

Mutual Accountability
in International
Development:



The Pando Localization Learning System

Executive Summary

2020



About us

Founded in 2009, **Root Change** is a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. Root Change's mission is to bring people together to identify and test pattern-breaking approaches that challenge the systemic causes of poverty, injustice and vulnerability. Since 2018, Root Change has been developing and testing Pando. The concept of a systems analysis tool for social impact organizations, however, has been 15 years in the making. Root Change has worked with groups of organizations in over 14 countries around the world to promote locally owned development, surface structural network roadblocks, and carry out activities to build trust, increase coordination, and strengthen local systems.



Founded in 2004, **Keystone Accountability** is a non-profit organization with locations in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States. Keystone helps organizations understand and improve social performance by harnessing feedback, especially from the people they serve. Using benchmarking surveys, feedback and analysis, Keystone consults NGOs, international development agencies, global companies, and grantmaking foundations to plan, measure and report social change. In 2009, Keystone blended participatory evaluation and customer satisfaction to create a new methodology referred to as Constituent Voice. In 2014, Keystone created the Feedback Commons (www.feedbackcommons.org), an online platform where users can design feedback surveys, analyze data against benchmarks, and generate insightful reports. As of 2020, Feedback Commons has over 17,000 survey responses for 103 users.



Table of contents

4	I. Introducing Pando LLS
6	Our Vision for Pando LLS
6	How Pando LLS works
7	Pando LLS Metrics
8	II. Background
9	Complex Challenges, System-Aware Solutions
11	How We Got Here
14	Helpers and Doers

I. Introducing Pando LLS



An army of opposition will always arise against an accountability mechanism that works.

- Fred Reichheld and Rob Markey¹

Public and private providers of international development assistance have consistently affirmed that local ownership is a priority for the international development sector.² The public donors have codified these principles in formal commitments at periodic global meetings, culminating in the 2011 Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.³ The INGOs from aid-giving countries are unequivocal that local participation and ownership are the core building blocks of effective development programs.⁴ These commitments are frequently reflected by national agencies in signature policies, including, most recently, the US Agency for International Development's "Journey to Self-Reliance" initiative in 2018.⁵

Setting goals and implementing policies are necessary building blocks, but they are insufficient without an effective accountability mechanism, particularly where one party in the relationship provides money as "aid".

Based on decades of work in the aid system as agents for human-centered development, organizational capacity building, and mutual accountability, Root Change and Keystone Accountability informed the US Congress of the opportunity to use new communications technologies to create the first accountability mechanism that is based on the quality of relationships between aid actors. Congressional leaders appreciated this opportunity and subsequently passed an amendment to US foreign assistance to create a ring-fenced, five-year experimental program inside USAID to test these ideas.⁶ The new aid accountability tool described in this white paper, **Pando Localization Learning System (Pando LLS)**, is the result of the work of Keystone Accountability and Root Change utilizing this innovation funding from USAID.

1 Fred Reichheld and Rob Markey started using this phrase around 2006 as they addressed the wave of resistance to their then new Net Promoter System, which at the time was radically disrupting the way companies measured and managed "customer satisfaction" (personal email between David Bonbright and Rob Markey).

2 This paper uses the terms international development assistance, international aid, and aid interchangeable. Similarly, references to the aid system and international aid system refer to the same thing. The main focus of this paper is how international development assistance affects national and local development systems with the specific objective to provide international aid with improved measurement and management tools to strengthen those systems.

3 The Busan conference affirmed that "partnerships for development can only succeed if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country-specific situations and needs" and that "openness, trust, mutual respect and learning lie at the core of effective partnerships, recognising the different and complementary roles of all actors."

4 Oxfam and Save the Children, *The Power of Ownership: Transforming US Foreign Assistance*, (Oxfam and Save the Children, 2016). Keystone Accountability and Bond, *A Bond Approach to Quality in Non-Governmental Organisations: Putting Beneficiaries First*, (Keystone Accountability and Bond, 2006).

