



On Localization in the International Cooperation Sector

with **Marlen Mondaca**



Welcome to Unit 1 Part A, “Discover Foundations: Introduction to Fundraising.” In this unit, you will learn about the latest trends in fundraising within the international cooperation sector, from the perspective of international counterparts and as an organization operating in a ‘donor’ country.

00:00:05 Jesse Clarke

Good afternoon. My name is Jesse Clarke and I'm with JN Clark Consulting. We are conducting the training on resource mobilization and equity force for change and I'm very happy to have a colleague with me and an expert in localization, Marlen Mondaca, who has kindly agreed to join us. To discuss some of these topics in more depth over the next few minutes.

So just to give you a brief description. My pronouns are she, her. As I mentioned my name is Jesse. I have brown hair and brown eyes and I'm wearing a brown jacket and I'm currently based in Toronto, so Marlen, if I can just turn it over to you then. Just introduce yourself and just tell us. Give us a bit of your background as well on this work.

00:00:56 Marlen Mondaca

Sure. Thanks for the invitation, Jesse. So as Jesse said, my name is Marlen Mondaca. My pronouns are she and her, and I also am here in Toronto so I just want to acknowledge, share the acknowledgement that Jesse just did in terms of being in traditional territory of many nations, so I'm also just so that those that can't see me, I have brown hair. I'm wearing it in a ponytail today and brown eyes and I'm wearing a light blue sweater.

In terms of, you know, being able to speak to, to the topic, we're going to be discussing today. So, I am currently consulting, but I have been working in the international cooperation sector for over 20 plus years and a large part of that period was with an organization called Save the Children in various roles. But the most interesting one, I guess, or the one that's relevant to this discussion today was the role that

I had in the last few years with Save, which really focused on providing strategic and thoughtful leadership, support or advice to the CEO and in that role I was tasked with moving away from operational responsibilities to really kind of try to understand the external landscape and how that was changing or is changing very, very rapidly and that and the impact of those changes on the international aid sector and on Save the Children.

I was looking at things like what's happening around climate change? What's happening around technology, you know, and of course, I also looked at the issue of localization as part of this larger forces or trends that we see are going to and are having a huge impact on the sector. The money piece is challenging, but perhaps the more challenging piece is how do we rethink?

How we work? With local and national organizations or partners, that whole piece around partnership and the way we can traditionally define partnership on paper has sounded very good, but the reality is that those relationships are very top down. They're very much compliant, focused. They're about, you know, fulfilling obligations for the donor and usually you know, northern organizations telling Southern organizations. Here's the project. Please go and implement and execute it. Report back to us if we don't like the report because the English quality is not great or it doesn't meet our standards, we go back to them and say, can you improve this? Can you improve that? And it's a very top-down relationship where the organizations in the North play this kind of almost policing role of making sure that you know that that project objectives have been met and that we're compliant with donor requirements.

So that piece is being challenged in terms of how we work with partners, that's one piece of you know, and how do we engage partners? You know that whole participation piece in the project thinking and design, what the choices are in terms of priorities for those people living in that context, you know, rather than coming up with ideas of what would be the best project, you know, here in the North. How can we really involve people right at the outset? In terms of thinking and designing the project so that they have a seat at the table through the whole project cycle, not just when we need them for compliance.

00:04:54 Jesse Clarke

I'm thinking about this course that we're that we're delivering and as we're thinking about fundraising, you know, and I think sometimes people will use fundraising as kind of an excuse as to why the relationships need to be a certain way between organizations, you know in the north and the organizations who are implementing program.

So, I don't know if I mean that's I think that's something you might hear to say, well, we're the ones who know how to speak to the donor or how to express things. Why the donor would want to hear them. So how would you respond to that that kind of perspective.

00:05:34 Marlen Mondaca

Yeah, I mean, I've certainly heard that. I think that they should remember that this this is the not only impacting NGO's, you know, bigger or smaller medium size. It's also impacting donors. So, they're doing their own reflection on this topic. And they're beginning to question, you know, all of the processes and procedures and administrative demands that they have and saying, asking themselves, is there something that we can do in terms of modifying this or making sure that people, making it lighter in

some cases, or making sure that people are actually, we're providing the training that people are doing, you know, need in order to be able to access our funding. So, USAID, for example, is doing it.

So, in terms of being able to respond to that, yes, historically we have been the gatekeepers in terms of knowledge and expertise. And I think that as that opens up, you know, whether because we choose to open up and we choose to bring our partners to the conversation and making more much more accessible and transparent. You know the requirements, the funding, all of these things, I think we will find that there's a lot of capacity to even think differently and more creatively than we have in the past.

