



LOCALLY-LED
**Development
in Africa**

Localisation of the Aid in **Senegal**

Perceptions, interpretations and
experiences of local actors in
Senegal

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Executive Summary

The report looks at the evolution of the global aid localisation trend in Senegal, a concept gaining increasing ground among global actors but also contested on a practical front. It focuses on the perceptions, interpretations and experiences of community-based organisations, local NGOs and other stakeholders in Senegal's aid ecosystem. It further delves into the perspectives of international actors, especially donor agencies, regarding power dynamics, funding modalities and partnership patterns. Finally, it looks at the broader aid landscape, incorporating the latest policy changes such as the US executive order to stop foreign aid and the major cuts to the UK aid budget.

The report employed a mixed method approach, combining FGDs, questionnaires to local CBOs and CSOs and intensive desk research. It aims to address a key concern: **Whether localisation truly transfers resources, power and authority to Senegalese local actors, or it simply perpetuates already existing hierarchies under a new language.**

The concept of "localisation" was unfamiliar to 95% of the actors surveyed (FGD) prior to the study. However when properly explained, they fully grasped its meaning, i.e. the direct empowerment and funding of grassroots organisations and associations from the very international development agencies that have been behind funding and non governmental developmental initiatives on the continent. Direct funding, administrative burdens, short project cycles and limited capacity represent a major challenge for community organizations. Although differences can be observed depending on the sector (health, education, humanitarian), the lack of influence in decision-making processes is a common source of concern. In an attempt to address some of these concerns, some donors focus on building the capacity of local players, but the transfer of power is not really visible.

In a context of declining global aid and shifting donor priorities, these findings illustrate the pressing need to build stronger, more autonomous local systems.

Introduction



Background and Rationale

Global development policy has increasingly embraced localisation, broadly defined¹ as devolving "decision-making agency, funding, leadership, and power to local and national actors" in the aid process. Advocates argue localisation makes aid more accountable to communities, aligning programs with local needs, but critics² warn it can be a "buzzword" that fails to change entrenched hierarchies. Similarly, Khoury and Scott (2024)³ warn that current localisation efforts often "reinforce power" by leaving international actors as gatekeepers who decide who gets funded.

This debate is highly relevant in Senegal's evolving political and donor landscape. In March 2024 Senegal elected a new president (Bassirou Diomaye Faye) and prime minister (Ousmane Sonko) who campaigned on an agenda⁴ of national sovereignty, anti-corruption, and rupture with past policies. Among its first actions, the government launched "Agenda 2050," a 25-year national development plan aimed at structural transformation. Public statements from the government

emphasise reducing dependence on foreign aid and debt and leveraging domestic resources and human capital. For example, Prime Minister Sonko has highlighted that Senegal's long-term plan seeks to "reduce foreign dependency and debt, focusing on local resources and human capital". This rhetoric reflects a broader push by the new administration to pursue greater economic self-reliance and local ownership of development strategies.

Such political and financial drivers, coupled with shifting of priorities of donors as well as suspension of US aid and the gradual decline in aid from the United Kingdom (UK), underpin the study. Now that Senegal is implementing its 2050 Agenda and donors are embracing localisation, it is crucial to grasp how the localisation agenda is being translated into action, locally. Most notably, the study focuses on perspectives from Senegalese grassroots organisations to assess how localisation is empowering or merely creating new dependencies.

1. Centre for Humanitarian Leadership & Rights CoLab. (2024). Ways of working. Centre for Humanitarian Leadership. <https://www.centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/research/publications/ways-of-working/>

2. Centre for Humanitarian Leadership & Rights CoLab. Ways of working. Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, op.cit.

3. Bond. (2024, septembre). Beyond the buzzwords: How can we fix localisation to shift power in humanitarian aid? Bond. <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2024/09/beyond-the-buzzwords-how-can-we-fix-localisation-to-shift-power-in-humanitarian-aid/>

4. Bryant, L (2024, April 2). As Senegal's Faye takes office, France watches closely. Voice of America. Retrieved from: <https://www.voanews.com/a/as-senegal-s-faye-takes-office-france-watches-closely-/7553276.html>



Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to capture a nuanced understanding of localisation in Senegal from the perspective of local civil society and community-based organisations (CSOs and CBOs). A desk review established the historical and policy context by analysing aid flow data and national frameworks, including the "Agenda 2050" plan. Qualitative fieldwork was conducted in five regions (Dakar, Thiès, Diourbel, Saint-Louis, and Ziguinchor) through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 10 to 12 participants each, representing grassroots organisations. These FGDs explored how localisation is perceived, how aid decisions are experienced at the community level, and the degree of

involvement of local actors in project design and implementation.

Complementing the FGDs, a mixed survey was administered to 100 targeted organisations, including local CSOs, CBOs, and internationally funded NGOs with local operations. A total of 59 organisations responded, predominantly Senegalese entities. To strengthen the reliability of findings, themes emerging from qualitative discussions, such as mistrust toward donors and limited local influence, were cross-checked against survey data. This triangulation ensured a grounded, evidence-based analysis of how localisation is interpreted and experienced on the ground.