5 USAID, "Journey to Self-Reliance": <https://www.usaid.gov/selfreliance> (accessed July 4, 2019).

6 Section 7080, Consolidated and Further continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (P.L. 113-235) (FY 2015 Appropriations Act). The program created, led by USAID's Office for Sustainability, is called "Local Works", see USAID, "Local Works": <https://www.usaid.gov/partnership-opportunities/ngo/localworks> (accessed July 4, 2019)

What Pando LLS does is simple. It makes the totality of relationships between aid’s organizational actors in any development intervention visible in real time. It shows who is connected to whom, how they are connected, and the quality of those connections as assessed by those on the receiving end of development assistance. Most importantly, it marks the changes in these relationships over time, thereby providing the first workable answer to the question every international aid worker must ask: Am I working myself out of this job and into a better job that is more helpful for my local partners?⁷

The type of accountability mechanism we have created is grounded in a concept of mutual accountability. In essence, mutual accountability says that those working in aid hold each other to account for equitable, inclusive relationships that are meant to enhance local leadership and self-reliance while realizing improvements to human wellbeing and habitat sustainability. What this means practically is set out in detail in this paper.

Pando is one of the world’s oldest and most massive living organisms: a forest of Quaking Aspen trees. Known as the “Trembling Giant,” it is connected by one sprawling root system that is estimated at over 80,000 years of age. Sadly, this ancient wonder, covering over 43 hectares and weighing collectively some 6,000,000 kilograms, is slowly dying.⁸ Pando, like our aid system, is an example of how a whole ecosystem depends on the mutuality of many actors. Pando had a survival strategy that worked well over eighty millennia, sprouting new trees from expansive lateral roots. But now it is becoming unwound over a half a century by an accidental adversary: human beings.

To succeed, Pando LLS must be inclusive – meaning that everyone affected by aid is fully included, especially and most importantly, those meant to enjoy the benefits of aid. Pando LLS recognizes, however, that as of today the aid system has neither the will nor the capacity to listen and respond systematically to everyday people. Pando LLS is designed, therefore, to establish the enabling conditions to form that will. We aim to create the capacity to listen and respond to local voices through pilot projects that launch micro-experiments inside existing international aid projects. In that sense, Pando LLS is not an “add on” but an “add in”, one that can easily be designed in at the beginning of any aid project, whether funded by government aid or private funding.

In its current form, Pando LLS is designed to take the first of two steps that are required of development aid to become fully inclusive and mutually accountable. In the first step international, national, and local organizations working in aid projects learn how to work in ways that are progressively more locally led. Pando LLS depends on its direct users – aid funders and implementers – having the capabilities to fully express themselves within projects through communications technologies.

The second step involves cultivating the voices of the people who are ultimately meant to benefit from aid, the so-called beneficiaries. We disfavor the term “beneficiary” as both disempowering and patronizing. We refer to the people in aid-receiving communities as the primary constituents of development. In the initial deployment of Pando LLS, the primary constituents of a project are not expected to be Pando LLS users directly. But they are seen as future users, and as aid organizations become ready, willing, and capable of doing

7 This form of the question suggests that the greater realization of local leadership and self-reliance in aid does not lead to the end of aid relationships, but to their continual movement to something better than what we experience today.

8 Rogers PC, McAvoy DJ, “Mule deer impede Pando’s recovery: Implications for aspen resilience from a single-genotype forest”, 2018. PLoS ONE 13(10): e0203619. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203619>

so, Pando LLS makes it their explicit task to find the contextually appropriate ways to connect the “last mile” by listening and responding to the everyday people who are meant to benefit from aid and development projects. Only the broad outlines of this second step – to reorient the aid system to be directly responsive to the empirically valid expressions of what everyday people want – are set out in this paper. This is because it is for the local development system actors themselves to lead this work.

Our Vision for Pando LLS

In addition to directly rolling out Pando LLS through multiple partnerships over the next few years, Root Change and Keystone Accountability are committed to making Pando LLS available as an open source toolkit so that others can adapt and deploy it – or maybe something better – themselves. We are committed to carefully documenting and publishing all material elements of Pando LLS. We envision a vibrant, multi-stakeholder community of practice building onto and out of Pando LLS, launching their own platforms and collectively improving how we measure and catalyze local ownership.

