison of progress and experiences across organizations and sectors.
- Descriptions, indicators, and methods should be simple but systematic, and user-friendly in terms of resources, time, and technical capacities.

### Towards measuring localization

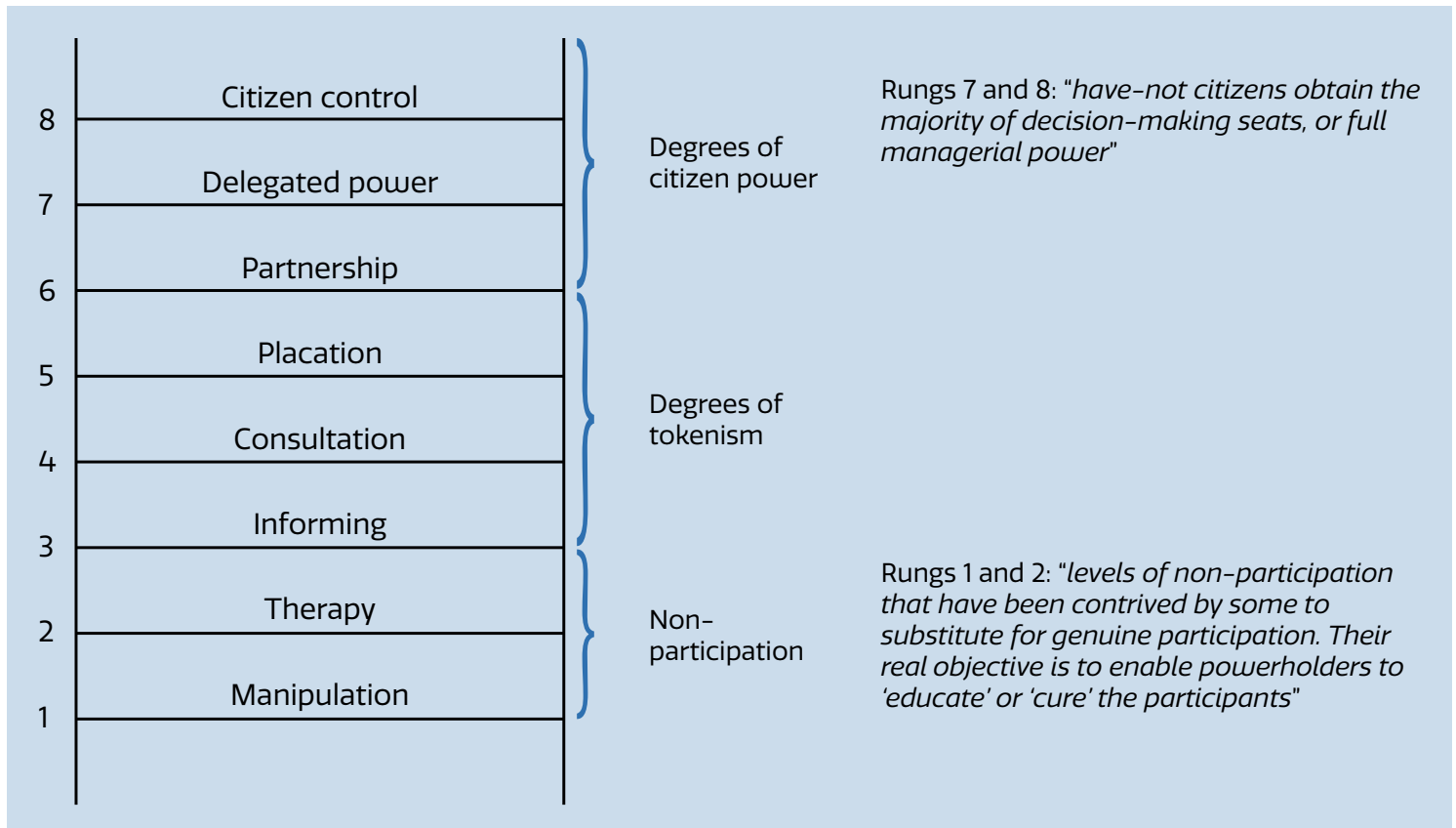
An important development lesson is that, although a general development concept might be widely accepted, specific definitions or understanding of the concept can vary widely. Examples include efforts to support "community participation," "empowerment," or "resilience." But what do participation, empowerment, or resilience really mean? As these concepts have become

established and widely used, so has the body of academic and practitioner debate on the concepts themselves, how to define them, and approaches and methods for measurement. The localization concept can easily fall into a type of development trend that seems like a good idea but is difficult to grab hold of in terms of systematically measuring it.