1

Limitations

This study presents a valuable snapshot of how localisation of aid is perceived and experienced by civil society in Senegal, yet it also faces several limitations. First, the geographic coverage is partial, with data collected primarily from four regions Dakar, Thiès, Saint-Louis and Diourbel leaving out other regions, which may exhibit different aid dynamics. Furthermore, the study was unable to secure direct input from bilateral or multilateral donors (such as USAID, the European Union, or United Nations agencies). In addition, the concept of "localisation" was unfamiliar to most community actors at the outset, raising the risk of framing bias, as respondents' views may have

been influenced by explanations provided during the data collection process. The research was conducted during a period of political transition following Senegal's 2024 elections and the announcement of Agenda 2050, a context that may have influenced how openly stakeholders shared opinions on donor relations or government reforms. Lastly, the study provides a cross-sectional view rather than longitudinal data and does not assess the concrete impact of localisation on development outcomes limiting the conclusions to stakeholder perceptions rather than measurable change.

Evolution of Senegal's Aid Architecture



Senegal has long been a significant aid recipient. In 2022 it received roughly \$1.45billion in net official development⁵ assistance, roughly 10% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), funding sectors like health, education and infrastructure. Major bilateral and multilateral donors (e.g. USAID, the EU, World Bank, UN agencies) remain dominant. Over the past two decades Senegal has articulated successive long-term development plans. The 2014 Plan Sénégal Émergent (PSE) succeeded the earlier **“Vision 2035”** strategy. Parallel to these plans, Senegal pursued ambitious decentralisation reforms. An **“Act 2”** decentralisation law (2013) created new local communes and transferred key responsibilities (education, primary health, roads) to local governments. The government also launched programs to strengthen local development. For example, the Agence de Développement Local (2018) for local planning, and the 2015–2018 Programme d’Urgence de Développement Communautaire⁶ (PUDC, CFA422billion around \$700million) implemented via UNDP. These initiatives aimed to build local infrastructure and services and to **“promote endogenous”** development. Nevertheless, many Senegalese have long criticised heavy aid reliance.

Former President Macky Sall’s administration and others raised concerns about sovereignty and **“paternalistic”** aid. For example, when USAID briefly suspended funding in 2023, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko publicly asked, **“Should we continue to depend on foreign aid?”**⁷ and called for investing in domestic programs instead. Scholars note that despite official decentralisation, real power often remains centralised: policymakers tend to **“domesticate”** civil society by involving only hand-picked leaders, leaving grassroots groups marginalised.⁸ A Guardian investigation⁹ similarly observed that major Western donors often avoid funding smaller local NGOs directly, citing compliance costs and risk. Cochrane and Wilson¹⁰ compile a database of 32 instances in which NGOs declined financial support. Mostly they refuse funding to safeguard their independence, ensure impartiality, maintain neutrality, and uphold humanity. In sum, Senegal’s aid regime combines a tradition of planning and decentralisation with persistent dependency and power imbalances. These dynamics set the stage for current debates on how to make aid truly **“local”**.

5. Trading Economics. (n.d.). Senegal : Net official development assistance and official aid received (US dollars) [Data set]. World Bank. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from https://www.the-global-economy.com/Senegal/foreign_aid/

6. Alternative Humanitaire. (2017, July 1). Sénégal - De la difficulté des ONG à s'autonomiser de l'Etat. Alternatives Humanitaires. <https://www.alternatives-humanitaires.org/-fr/2017/07/01/senegal-de-difficulte-ong-a-sautonomiser-de-letat/>

7. Le Soleil. (2025, February 3). Ousmane Sonko évoque la suspension de l'USAID et appelle à un développement autonome. Le Soleil. <https://lesoleil.sn/actualites/politique/ousmane-sonko-evoque-la-suspension-de-lusaid-et-appelle-a-un-developpement-autonome/>

8. Poulet, K., & Ba Ghing, S. (2017, July 1). Sénégal : De la difficulté pour les ONG à s'autonomiser de l'Etat. Alternatives Humanitaires. <https://www.alternatives-humanitaires.org/-fr/2017/07/01/senegal-de-difficulte-ong-a-sautonomiser-de-letat/>. See also the Editor. (February 12 2023). S4C Takes NGO Regulatory Compliance Clinic To Senegal. Spaces for Change. Retrieved August 4, 2025, from <https://spacesforchange.org/s4c-takes-ngo-regulatory-compliance-clinic-to-senegal/#:-text=On%20December%207%2C%202022%2C%2054C%20and%20Publish%20What,together%2015%20executives%20of%20civil%20society%20organizations%2028CSOS%29>

9. Chadwick, V. (2015, November 9). Five reasons donors give for not funding local NGOs directly. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/09/five-reasons-donors-give-for-not-funding-local-ngos-directly>

10. Cochrane, L., & Wilson, A. (2024). Motivations Behind Donor Funding Refusal: Towards a Typology of Principled Refusal. *Journal of Development Studies*, 61(3), 319–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2024.2401414>



Political Shifts and Agenda 2050

Senegal elected a new government led by President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko in March 2024. The duo campaigned on sovereignty, anti-corruption and "rupture" with previous regimes policies. One of the main moves by the new government was to launch Agenda 2050,¹¹ a 25-year development framework emphasising on economic self reliance. Most recently, the Prime Minister, unveiled the Jubbanti Koom ("Redressement économique national")¹² an economic and social recovery plan, which represents a strategic pivot plan toward home-grown, sovereign development, grounded in mobilising over CFA5,000 to CFA5,667billion over four years without external borrowing. Structured around three progressive phases (Redress, Impulsion, and