How Pando LLS Works

Pando LLS combines data drawn from two sources: network mapping and feedback loops. Their order of presentation reflects the order they are introduced through Pando LLS, as explained in part III of this paper.

Network Mapping

To begin, local organizations working in and with aid, use the Pando LLS platform to design and launch a user-friendly, interactive network map that makes the dynamics of aid localization visible. It is the local actors themselves who define the information, ideas, and types of support that define what aid localization means for them on a given project map. This could include things like technical support, financial support, training, information, research, and so on. The initial actors on a map invite other system actors until all known actors that are collaborating in the defined ways are on the map, including non-local ones.

Feedback Loops

The Pando LLS platform supports local actors within a defined system (e.g., around a project or program and those addressing a related issue such as education reform or health services) in soliciting feedback from and contributing feedback to the local system captured in the network map. Micro-surveys, conducted online via computer or mobile phones, using Keystone’s Constituent Voice™ (CV) method generate simple but accurate signals of key relationship qualities, that are then validated and interpreted through open dialogue and qualitative inquiry. An effective feedback loop follows a continual cycle of ask, analyze, dialogue, and course correct that system actors follow to turn feedback data and social network metrics into voice and solutions to advance local leadership in aid.

Pando LLS Metrics

The Pando LLS platform focuses on four local system strength and relationship measurements that are derived from social network analysis (SNA) and Constituent Voice micro-surveys:

Leadership

Leadership measures the degree to which local actors are able to: lead identification of challenges and opportunities, set priorities, define and assess success, and receive recognition as subject matter experts by outside donors and larger international institutions and organizations. It records the extent local actors feel empowered to make independent decisions about what they consider the best course of action.

Mutuality

Mutuality assesses the quality of connections and relationships within the system. It evaluates the degree to which there is trust, commitment, respect, openness, voice, and responsiveness across a local development system (donors, project actors, partners, and (eventually) communities and everyday people).

Connectivity

Connectivity assesses the diversity and density of relationships and collaboration between local actors. It examines the degree to which networks of local development actors have the motivation, opportunities, and incentives to work together to solve problems. It maps the extent local actors are connected to local resources, knowledge, and expertise. The connectivity dimension measures the degree to which aid programs foster increased collaboration and cohesion among local development actors.

Financing

Over time, Pando LLS financing measures reveal the degree to which the dependence of local system actors on external (international) financial resources is decreasing and whether connections to local funding opportunities are improving. It assesses the extent to which local development actors have access to the required financial resources to succeed and increase their autonomy. Questions about local development actors' confidence that the funding/resource environment is improving will be tracked and compared with research on locally available development financing. The extent to which a relationship with a particular organization has made an actor more resilient and less dependent on foreign aid may become a key leading indicator of progress.

II. Background

In 2004, Zimbabwean feminist activist Everjoice Win wrote an imagined open letter to her “Donor Friend Christine.” Everjoice first met Christine when the American woman spent a year in Zimbabwe as a volunteer. Christine impressed local activists as she fully immersed herself in the local culture, dressing in local clothing and eating the local diet. She was then, “a lovely person, reading books asking questions.” After Christine left Zimbabwe and Everjoice, she interned at a small organization and eventually joined a large donor foundation as “a gender expert, specializing in southern Africa.” When Everjoice met her friend Christine again, gone was the enthusiastic young worker eager to learn from the local people. No longer a *friend*, Christine had become a *donor*.

Their relationship had changed. “You no longer ask questions,” Everjoice wrote, “you have the answers.” Once close friends and confidants, the dynamic had deteriorated. “I no longer feel relaxed, sharing information with you,” she told Christine, “I now ‘report’ to you.” Christine had, in the eyes of local actors, become more concerned with the bureaucracy of reporting than the success of the local people. The local activist and her donor counterpart needed to repair their relationship. They needed to “meet halfway.” “All we are asking,” Everjoice closed her letter, “is that you develop ways of listening to our language and our visions, and adapt some of your procedures to our way of doing things. You and I are only part of the story of development.”⁹

Everjoice Win’s allegorical letter shows the necessity of expressly surfacing the relationships and power dynamics between development actors in order to make aid more effective on its own terms. Aid relationships are inherently unequal and diverse – sometimes wonderfully so, and sometimes not so much. Each actor brings different gifts to the common enterprise. Some of these differences – especially ones thickly implicated by power and control, such as control over financial resources – can breed inauthentic relationships unless they are acknowledged and addressed.