One approach to understanding and measuring localization draws on experiences with community participation. Instead of viewing participation as a single, narrow entity, it can be framed as a spectrum ranging from "weak" to "strong" participation, with several types of participation between these opposing points. With this approach, measuring participation means tracking the changes along the spectrum. A very early example of a typology of community participation is shown below in Box 1 to illustrate this approach.<sup>viii</sup>

Using a similar approach to the ladder of participation illustrated above and developed in urban areas of the USA, typologies were later developed to guide analysis of community participation in agriculture and health development in low-income countries.<sup>ix</sup> Notably, although now over 50 years old, the language on participation, partnership, and leadership used to develop the ladder in Box 1 is remarkably similar to language used in USAID's Locally Led Program Indicator and related guidance notes on localization. This raises the option of

**Box 1: A ladder of citizen participation (source: Arnstein, 1969).**



developing a "ladder of localization" as a tool for local organizations to measure localization.

### A provisional ladder of localization

By viewing localization as a transition from weak to strong localization, a ladder showing different steps of the transition can be developed, as shown below. A systematic framing of localization in this way supports its measurement as, for example, local groups or organizations can identify the type of localization that they'd like to achieve and develop a process and timeframe for reaching it.

### Using a localization ladder

#### Using local languages

A first stage for using a localization ladder is to enable local groups and organizations to develop their own ladders in their own languages. This is important because each step of the ladder needs to be clearly understood by those who use it, and a direct translation of English words or terms such as "participatory," "joint analysis," "co-design" and so on is not always straightforward. While the example of a localization ladder above has six steps, locally developed ladders in local languages might have more or fewer steps.