Acceleration), it aims to stabilise the economy, reduce public deficits to 3% of GDP by 2027, and move Senegal toward long-term growth aligned with Vision 2050. Public statements from the leaders stress reducing dependence on foreign aid and debt, while mobilising local resources and competencies. According to Sonko's view, the 2025 agenda plan seeks to "reduce foreign dependency and debt, focusing on local resources and human capital". The agenda focuses on four pillars including governance, regional development, human capital, and job creation: all highlighting sovereignty and inclusion. These political shifts have heightened scrutiny of aid practices. If Senegal is to chart its own path, donors must align with national priorities and genuinely

11. Présidence de la République du Sénégal. (2024, January 20). Vision Sénégal2050: Stratégie nationale de développement 2025–2029 – Communication DGPPE CAMP 2025 [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://www.presidente.sn/fr/assets/documents/Communication-Vision-20250-DGPPE-CAMP-2025.pdf>

12. Présidence de la République du Sénégal. (2025, August 1). Official presentation of the Jubbanti Koom Plan: Senegal launches a new economic dynamic under the leadership of President Faye. Retrieved from <https://www.presidente.sn/en/actualites/official-presentation-of-the-jubbanti-koom-plan-senegal-launches-a-new-economic-dynamic-under-the-leadership-of-president-faye-1>

empower local actors. Senegal's political context also includes debates on NGO autonomy. Critics note that despite a robust civil society, NGOs often struggle for independence from both donors and the state. Legislation (e.g. stringent "good governance" requirements on NGOs) and weak support for decentralisation have sometimes constrained NGO action.

With specific reference to anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing laws. Many CSOs do not have the legal and administrative capacity to fully comply with complex compliance processes when working with governments or governments' reporting and accountability requirements. The failure of the government contracting regime to adopt a complementary alternative would have real implications on NGOs and their compliance processes. This was the topic of the NGO Regulatory Compliance Clinic hosted by S4C and Publish What You Fund in December 2022.¹³ For smaller and grassroots NGOs, it means time and resources spent on compliance, record-keeping related to donor disclosures, diligence, procedural documentation and financial reporting rather than their core mission work. As with many legal obligations, these

obligations are generally between charitable practices and for-profit laws that are vaguely based and too often lead to mere unintentional violations. This invites uncertainties about the fate of their activities, and sanctions or risks loss of institutional trust of their work. These uncertainties compel NGOs to undertake cautious self-censorship that muddle their advocacy and watchdog roles accountability.

At the same time, new opportunities have emerged. The government's Agenda 2050 repeatedly invokes themes of local governance and decentralisation, and donors report increasingly checking project alignment with Senegal's strategic goals (e.g. emphasising municipal associations in urban projects). Moreover, the Senegalese diaspora's massive remittances¹⁴ (In 2023, they amounted to CFA1,600 billion (€2.4 billion euros), or around 10.5% of GDP) function as de facto local development finance, prompting ideas like a diaspora bank under the localisation agenda.

13. Spaces for Change. (2022, December 7). S4C takes NGO Regulatory Compliance Clinic to Senegal. Retrieved from <https://spacesforchange.org/s4c-takes-ngo-regulatory-compliance-clinic-to-senegal/>

14. Ba, C.S. (2024, December 26). Le Sénégal compte sur sa diaspora pour financer son développement. Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/12/26/le-senegal-compte-sur-sa-diaspora-pour-financer-son-developpement_6468481_3212.html

The Global Localisation Agenda

Globally, the term “localisation” has gained currency in development and humanitarian policy. It generally refers to shifting agency, resources and power to local/national actors in the aid process. International commitments such as the Grand Bargain (2016)¹⁵ explicitly call for increasing direct funding to local NGOs and reducing barriers to their participation.

Proponents argue localisation can make aid more accountable to beneficiaries and tailored to local needs. However, observers warn these commitments often go unfulfilled. As Bond (2024) notes, localisation rhetoric may be

“empty buzzwords...not truly transferring power to local organisations and communities”. Khoury and Scott (2024) similarly caution that without structural change, localisation “often reinforce[s] power” for international actors, who remain gatekeepers of funding. In other words, donors can fund local groups in name yet still dictate priorities and procedures. This global debate over localisation’s substance (versus mere rhetoric) is highly relevant to Senegal, where domestic and international voices converge on the need to reform aid modalities.

¹⁵. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (n.d.). The Grand Bargain and Localisation Commitments (Section2). Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream Country Level Dialogue Resource Kit. <https://gbllocalisation.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Section-2.pdf>

Shifting of donor's priorities: The case of the USAID cut and its Implication on Senegalese Actors



A 90-day suspension¹⁶ of foreign development aid programmes, including those of the USAID agency, was signed by US President Donald Trump in January 2025. The immediate effect of this decision was felt in Senegal by both the government and CSOs. USAID covered almost all the country's key sectors. From the government side, key programmes have been interrupted or slowed down. For instance, in the health sector,¹⁷ USAID was massively funding programmes to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, malnutrition and mother and child health. For example, USAID financed 42.7% of the national response to HIV (compared with only 29.6% from the State), ensuring free antiretroviral treatment for tens of thousands of sufferers. The cut in funding has led to fears of a shortage of Anti Retro Viral drugs (ARV) and a resurgence of the epidemic. Similarly, USAID has invested around €384 million since 2007 to eradicate malaria; its withdrawal risks compromising preventive and treatment campaigns (community programme managers are worried: **"Who's going to fund all this now?"**).

Projects on education, literacy and awareness raising (reproductive health, human rights, minority rights, etc.) were also hit hard. For example, training for

health workers and teachers, and information campaigns in rural areas (on family planning, nutrition, local democracy, etc.) have been put on hold.