Robert Chambers and Jethro Pettit see this clearly:

“Viewed as a complex system, international aid can be understood as governed by the dynamics of power and relationships within and among key actors: governments, donor agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations. These dynamics also shape the ways in which aid actors respond to and seek to influence, the context in which they operate. New key words used by aid agencies – *partnership, empowerment, ownership, participation, accountability and transparency* – all imply changes and levelling in the realm of power and relationships. Yet, these words are often applied in ways that do not acknowledge or address power...diverse experiences involving a range of actors and contexts have all identified power as a common obstacle to making the rhetoric real.”¹⁰

9 Everjoice Win, “‘If it Doesn’t Fit on the Blue Square It’s Out!’ An Open Letter to my Donor Friend,” in Leslie Groves and Rachel Hinton, eds., *Inclusive Aid: Changing Power and Relationships in International Development* (London: Earthscan, 2004), 123-127.

10 Robert Chambers and Jethro Pettit, “Shifting Power to Make a Difference,” in Leslie Groves and Rachel Hinton, eds., *Inclusive Aid: Changing Power and Relationships in International Development* (London: Earthscan, 2004), 138.

Despite the common sense understanding among global development leaders and local activists that progress on local ownership and participation in aid is dependent on the quality of relationships amongst aid actors, few development actors exert to, first, understand their own unconscious biases and cultural baggage, and second, ask how they “show up” to those they work with within the aid system.

The **Pando Localization Learning System** (Pando LLS) cannot address the first issue (self-awareness) directly. But it provides a comprehensive answer to the second (how others see me) by visualizing relationship dynamics and quality in an aid intervention. By mapping all the relationships in a system, and creating a steady stream of feedback from local actors – “you don’t do what you promise” or “you don’t value what I bring to this effort” – Pando LLS encourages aid organizations to step back and do the needed exploration of their own cultural baggage.

Complex Challenges, System-Aware Solutions

All development interventions, whether incorporating international aid or not, contain major challenges of inclusiveness, ownership, and agency. Everyday people often require support and encouragement to exercise their own agency, to give themselves permission to lead their own development, or to stand up to hold others to account. Adding the prevailing international aid power dynamics to the mix often drives local civil society organizations to prioritize the delivery of prescribed aid outputs at the expense of fostering agency, power, and ownership amidst everyday people in communities. In many countries, government and businesses may not regularly engage citizens or actively support civil society organizations, increasing their dependence on international aid. In other cases, donors and the international development community may not systematically prioritize learning about better ways to implement local systems strategies, neglecting in particular new ways to deploy local human and financial resources. The prevailing reporting and evaluation tools and methods are designed to measure aid system preset priorities rather than relationship quality and aid’s contribution to the strength, resilience, sustainability, and autonomy of local systems.

These complex social problems require system-aware solutions. Pando LLS recognizes that development occurs within a complex local system with diverse agents and degrees of power and action. No single organization or actor can bring about lasting change on their own. The more authentic the relationships among actors in the system, the more they are consciously aligned and understand their work in relation to other actors in the system, the more likely it is that the system will deliver the results that everyday people want.

Pando LLS posits that by creating a practical, affordable way for aid system actors to see the whole system and see how they are working together, they will be more likely to realize their shared goals by holding each other to account by improving their Pando LLS measures. There is nothing inevitable or easy in this, and a great deal of creative fostering will need to be done by enlightened aid actors to create the enabling environment and incentives around Pando LLS metrics. At the same time, past experience makes it clear that meaningful progress on localization will not happen absent this kind of accountability mechanism.