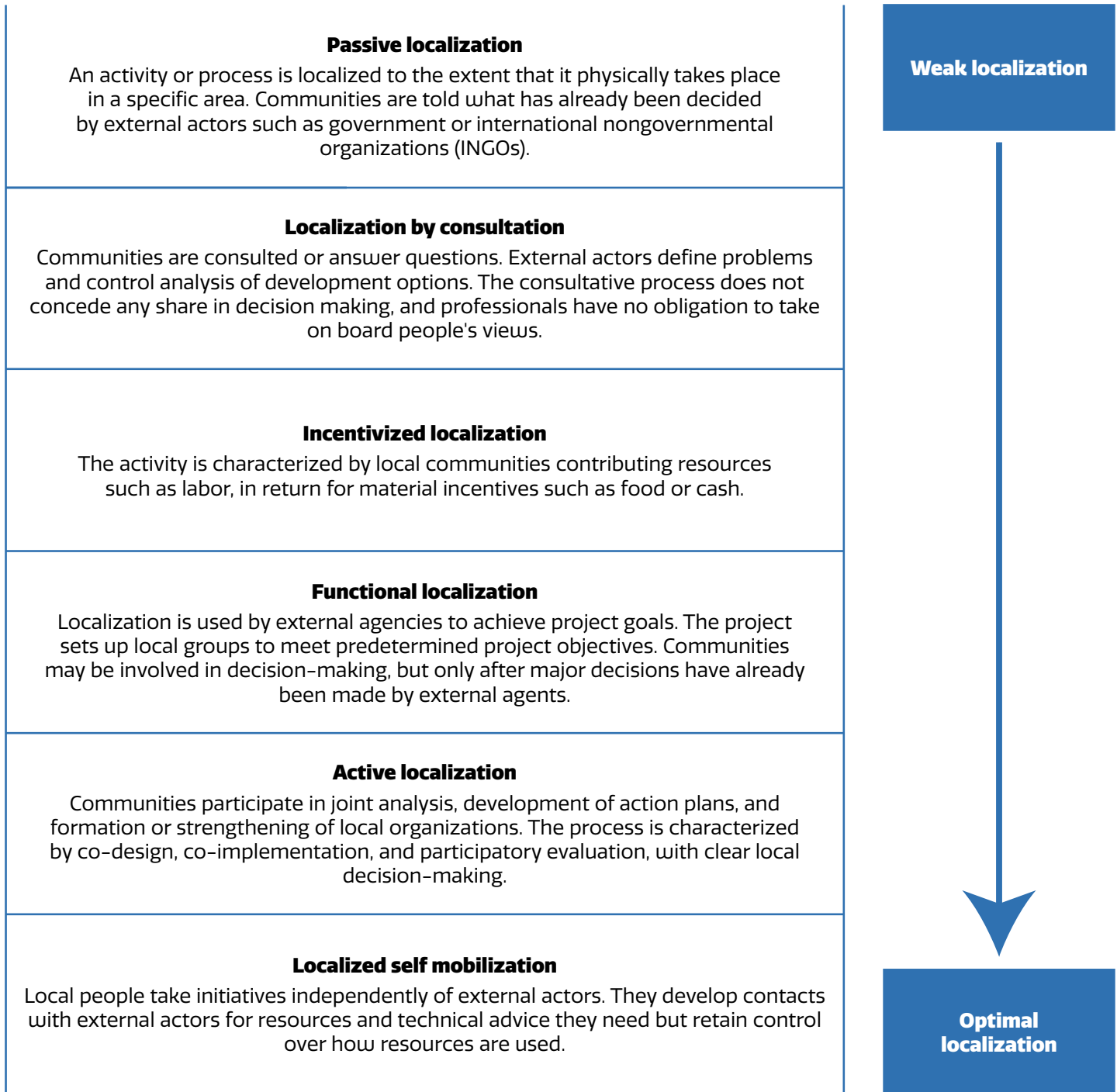


Figure 1: A localization ladder.<sup>xi</sup>

**Table 1: Main language groups by district in Karamoja**

District	Language group(s)
Abim	Thur/Ethur
Kotido	Jje
Kaabong	Dodoth
Karenga	Napore, Nyangia, Mening
Moroto	Matheniko, Tepeth (So)
Napak	Bokora
Nakapiripirit	Pian, Kadama
Nabilatuk	Pian
Amudat	Pokot

**Measuring change**

Various options are available for measuring localization by using a localization ladder as a point of reference. The option below applies a numerical scale to a localization ladder and assumes that the ladder has been translated into a relevant local language. See Table 1 for languages by district in Karamoja.

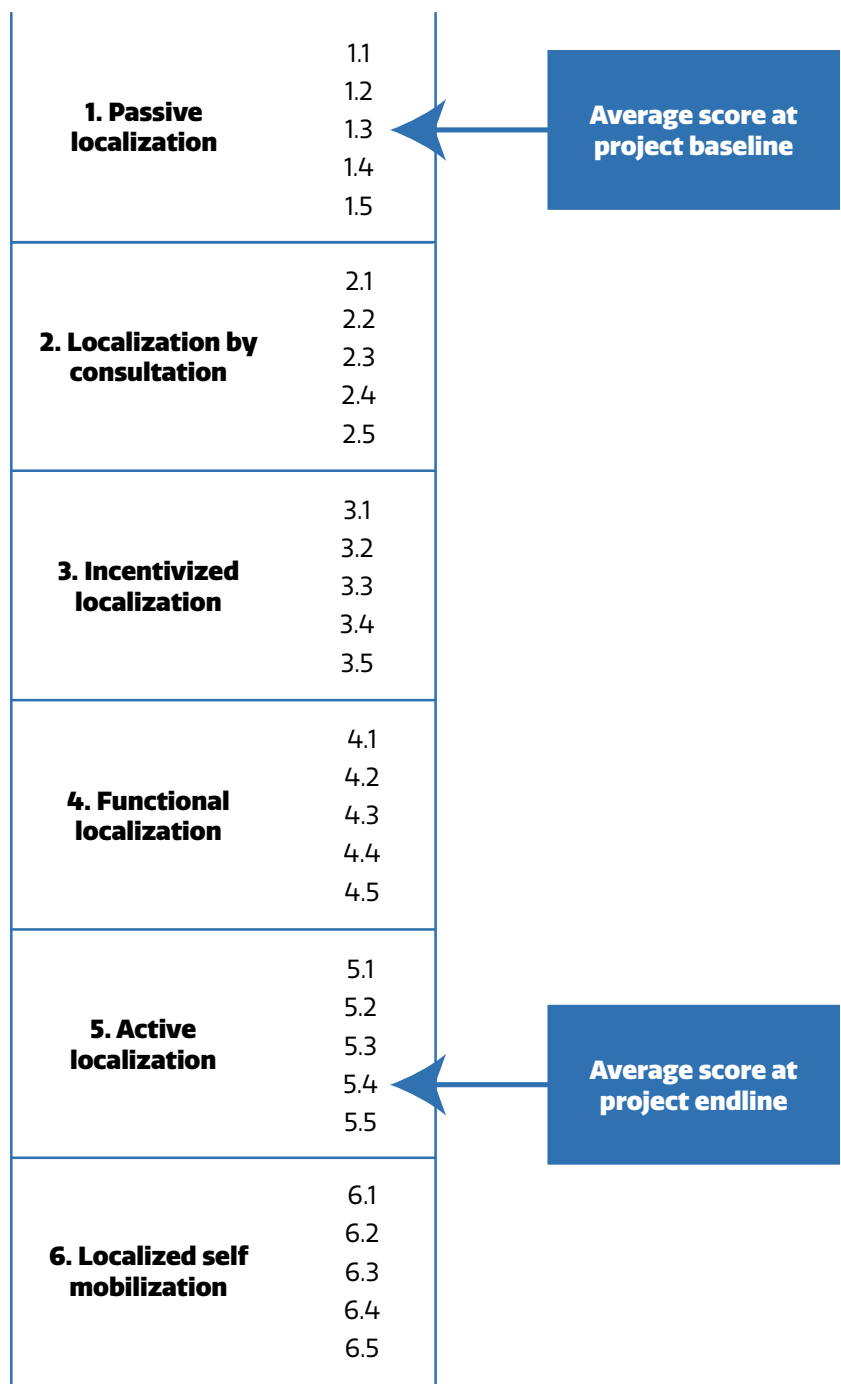
At the start of a project or monitoring period, each group member independently assigns a score to represent their view on "Where we are now," and the scores are averaged. This average is the starting point on the ladder, e.g., at the start of a project. Group members can be the members of the organization only, or the group of people doing the scoring can be expanded to include community members.