The Millennium Challenge Power Compact (MCC),¹⁸ a vast rural electrification project with a budget of \$600 million, including \$550 million in US donations, launched in 2021, has been directly affected. The United States has announced that it will 'terminate all funding for the MCC Power Compact in three months', leaving Senegal to take over the project on its own. This programme aimed to provide electricity to almost 70% of the rural population (around 13 million people) and generate around 1,500 indirect jobs and 100 direct jobs. The loss of this major funding is therefore delaying the modernisation of the electricity network and jeopardising these jobs.

The peace reconstruction in Casamance (South Senegal), a post conflict region, was also impacted. USAID was actively supporting the peace process.¹⁹ A community project called 'Aliwili' (total budget CFA16 billion or €25 million) managed by several NGOs, financed the reintegration of ex-combatants (construction of housing), the resettlement of displaced

16. Bonnerot, C. (2025, March 3). Sénégal: Sans l'aide des États-Unis, le souverainisme à l'épreuve. AfriqueXXI. <https://afriquexxi.info/Sene-gal-Sans-l-aide-des-Etats-Unis-le-souverainisme-a-l-epreuve>

17. Agence de Presse Sénégalaise. (2025, April 28). Sénégal to proceed with restructuring of the MCC Power Compact after U.S. withdrawal. APS. <https://aps.sn/le-senegal-va-proceder-a-une-restructuration-du-mcc-power-compact-apres-le-retrait-des-etats-unis/>

18. Agence de Presse Sénégalaise. (2025, April 28). Sénégal to proceed with restructuring of the MCC Power Compact after U.S. withdrawal. APS. <https://aps.sn/le-senegal-va-proceder-a-une-restructuration-du-mcc-power-compact-apres-le-retrait-des-etats-unis/>

19. Sonko, K. (2025, February 21). Intervention of USAID in Casamance: 16 billion CFA francs injected into community projects. Le Quotidien. <https://lequotidien.sn/intervention-de-lu-said-en-casamance-16-milliards-de-francs-cfa-injectes-dans-des-projets-communautaires/>

persons and the development of infrastructure (roads, agricultural tracks); were also affected.

The CSOs and CBOs have been the primary victims of the cut. Many activities of local NGOs were funded through USAID call for tenders or public call for proposals. According to the Council of Senegalese NGO, (CONGAD), the measure: "compromised intervention of NGOs in key sectors like health, education and agriculture". In practical terms, this translates into direct funding suspension of entire projects run by CSOs. One key example is a project of the Collectif des OSC pour les élections (COSCE),²⁰ who had obtained international funding (NDI/USAID) to mobilise observers during the polls, but this has now ceased. Although it is temporarily redirecting its support to other international partners. Similarly, a community development NGO, Enda Ecopop, lost USAID funding for its local governance programmes.

Some community services activities were also curtailed. For example, the NGOACDEV community health centre in Guédiawaye²¹ (a suburb of Dakar) used to offer basic care (general medicine, paediatrics, gynaecology) 24 hours a day and used to run reproductive health awareness campaigns thanks to American funding.

Beyond the projects directly financed, the suspension has significant collateral implications. Hundreds of local jobs have already been lost or threatened.²² Grassroots associations and community organisations, the driving force behind citizen participation and local advocacy, find themselves financially suffocated.²³ Campaigns to raise awareness of governance, climate justice and inclusion have ground to a halt.

This crisis has highlighted Senegal's heavy dependence on foreign aid, while accelerating the debate on the 'localisation' of aid. The Senegalese government sees this as an opportunity to push its sovereignist agenda through "Agenga/Vision 2050", banking on the mobilisation of internal resources and the diaspora. Bonds aimed at Senegalese living abroad are being prepared, with the aim of capturing some of the CFA1,600 billion in annual remittances. However, these moves towards self-financing remain fragile. Many actors are warning that other powers (China,²⁴ Turkey,²⁵ etc.) are not offering equivalent humanitarian aid, but rather commercial partnerships that are sometimes unbalanced.

20. Kane, C. (2025, March 28). Au Sénégal, après la suspension de l'aide américaine, l'angoisse des malades : « Où le gouvernement va-t-il trouver l'argent ? Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/03/28/au-senegal-apres-la-suspension-de-l-aide-americaine-l-angoisse-des-malades-ou-le-gouvernement-va-t-il-trouver-l-argent_6587241_3212.html

21. Mandy, A. (2024, April 8). Sénégal : Sans l'aide des États-Unis, le souverainisme à l'épreuve. Afrique XXI. <https://afriquexxi.info/senegal-Sans-l-aide-des-Etats-Unis-le-souverainisme-a-l-europe>

22. Agence de Presse Sénégalaise. (2024, February 7). Suspension de l'aide américaine : les partenaires au développement invités à poursuivre leurs programmes. APS. <https://aps.sn/-suspension-de-l-aide-americaine-les-partenaires-au-developpement-invites-a-poursuivre-leurs-programmes/>

23. Senego. (2024, February 6). Suspension de l'aide américaine : un impact majeur sur les ONG sénégalaises. Senego. https://senego.com/suspension-de-l-aide-americaine-un-impact-majeur-sur-les-ong-senegalaises_.1807857.html

24. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2022, November 30). Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024). Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/\[20240531_11367448.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/[20240531_11367448.html)

25. Ustun, K. B. (2022, February 15). Analysis – Türkiye, Africa: Building a joint humanitarian aid outlook. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-turkiye-africa-building-joint-humanitarian-aid-outlook/2600543>

Key Findings



Focus Group Insights (Local CSOs/CBOs)

Across all FGDs (four completed so far in Dakar, Thiès, Saint-Louis, Diourbel; **43 participants**), local civil society leaders began with little familiarity with “localisation” as a concept. Fully 95% had not encountered the term before the discussions. After clarifying the idea, a clear shared diagnosis emerged: local actors feel excluded from real decision-making. Participants unanimously reported that international donors still “define priorities and implementation methods” for aid projects. They described a “chain of intermediaries” (international NGOs – national NGOs – local CSOs) in which money and control are siphoned off before reaching communities. As one FGD summarised, donors “set the agenda,” and local CSOs often find themselves confined to implementing narrow tasks within predefined projects.