Inclusive development experts Leslie Groves and Rachel Hinton support this thinking. “Presenting power and relationships as an entire system reveals the extent to which development is complex and dynamic...A complex systems diagram illustrates the diversity of relationships as well as their fluidity and interdependence. It

is also important to note that with each interaction, relationships evolve and all parties to the relationship are changed.”¹¹

Resource providers who want to support local development, in particular, need to enter the ecosystem with the intention of creating high-quality relationships of mutual accountability. This means understanding how the resources that they might provide to support one group of actors affects others in the system. As a recent study of local development notes, externally dominated distribution of resources may have a “number of damaging and distorting consequences for local agency and ownership, and it can lead to inappropriate and misconceived interventions that end up exacerbating the very problems they aim to solve.”¹²

Keystone Accountability has surveyed over 5,000 local civil society organizations about what it is like to work with international aid actors over the past decade.¹³ The feedback is strikingly consistent and may be summarized, “Stop instrumentalizing us. Treat us as equal partners. You don’t appreciate what we know that you don’t. You don’t seek our input early and often enough.” Shamefully, there is no measurable progress on these issues discernible in our decade long tracking of these issues.

Robert Chambers writes that relationships are of “paradigmatic significance...To shift from relationships which are distant, impersonal, auditing, and controlling to become more face-to-face, personal, trusting, and empowering takes time. It also needs staff and motivation. Instead of continually reducing staff and ratio of staff to finance, as so many funders have done, value for money will come out of augmenting staff and encouraging them to get closer, face-to-face with their partners, and more in touch with the ground and the action.”¹⁴

While Pando LLS cannot directly address the resourcing, motivation, and deployment challenges funders must tackle for themselves, it can create a steady and reliable signal derived from those they mean to help, that funders may manage to, in order to realize their agreed objectives.

Pando LLS is a tool for the providers and receivers of international aid to visualize and understand the local ecosystem in which they are acting. With limited investment in logistics and infrastructure, they can see the local development project’s system through a combination of a map of real-time relationship dynamics and qualitative feedback on relationship quality. It follows the precept from Participatory Rural Appraisal in the 1990s, “Start, stumble, self-correct, share.”¹⁵ It builds on the production of relationship metrics to create frequent online and face-to-face opportunities for actors to discuss their relationships and co-create ways to improve them.

11 Rachel Hinton and Leslie Groves, “The Complexity of Inclusive Aid,” in Hinton and Groves, eds., *Inclusive Aid: Changing Power and Relationships in International Development* (London: Earthscan, 2004), 6.

12 Rosie Pinnington, “Local First in Practice: Unlocking the Power to Get Things Done,” (London: Peace Direct, 2014), 7.

13 <http://keystoneaccountability.org/kps/> (accessed July 4, 2019).

14 Robert Chambers, *Can We Know Better: Reflections for Development*, (Warwickshire: Practical Action Publishing, 2017), 169.

15 Robert Chambers, xi.

How We Got Here

Pando LLS has its roots in the long march of participatory development methodologies and locally owned development. In the immediate post-WWII period, western donor agencies helped drive the first wave of attempts at participatory development in post-colonial countries through the funding and promotion of co-operatives and an increased focus on decentralization and community-based development.¹⁶ Dedication to localization diminished in the 1970s as donors balked at the system factors in localization – such as elite capture, the time and effort required to activate everyday people’s agency, and the need for effective accountability mechanisms – and moved on to the next fad, in this case large-scale “top-down” investments in agricultural or industrial growth.¹⁷

By the mid-1980s, however, scholars and activists critiqued such approaches as fundamentally disempowering and biased against local actors, especially the marginalized. Advocates argued for a more “bottom-up” approach to international development and more attention to decision making power and the social capital of local communities. Informed by these critiques, international development organizations returned to approaches more rooted in community-based development, decentralization, and participation.¹⁸ The assumption of these approaches was that if local actors and communities ‘owned’ a development activity they would voluntarily and actively participate in its design and implementation leading to improved sustainability, especially beyond a period of outside funding.¹⁹ Simultaneous to these advances was the development of new participatory development models and tools. These include approaches like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), which focus on facilitation, behavior change, local knowledge, learning, and pay close attention to dynamics of power and relationships.²⁰

By the 1990s, donors increasingly embraced a language of local ownership with a stronger focus on nation-state participation as part of governance, accountability, and empowerment processes underpinned by an ideological commitment to citizenship and human rights.²¹ This trend tended to see development through the lens of an expansion of democracy and governance and grounded local ownership of development in ideas like accountability (meaning the western liberal idea of citizens holding their governments to account for public services), empowerment, and citizen participation.