The scoring is repeated at regular intervals, e.g., biannually, and each scoring is supported by documenting the reasoning behind the scores. If a similar ladder and scoring system is used across different groups within a project or language group, the scores can be collated or averaged across the groups to indicate project-wide progress.

A critical aspect of this type of scoring approach is that participants should have a common understanding of the different steps of the ladder, as well as the specific sub-steps within each step. In the example below, each of the main steps has been split into five sub-steps. See Figure 2. This enables a very sensitive measurement of localization but only if the meanings of the steps and sub-steps are clear across the participants. The selection of five sub-steps is arbitrary in the example, and the appropriate number of sub-steps will depend on the local definitions of each step of the ladder and the extent to which a step can be sub-divided in a meaningful and clear way.

The guidance notes above provide a flexible approach to systematic measurement of localization by local actors. The localization ladder should be adapted using local concepts and languages, and the measuring system can vary according to local preferences.

Ladders of localization can be integrated into the monitoring and evaluation systems of local organizations and triangulated with typical indicators of capacity building and organizational development.



**Figure 2: Applying a numerical scale to a localization ladder.**

## Endnotes

- i USAID, 2022. Moving towards a model of locally led development. FY 2022 Localization progress report. USAID, Washington DC.
  - ii <https://usaidlearninglab.org/resources/report-integrating-local-knowledge-development-practice>.
  - iii <https://usaidlearninglab.org/collective-action-usaid-programming>.
  - iv [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/co-creation\\_toolkit\\_interactive\\_guide\\_-\\_march\\_2022%20%283%29.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/co-creation_toolkit_interactive_guide_-_march_2022%20%283%29.pdf).
  - v <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/LCS-Policy-2022-10-17.pdf>.
  - vi [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/Locally%20Led%20Programs%20Indicator%20%28EXTERNAL%29\\_1.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/Locally%20Led%20Programs%20Indicator%20%28EXTERNAL%29_1.pdf).
  - vii [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/Locally%20Led%20Programs%20Indicator%20%28EXTERNAL%29\\_1.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/Locally%20Led%20Programs%20Indicator%20%28EXTERNAL%29_1.pdf).
  - viii Arnstein, S. R. 1969. A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 4: 216–224. DOI: 10.1080/01944366908977225.
  - ix Pretty, 1994. Participatory Learning for Sustainable Agriculture. *World Development* 23, no. 8: 1247–1263
  - x Cornwall, A. 1996. Towards Participatory Practice: Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and the Participatory Process. In *Participatory Research and Health: Issues and Experiences*, eds. K. de Koning and M. Martin, 94–107. London: Zed Books Ltd.
  - xi Adapted from Pretty 1994) and Cornwall (1996).
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## USAID Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU)

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For more information about the KRSU:

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