Participants highlighted several common obstacles in localisation practice. The most prominent was

administrative complexity: funding procedures were seen as “burdensome, lengthy and sometimes discouraging”. Relatedly, CSOs complained of poor information flow and lack of access to calls for proposals. Many noted they lacked formal skills in project management, reporting or fundraising, making it hard to compete for grants. Crucially, local actors felt they had no real voice in strategic decisions: proposals and priorities were decided without consulting community groups. This led to frustration and calls to “bypass international structures” and seek direct channels to funders. Participants also observed that aid sustainability was weak – projects often “come to a halt when funding ends” due to lack of local funding mechanisms. Nonetheless, FGDs did identify occasional positive experiences (e.g. a post-Covid education fund where local NGOs co-defined needs). But these were seen as exceptions.

Table 1: Barriers to effective localisation

Type	Description
Institutional	Dependence on sectoral ministries (e.g. health)
Administrative	Lengthy procedures, long deadlines
Technical	Uneven project management capacities
Political	Weak local political will to fully integrate CSOs
Financial	Lack of sufficient direct funding

Source: Author's research

The consensus diagnosis was clear: in practice donors "set priorities, often without any real consultation with local CSOs," and CSOs feel like bystanders. Participants criticised the lack of structured dialogue between donors, local authorities and CSOs. From these discussions emerged operational recommendations from the ground. Local participants urged multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms (e.g. quarterly roundtables) to jointly set priorities using local data. They called for direct, flexible funding lines for local CSOs that bypass international intermediaries, and for simplification of approval procedures (e.g. regional funding thresholds) to cut bureaucratic delays. Capacity-building also ranked high: communities want ongoing training in financial management, monitoring, advocacy and other skills.

They recommended encouraging diversified local financing (e.g. local fundraising, partnerships, community contributions) to reduce donor dependence. Importantly, participants emphasised actively involving local governments – including mayoral and regional councils – in project planning and governance, requiring legal recognition of their role. Finally, they noted that development efforts must adapt to local contexts (language, culture, and sectoral contexts): for instance, translating key documents into Wolof or Fulani and mapping local actors to avoid overlap. These FGD findings highlight that Senegalese CSOs demand both more financial autonomy and stronger institutional integration of local voices in aid decision-making.

Survey Results: Local NGOs/CSOs



59

organisations

To explore the state of localisation from the perspective of local stakeholders, 59 organisations across Senegal participated in a structured survey. The survey aimed to assess their understanding, experiences, and expectations regarding localisation policies and practices. The diversity of respondents reveals a rich local civil society ecosystem, composed of grassroots, formalised, and networked structures.

The data highlights several key points:



Table No. 2: Representativeness of local actors

Type de structure / Type of organisation

59 réponses



Source : Author's research (Google Form)

Table No. 3: Area of expertise of actors interviewed

Domaine d'intervention principal / Main area of expertise

59 réponses



Source : Author's research (Google Form)

Thematic expertise was primarily focused on human rights (27%), women's empowerment (15%), and education and health (collectively 19%), aligning with critical areas of donor investment.

One of the most significant findings relates to the limited understanding of the concept of localisation itself:

Only

14%

had a deep understanding of what "localisation of aid" entails.

The largest group

44%

had heard the term but lacked clarity.

Over one-third

35%

had never heard the term.

Table No. 4: Familiarity with the concept "Localisation"

1) Avez-vous déjà entendu parler du concept de "localisation de l'aide" ? / Have you ever heard of the concept of 'localisation of aid'?

59 réponses



Source: Author's research

This highlights a troubling disconnect: while localisation is increasingly invoked in donor strategy documents, it remains an abstract or unfamiliar concept on the ground.

Other key findings suggest power dynamics are asymmetrical. International donors and NGOs define funding priorities, criteria and modalities, while local actors adapt to often imported frameworks. Respondents perceive a concentration of power at several levels:

Between donors and international NGOs, which still control most funds and strategic decisions.

Between international and national NGOs, often in a logic of subcontracting.

Between the capital (Dakar) and the regions, where rural NGOs denounce "Dakar centralism".