The 2000s saw a global consensus of the fundamental importance of local ownership codified in several global agreements. Building off agreements from earlier in the decade, the 2011 “Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation” affirmed several significant principles guiding international development. Among those was that “partnerships for development can only succeed if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country-specific situations and needs”

16 Ghazala Mansuri and Vijayendra Rao, *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2013), 3.

17 Mansuri and Rao, 3.

18 Mansuri and Rao, 3.

19 Jeremy Holland, Stephen Jones and Andrew Kardan, “Understanding Participation in Development: Towards a Framework,” *International Development Planning Review*, Vol. 37, Issue 1, (2015), 78-79.

20 Pinnington, “Local First in Practice,” 9.

21 Holland, Jones, and Kardan, 79.

and that “openness, trust, mutual respect, and learning lie at the core of effective partnerships, recognizing the different and complementary roles of all actors.”²²

Informed in part by these agreements, donor countries revised policy and created more locally focused programming. One large donor country, for example, the United States, launched new initiatives like the Millennium Challenge Corporation that heralded recipient country-level priorities and cooperation. In 2010, spurred on by new development policy initiatives demanding local ownership from the Obama Administration, USAID formed USAID Forward and Local Solutions to meet these challenges. The primary goals of Local Solutions were to increase the proportion of program awards to partner-country based local organizations and the alignment of agency strategy with country priorities and interests through Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS). Most recently, USAID has embarked on a “Journey to Self-Reliance” (JSR) that focuses the agency’s attention and priorities on “the ability of a country, including the government, civil society, and the private sector, to plan, finance, and implement solutions to solve its own development challenges.”²³

This may bring USAID priorities into fuller alignment with Congress as The Foreign Assistance Act, Section 102, says: “[B]ilateral development assistance authorized by this Act shall be carried out in accordance with the following principles: (1) Development is primarily the responsibility of the people of the developing countries themselves. Assistance from the United States shall be used in support of, rather than substitution for, the self-help efforts that are essential to successful development programs and shall be concentrated in those countries that take positive steps to help themselves. Maximum effort shall be made, in the administration of this part, to stimulate the involvement of the people in the development process through the encouragement of democratic participation in private and local governmental activities and institution building appropriate to the requirements of the recipient countries. (2) Development planning must be the responsibility of each sovereign country. United States assistance should be administered in a collaborative style to support the development goals chosen by each country receiving assistance.”

In addition to an interest in self-reliance, development organizations embraced more complexity awareness.²⁴ As USAID wrote in a recent report, “achieving and sustaining any development outcome depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected actors...the focus needs to be on the system as a whole—the actors, their interrelationships and the incentives that guide them.”²⁵

A similar story could be told for most of the western donor countries, but at the level of official, and perhaps especially for the international development NGOs that are headquartered in these countries and which tend to pioneer international development thinking and practice for these donor countries. In sum, international development actors are looking at their programs and interventions holistically and with attention to

22 “Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation,” 2011.

23 USAID, “Journey to Self-Reliance Fact Sheet,” (USAID, 2018).

24 USAID, “Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development,” (April 2014); Kimberly Bowman, John Chettleborough, Helen Jeans, Jo Rowlands, and James Whitehead, “Systems Thinking: An Introduction for Oxfam Program Staff,” (October 2015); USAID, “SPACES MERL: Systems and Complexity White Paper,” (March 2016).

25 USAID, “Local Systems,” 4.

power dynamics and impacts across a system.²⁶ One of the most interesting practical applications of these ideas was developed by the Family Independence Initiative in the United States as a response to decades of failure of domestic anti-poverty programs.²⁷

To achieve these goals, changemakers are embracing methods and tools such as feedback loops, system mapping, social network analysis, peer support, asset-based approaches, and positive deviance to better understand how local actors live and express their own agency.