And I think on the other side, donors are going to start potentially demanding or creating, you know, different funding modalities where you know local national actors by virtue of this new push for locally led action will have access and will have the capacities to directly engage with donors, so I think it behooves organizations to really begin a process of reflection, but also action around this, because I think things are going to change.

I don't know the pace of change is you know, it's these kind of changes, which imply a a rethink and a new way of doing things from the way it has been done for decades will take time, but I do feel that there's a continued momentum in this direction which will compel, you know, organizations to really rethink that argument, that they are the only ones that can play that role.

00:08:02 Jesse Clarke

People really need to think about their own beliefs and attitudes is an important part of this as well. And you mentioned briefly too that you know the kind of relationship between localization and decolonization. Can you talk a little bit more about that and about those 2 concepts and how they interact?

00:08:21 Marlen Mondaca

Sure, sure. I mean decolonization of it really kind of emerged. You know, I think as a result of a lot of these new social movements that we have, particularly the Black lives matter. You know, social movement, like these social movements are dynamic. They allow people to communicate, you know, using social media and you know, tools that we didn't have, you know, 10 years ago and. And so, they're very much tech having an issue driven. And I think that, you know what occurred in the United States, particularly around, you know, racism and discrimination really opened the floodgates or organizations to the employees and staff people to begin to really question and make the connections between, you know this what was happening, you know, in the states around race and around discrimination to how do we deal with that internally in our own organizations?

Whether it's you know how the issue of diversity, equity and inclusion within you know and whether the policies exist and how are they operationalized to the programmatic level, right to the programming. So it extended to kind of the in-house stuff, but also to what we do out there with our programs.

And so, you know, decolonization of aid is really around, you know, questioning kind of the colonial nature of international aid. And when you look at the history of international aid, we see that we borrowed a lot of the structures that were in place, actually, by colonial States and a lot of the thinking that accompanied that you know when we talk of, you know the beneficiary or the use of the English language.

This idea the white gaze as people call it, which is coming, you know, is very much part of the understanding why decolonization of aid is needed is this idea that, you know, the West or the white is more is supreme. That anyone that's you know, brown skinned, you know another colour that's not white and that doesn't have western education that doesn't speak English perfectly. You know, that's the measure of expertise. That's the measure of, you know, that's what we measure ourselves.

And that is the white gaze, right? I mean, it's a concept that was introduced by, you know, black intellectuals. And then it was borrowed by people in the development space and that's its application. And I think it's very relevant when you look at, you know, every report has to be in English, you know, and it has to be perfect English. You know, of course.

You know a person, you know that is living in a francophone country. Even if you speak English pretty well, it's not going to be perfect English. And that report will never be perfect. And so why do we why do we want to force these are, you know, why? Why do we what can we do? Like some organizations are doing? They're interviewing their partner and we take the notes and then we do our report. Let's make it lighter for them, you know, because they they're doing the good work.

It's just about are they able to translate that into paper, you know, and do they have the right words? You know, the right lexicon. And do they speak English well enough in order to be able to demonstrate on paper that that's the case?

So decolonization of aid is really around that issue of power. So a lot of conversation, you've heard shift power. So there is some small baby steps on the Canadian front, but there's a lot of conversations in terms of how they can have a whole agency approach rather than kind of piece meal it.

So that you know, we are making small inroads here in Canada and certainly this is a very much of a live conversation amongst large INGO, middle size and smaller ones for sure. I think the biggest challenges actually are for the bigger INGO's because they build super structures that need to be rethought because the role of organizations will change has to change and therefore how do we define success?

Is it about the bottom lines only more money means more impact? That's the way we've defined success in the past and I think we need to do a redefinition of that.

00:13:10 Jesse Clarke

Yeah. Yeah. No, that's such an interesting point. I mean, just to pull some of the threads from what you're saying is well I think you know what you mentioned around. You need to be really concrete and have a framework, you know, to measure to what extent you're actually implementing localization right. That goes beyond just kind of thinking, oh this is a nice principle, but I think also you know just in terms of organizations that are, you know, trying things out and learning, you know, maybe giving them an opportunity to share those experiences as well and reflect together on what is looking and how they can learn from each other.

00:13:49 Marlen Mondaca

Exactly. I think there's a huge opportunity for, quite honestly, like the more interesting examples are coming out from some of the smaller ones and so I think, but you know the issue is that, you know, like every organization, you know, people are so busy and caught up in the day-to-day that we need to create space for documenting some of that and sharing as you said right, like creating some space for that and supporting that.