As one respondent shared:

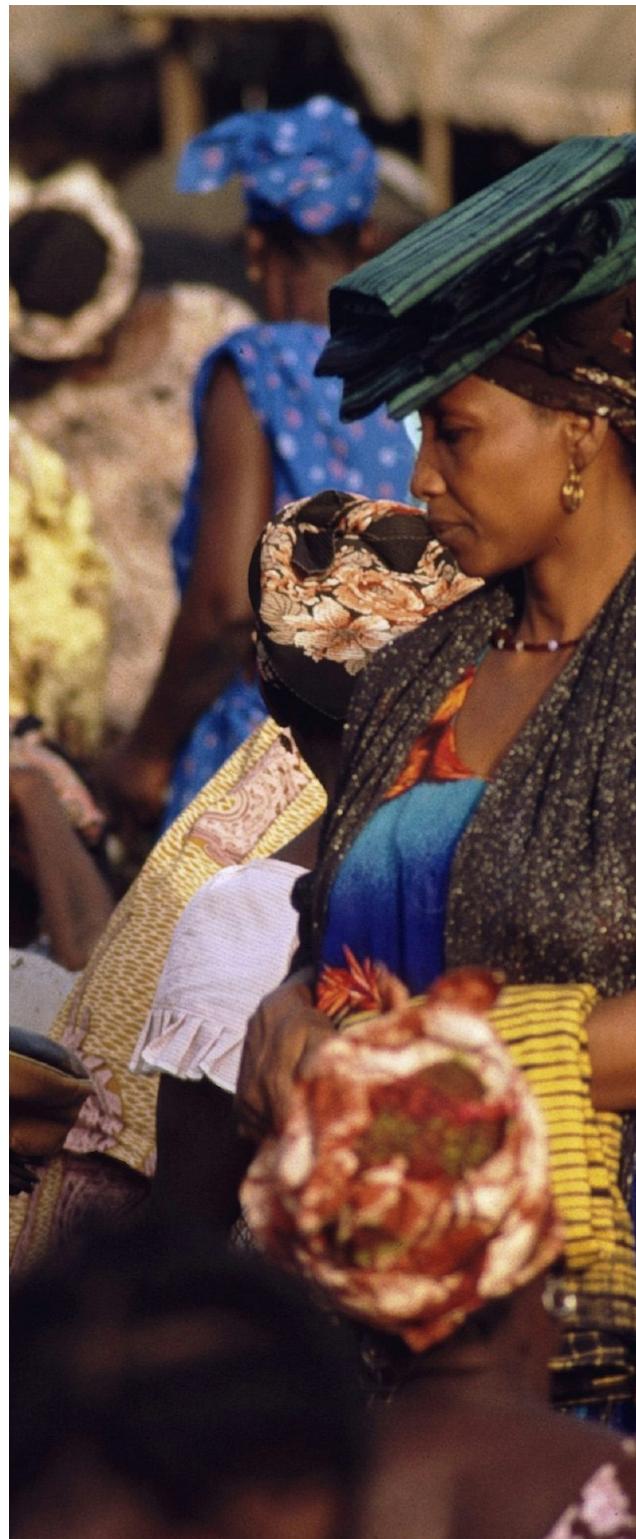
"Key decisions are still taken in Geneva, Washington or Paris, not in Dakar or Ziguinchor."

«Les décisions clés sont encore prises à Genève, Washington ou Paris, pas à Dakar ni à Ziguinchor.

Another respondent shared:

"Non, cela renforce la dépendance... ce sont toujours les bailleurs qui décident de tout."

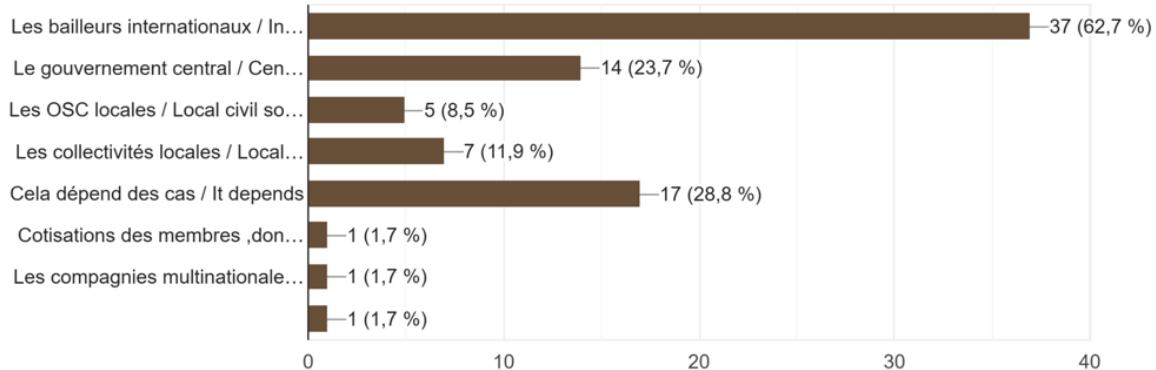
(“No, it reinforces dependency... donors still decide everything.”)



Forms of infantilisation of local structures are also noted: they are "consulted but not listened to", with little influence on logical frameworks or evaluation criteria.

Table No. 5: CSOs and CBOs views about priorities

4) À votre connaissance, qui décide réellement des priorités, modalités ou partenaires dans les projets dits "localisés" ? To the best of your knowledge and partners for so-called 'localised' projects?
59 réponses



Source: Author's research

While the term "localisation" may not be fully understood, its principles resonate clearly with the hopes of local actors. When asked what is needed for effective localisation, respondents highlighted:

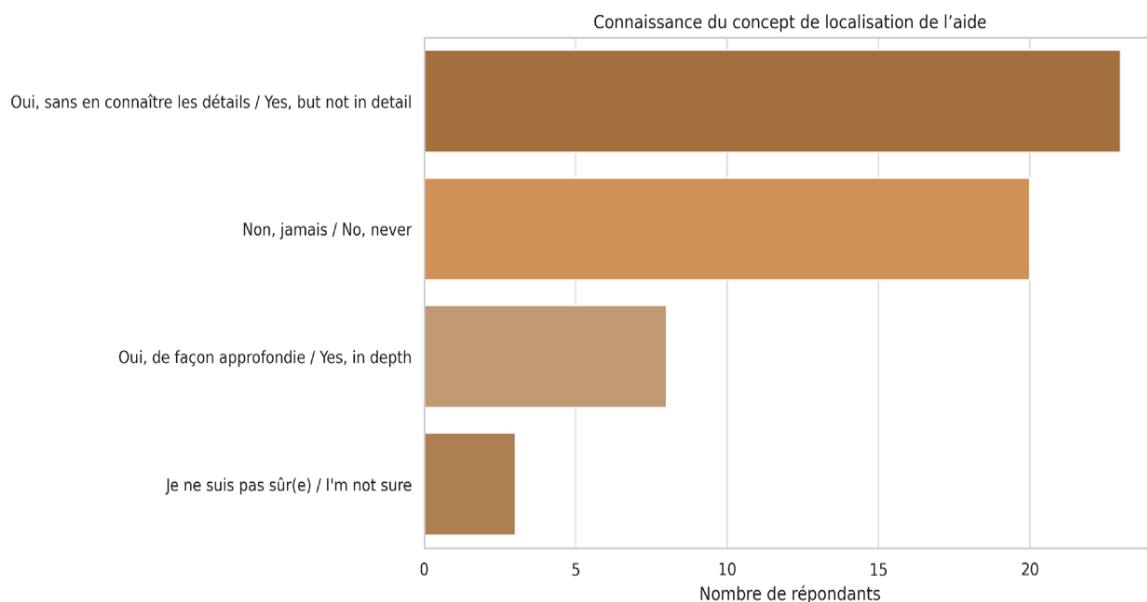
Unrestricted funding and simplified reporting to reduce donor-driven bureaucracy.

Trust-based partnerships, where local CSOs are treated as equals, not subcontractors.

Recognition of local knowledge and legitimacy, especially in setting priorities and designing programmes.

This survey paints a clear picture: Senegal's local civil society is ready and willing to lead, but donors must do more than endorse localisation in theory. They must translate commitment into action, by investing in local capacity, involving local actors in strategic planning, and removing barriers that prevent meaningful leadership.

Table No. 6 : Level of awareness of the aid localisation concept among respondents



Source: Author's research

The survey of local organisations (59 respondents) sheds further light on these perceptions. Respondents were primarily Senegalese NGOs, associations and community organisations working in different sectors (with a few international NGOs with local presence).

About 58% reported having heard of the concept of aid “localisation”, though only 15% felt they understood it deeply; 37% had never encountered the term. Most local respondents conceptualised localisation as strengthening local actors and direct aid flows: common definitions included “letting local actors do the work,” “enabling more direct aid between donors and local organisations,” or putting “local actors at the centre of local governance”.

This is in line with international commitments (e.g. ensuring local organisations receive funds and capacity support). On whether localisation is happening, local NGOs were sceptical. Only a minority felt their autonomy had increased under current aid structures (the survey asked, “Does localisation reinforce autonomy?” and answers clustered toward “not really”). When asked about major obstacles to effective localisation, local respondents overwhelmingly cited:

Burdensome administrative procedures of donors (complex reporting, rigid criteria, excessive deadlines), as well as the scarcity of direct funding for local CSOs.

Lack of technical and administrative capacity on the part of CSOs (project management, monitoring and evaluation, fundraising) was also frequently mentioned as a barrier.

Institutional context (centralised decision-making, failure of decentralisation policies, political mistrust of local NGOs) is seen as a barrier to localisation.

Table No. 7: Barriers to effective localisation



Source: Author's research

In the context of the study, respondents were asked whether the way localisation is currently practised contributes to strengthening their organisation's autonomy. Responses revealed varying viewpoints.

Table No. 8: Local actors views on Localisation strengthening autonomy of their organisation

3) La localisation, telle qu'elle est pratiquée actuellement, contribue-t-elle à renforcer votre autonomie en tant qu'organisation ? Does localisation...p to strengthen your autonomy as an organisation?
59 réponses



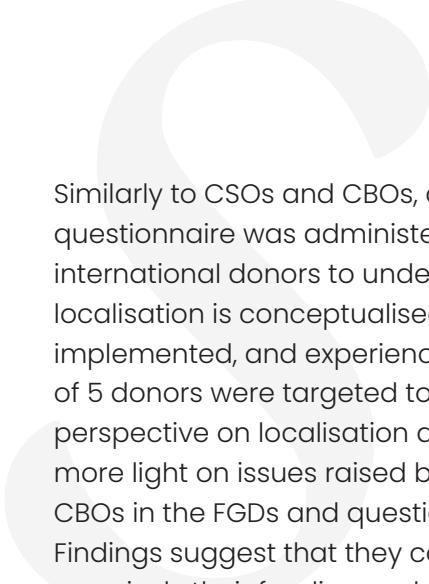
Source: Author's research

With regards to sector analysis. Data reveals a strong representation of the human rights and women's empowerment sectors within the sampling, attesting strongly to the commitment of local actors in these areas. However, the qualitative evidence reveals significant sectoral disparities in terms of the obstacles encountered in implementing local initiatives. Humanitarian and Health organisations cite specific constraints linked to the need for responsiveness, compliance with strict technical standards, and the high requirements of donors. These fields require rapidly deployable technical capabilities, which severely limits local structures' access to funding and strategic responsibilities.