Despite the important public commitment to complexity and power awareness and local country ownership and participation, in the last 10 years or so there has been an evolving agreement among development academics and development workers that the concept of ownership, centered on governments, should not come at the expense of the participation of those who aid providers seek to help through development interventions. As one recent critique describes, “the parameters of what constitutes ‘localising aid’ are somewhat limited by its focus on the transfer of donor funds to recipient country entities.”²⁸

Complexity aware analyses, including Thinking and Working Politically and Political Economy Analysis, highlight the concern that governments and civil society organizations may incompletely represent the interests of development program target groups and that “when beneficiaries do not feel that they have ownership of an intervention, their lack of participation may undermine the effectiveness of aid programs.”²⁹ They call for “new approaches and procedures that stress partnership and transparency.”³⁰

These critics advocate locally inclusive participation at all levels of development priority setting, design, and implementation. One of the leading scholar-practitioners in this thinking, Robert Chambers, advocates for a more local people-centered participatory paradigm. In his model, development should be focused on bottom-up approaches prioritizing empowerment over the pursuit of specific targets and disbursements of resources. He advocates for diverse contextually-aware approaches where external development actors act as facilitators, rather than supervisors of interventions. Outside participants should acquire knowledge through direct immersive experience and enable local initiatives, rather than exert out-right control of projects. This model prioritizes downward accountability to stakeholders and end-users, rather than upward accountability to donors or taxpayers.³¹ Development practitioners have begun to take relationships between actors more seriously and advocate their fundamental importance to local ownership and self-reliance. As one USAID officer explains, “Assistance should focus at least as much on...helping to expand and strengthen

26 The literature on this has grown to such an extent it is being referred to now as a “second orthodoxy”. Leading exemplars include Thinking and Working Politically (TWP): Tesky, Graham, “Thinking and Working Politically: Are we seeing the emergence of second orthodoxy?”, Governance Working Paper Series, Issue 1, March 2017: <https://www.abtassociates.com/insights/publications/white-paper/thinking-and-working-politically-are-we-seeing-the-emergence-of> (accessed July 4, 2019).

27 For a book length exposition of an approach to localization that successfully teaches the providers of assistance to get out of the way and allow people to develop themselves, see Mauricio L. Miller, “The Alternative: Most of what you believe about poverty is wrong”, (Lulu Publishing Services, 2017).

28 Pinnington, “Local First in Practice,” 10.

29 Holland, Jones, and Kardan, 79.

30 Groves and Hinton, 5.

31 Robert Chambers, “Ideas for Development”, (London: Earthscan, 2005), 212.

local networks of generalized trust and collaboration—as it does on improving human capital.”³²

Despite the increased knowledge and evidence of strong equitable relationships as a crucial component of sustainable development, typical frameworks and measures of local ownership and participation do not account for complex dynamics in systems of power and relationships.³³ As Hinton and Groves describe, this “points to the problem of program operations that are based on predicted outcomes planned with only partial knowledge of the system and without constant review and reflection. Such generalizations hide the fluid and interdependent nature of organizations over time and space and the consequence of this is poor programming and policy design, based on inaccurate understandings of the behavioral dynamics of the system.”³⁴ External actors have ignored the existing incentives and pressures in a local system and simply imposed their own, then wondered why aid doesn’t work as planned.

Even as development activists, scholars, and practitioners attempt to expand the quality and inclusivity of locally-led development, there is a lack of easily accessible and usable tools to capture, assess, and visualize the dynamics between development actors. “Measuring the relationship between participation and empowerment,” a recent study reports, “remains a key challenge in the development sector, as does engagement in feedback mechanisms and genuine accountability.”³⁵ Critically, present analytical frameworks do not adequately account for the importance of strong relationships and trust necessary for a strong local development system.

Pando LLS enters this space to provide an easy-to-understand and accessible tool and method, allowing diverse stakeholders across a local development value chain to visualize, measure, and analyze their system. As international development scholar, Andrea Cornwall warns, “Without a dynamic understanding of people’s social networks and the institutions and dimensions of difference that matter in the pursuit of their livelihoods, naive efforts to bring about inclusive development may simply make things worse.”³⁶

Helpers and Doers

The overall strategy animating Pando LLS is to transform aid to be more effective at realizing its localization goals by providing a way for aid’s organizational actors to hold each other to account for high-quality relationships with each other and, ultimately, to those meant to benefit from aid. It does this by making aid relationships visible in real time so that these measures may be used by all aid constituents to aspire to improvement.