By contrast, the education and human rights sectors appear to be more open to local initiatives, with greater scope for action by community organisations. However, these dynamics are hampered by cross-cutting constraints, such as burdensome administrative procedures, the scarcity of direct funding and complex institutional requirements. In fact, while the obstacles to localisation are broadly similar from one sector to another, particularly in terms of funding, procedures and capacity building, their intensity varies from one area to another.

Donors' Perspective on Localisation





Similarly to CSOs and CBOs, a questionnaire was administered to international donors to understand how localisation is conceptualised, implemented, and experienced. A total of 5 donors were targeted to get their perspective on localisation and shed more light on issues raised by CSOs and CBOs in the FGDs and questionnaire. Findings suggest that they concentrate massively their funding and support on inclusive economic development: professional training, support for small and medium-sized enterprises and the strengthening of agro-industrial sectors form the core of their portfolios. In second place are energy transition and climate resilience, with support for renewable energy production (“mini-grids”, solar and wind power) and the protection of coastal and agricultural ecosystems. Transport infrastructure, water and sanitation are also targeted to support urban mobility and access to basic services. Finally, education, health and social cohesion, although less predominant, are the focus of key initiatives like maternal health coverage, reform of the education system and promotion of cultural and sporting industries.

As part of their “Localisation” approach, while some systematically integrate technical advisors into government

departments to accelerate program co-construction, others rely more on consortia led by international NGOs, citing the need to master the complexity of reporting and auditing procedures. Some donors are already experimenting with “pool funding” mechanisms associating local authorities and CSOs, others maintain traditional calls for projects, requiring detailed administrative files, which hampers access for small grassroots structures. This diversity of approaches reflects both the shared desire to strengthen local ownership and the persistent challenges posed by the technical and administrative complexity of international financing.

To prepare for the transition to direct financing, some donors include capacity-building components, such as workshops on project management, coaching in drawing up financial plans and training of trainers within local authorities. Yet the effectiveness of these measures would benefit from being reinforced by post-project follow-up actions and a reduction in administrative requirements, so that local structures can demonstrate their maturity and gain easier access to large international funds.

Conclusion



4

The localisation of aid in Senegal is on the verge of a drastic change. The language of local actors' empowerment has gained vigor not only globally but also nationally, but this study exposes a continuous hiatus between the aim and the actuality. Most community-based organisations and local NGOs are still at the edges of the decision-making process; they are dealing with complicated procedures and are not provided with direct funding. Furthermore, the donor landscape is still dominated by international intermediaries, which means that the power dynamics are going to be more asymmetrical, and the spirit of localisation will be weakened.

On the other hand, there is a surge of potential. The political turn in Senegal represented by Agenda 2050 is like an open door to a new relationship with national sovereignty, local ownership, and deep transformation. Civil society actors, although they are not usually side-lined, want and are waiting to be the ones in the lead. They come with the knowledge that is specific to the area, the trust they have in the communities, and their commitment to inclusive

development. What they don't have is not ambition but access: to resources, recognition, and real influence.

This report calls on different stakeholders (donors, government actors, and INGOs) to act rather than just talk, and to be proactive in addressing the institutional barriers that impede effective localisation. They should look at aid partnerships afresh, switching from simple transactional arrangements to collaborations based on trust, equality and mutual responsibility. Straightforward, flexible funding, participatory planning processes and legal and institutional reforms are not just aspirations, they are the conditions without which sustainable, community-led development cannot be achieved.

Senegal's aid future is not one that can be brought in from outside. It should be built internally through supporting investments in local systems, increasing grassroots voices and relying on the Senegalese people to manage their own development. Localisation is not a jeopardy, but an opportunity.

Policy Recommendations



To turn these ideas into action, the proposals below aim to promote a more efficient and meaningful localisation of aid in Senegal:

1

Create multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms through quarterly roundtables or forums bringing together donors, civil society organisations (CSOs) and local authorities to decide together on thematic and local needs based on local data.

2

Provide direct and flexible funding for local CSOs: discuss with donors the possibility of opening dedicated budget lines for local organisations without always going through international intermediaries.

3

Simplify and fast-track approval processes (e.g. funding thresholds delegated to regions) to reduce bureaucracy.

4

Build local capacity and sustainability: invest in ongoing training (financial management, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, digital skills) and peer mentoring.

5

Encourage diversification of resources (local contributions, private partnerships, income-generating activities) to reduce dependence on donors. Provide for transparent donor withdrawal plans to ensure continuity of services.

6

Actively involve local authorities: include town halls and regional councils in project governance to anchor initiatives at local level. This requires formal recognition of their role in planning and the creation of legal frameworks or portals (information on funding opportunities) accessible to local actors.

7

Adapting approaches to the local context by considering the specific cultural, linguistic and sectoral characteristics of each area. For example, translate key documents into local languages (Wolof, Fulani, etc.) and simplify administrative forms for local CSOs.

8

Draw up a map of local development actors to better coordinate action and avoid duplication.

9

Simplify the criteria and administrative burden of partnerships with local actors. Donors should adapt their reporting and promote innovative funding mechanisms (national pooled funds, local governance bonuses, etc.) that facilitate direct support.

10

Work with the Senegalese authorities to clarify and apply the decentralisation of resources and powers. Encourage the introduction of appropriate local governance standards. Donors can support legislative reforms enabling local authorities to manage certain local development programmes themselves.



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