It derives measures of how organizations relate to each other as a system around an aid intervention (the

32 John Ellis, “Revisiting Social Capital (And What to Do About it),” USAID.gov, <https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/frontiers/2014/publication/section-2-revisiting-social-capital-and-what-do-about-it> (accessed February 15, 2019).

33 Recent frameworks for evaluating local ownership and participation include the “Oxford Policy Management Framework,” Holland, Jones, and Kardan (2015); “The Local Engagement Assessment Framework (LEAF),” Oxfam and Save the Children, *The Power of Ownership: Transforming US Foreign Assistance* (2016).

34 Groves and Hinton, 6.

35 Pinnington, *Local First in Practice*, 9.

36 Andrea Cornwall, “Unpacking ‘Participation’: Models, Meanings and Practices,” *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (July 2008), 278.

network map) and the quality of those interactions (through feedback loops). Pando LLS measures, discussed in the next section, *III. Pando LLS in Practice*, are based on theory and practice principles described here.

The theoretical framework that we have found most explanatory posits aid relationships as between “helper” and “doer.”³⁷ At the outset, it should be noted that the degree to which an actor is a helper or a doer may vary considerably by the relationship in question, and may even vary within a relationship depending on the context. An actor who is a helper in one context might be a doer in another. Placed in the frame of the relationship between development assistance and those implementing and benefitting from aid, the helpers are providing assistance and doers receive and act with the help. Effective helpers do not override, undercut, or substitute their own will and priorities for those of the doers. The goal, therefore, is to provide what David Ellerman calls “autonomy-respecting assistance” where helpers “find a way to help in a way that respects, fosters, and sustains the autonomy of the doers.”³⁸ Respect for the autonomy of the doer extends to honest expression of opinion both ways, along with the willingness to respect the decision of those affected by the decision.

Pando LLS is a tool to help development actors visualize, measure, and sustain this type of helper-doer relationship. It provides data and evidence about the extent to which a given aid project advances localization objectives. It does so by creating opportunities for providers and recipients to strategize about how to make assistance more inclusive and equitable. As the local development system becomes more autonomous and self-reliant with respect to a particular intervention, the requirement for external help will change, certainly, but it need not disappear. Rather, high-quality helper-doer relationships will identify new and better helper roles. In this way, Pando LLS provides a continual improvement tool for development assistance.

Based on our learning from a decades-long pursuit of autonomy-respecting assistance and locally owned development, Pando LLS is designed around five central principles:

Prioritize Relationships

Focus on the context, nature, and quality of the relationships between aid providers, receivers, and between aid recipients themselves. How people work together in development assistance determines whether they transcend unidirectional dependency relationships to realize mutual inter-dependence.

Look Locally

Incentivize widespread local support and ownership of the development agenda. Define problems as everyday local people see them. This means privileging end-user voices through continual feedback loops by which constituents of any given development project give feedback and monitor how organizations improve based on their feedback.

³⁷ For a comprehensive articulation of this line of thinking and social action, see David Ellerman’s important work, *Helping People Help Themselves: From the World Bank to an Alternative Philosophy of Development Assistance* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005).

³⁸ Ellerman, *Helping People Help Themselves*, 11, 7.

Embrace Mutual Accountability

Understand and guide individual activities of local development actors in alignment with wider networked efforts to achieve shared developmental outcomes. Have clear, agreed, public obligations for all constituents, especially those with more power. Promote a strong norm of reciprocated helpfulness and trust. Validate relationship measures through sense-making with those in the system and by testing corrective actions through more feedback. Encourage those with less power and status to proactively hold those with more power and status to account.

People-Centered Learning

Support local system actors in creating, validating, and using data for their own learning and improvement. Participants in the system must identify their shared purpose and then evaluate their own relationships and collective actions. The only failure in relationships is the failure to learn.

Encourage Experimentation

Utilize structured learning cycles to create an evidence-based “authorizing environment” for decision-making that encourages continual adjustment in how various actors are working together in light of patient, intentional experimentation and positive deviance.