



**The Brookings Institution
Center for Sustainable Development**

and

The Rockefeller Foundation

**17 Rooms Podcast
“Valuing local knowledge and solutions for SDG progress”
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Episode Summary:

In this sixteenth interview of the “17 Rooms” podcast, Jamie Drummond and Kennedy Odede discuss shifts in power, process, and funding to uplift proximate leaders and value local knowledge and community-based solutions. Drummond, co-founder of ONE and Odede, CEO and co-founder of Shining Hope for Communities, moderated Room 11 focused on Sustainable Development Goal number 11—on sustainable cities and communities—during the 2021 17 Rooms flagship process.

MCARTHUR: Hi, I'm John McArthur, senior fellow and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings.

KHAN: And I'm Zia Khan, senior vice president for innovation at The Rockefeller Foundation. This is 17 Rooms, a podcast about actions, insights, and community for the Sustainable Development Goals and the people driving them.

John, I'm really excited about today's conversation on localization. And this is how I've personally been experiencing it as we've all been wrestling with COVID, and the rise of Omicron is all of us, and everyone I talk to is hearing the guidance from the CDC and the WHO, which feel like these faraway institutions, but our local realities are very different. When to go back to work, when to quarantine, how to manage school for kids. And increasingly, people are taking those decisions in their own hands and managing it much more locally. And I think that's a good analog for what we're about to talk about.

MCARTHUR: I think you're highlighting a real tension that shows up in different problems in our local and global societies, Zia, which is some issues really need massive coordination globally. Vaccination, for example, there's not enough coordination. Some issues need super localized approaches. And even if they're globally coordinated, there needs to be a local say in order for things to work. And it needs to match with local realities, and the resources need to fit the local priorities.

As I think about it, that's really what localization means to me. It's about local leaders having a say, or even the say, in driving their own fate and guiding local resources to meet local priorities in harnessing and mobilizing their own innovations for progress. But also in balancing power with other institutions, whether it's in their country or in other countries around the world, so that people can make progress together.

You know, by one measure, less than 1 percent of all the world's official development assistance, as the technical jargon, or foreign aid budgets, if you add them all up, less than 1 percent goes to local actors on the ground. And what's the precise number, what does it really mean? These are hard questions, and we're going to hear about that in this conversation, what should we be measuring.

But there's a broad recognition from COVID, from Black Lives Matter, from a broader movement to so-called decolonize these global conversations that we need to not have top down, we need to have a lot more partnership and bottom up, too.

And today we have an extraordinary coupling of two people who are really bringing those conversations together in important ways for the world. We have Jamie Drummond and Kennedy Odede coming to share their efforts to promote localization and a locally led development at the global level.

Jamie is a global strategist for the Sustainable Development Goals, and he's been a driving force of a broad range of global anti-poverty campaigns over the past couple of decades, ranging from global debt relief efforts for the poorest countries in the late 1990s, and then the creation of Data.org, and scaling up of things like treatment for HIV/AIDS and malaria, and co-founder of the One campaign, which has been arguably the leading international advocacy organization promoting increased investments from the richest and most powerful countries to support the poorest and often least powerful countries in the international system.

Jamie is joined today by Kennedy, who is a co-founder and the CEO of Shining Hope for Communities. He's one of Africa's best known community organizers and social entrepreneurs. Kennedy is a senior fellow with Humanity in Action, and Aspen Institute, a New Voices Fellow, a Young Global Leader at the World Economic Forum, and an Obama Foundation Africa leader.

The two of these people have so many accolades for their respective streams of work, but they bring them together here in Room 11, where they co-moderated a working group for SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities in this year's 17 Rooms process. For new listeners, 17 Rooms is an approach to spurring action for the Sustainable Development Goals. It convenes 17 working groups, one per goal and asks them to focus on an area within an SDG that is ripe for action, and then to define some concrete next steps that can be achieved in 12 to 18 months to make progress.

Zia, this one's big, complicated, and so hard to take on. But it's also something I think all of us feel is a first order basic priority for the world to take on, and it's such a gift to have these leaders coming together to help us figure it out.

KHAN: And John, we couldn't ask for better guides. Jamie representing so much around how global policy works, and Kennedy representing so much about how local leaders act. Jamie and Kennedy are co moderators of Room 11, the working group for SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities. This is their story.

MCARTHUR: Jamie, welcome to 17 Rooms.

DRUMMOND: Thank you, John, thank you, Zia, and the whole 17 Rooms crew.

MCARTHUR: And Kennedy, such a pleasure to have you here too.

ODEDE: Thank you, John. I'm happy to be here. Thank you so much.

MCARTHUR: Zia?

KHAN: We'll thank you both for your great leadership in 17 Rooms, and we're very excited to dive in to that work. Before we jump in, I'd like to ask each of you your story of how you came to your work, how you came to this issue of localization, and how you came to 17 Rooms. Kennedy, maybe we could start with you.

ODEDE: Thank you so much, Zia. Yes, so first of all, my story is that I grew up in a slum in Nairobi, Kenya, one of the largest slums in Africa. And I ran a nonprofit that was founded in Islam. And I saw a lot of challenges, trying to fundraise in the world and how local actors are being treated.

But then why they talk about this issue now is an important question. So what happened is that during this COVID, we saw an opening with Black Lives Matter, there was a moment that we are allowed to speak out. And I wanted to really capture this moment and run with it, to talk about it. And for us to really achieve our Goal, we have to really invest and work with the local actors. So that's how this thing really came into my mind.

KHAN: Thank you. Jamie, how about yourself?

DRUMMOND: Well, I've been campaigning on these issues for a very, very long time, trying to raise money from governments, G7, the G20, private foundations, high net worths for the MDGs, the Millennium goals, and now the SDGs and climate action. And the constant refrain from those throughout the system, who on the one hand with good intentions were worried to make sure the money would be well invested—but also those who did not want to do anything—the constant refrain was how whether the resources you're raising are having the impact you claim they will. And the only and the best and the consistent answer was well if people on the ground are in charge of the money when it gets there and they could determine the results they can verify delivery, have that confidence and feed that back to the policymakers who might be skeptical or who might have great questions about how it's being used.

And throughout my career, we've been sort of telling stories, anecdotes, and statistics about great local citizens and leaders like Kennedy, who do that crucial work at the grassroots community level. But the honest truth is it was more of a story than the reality. We were too beholden to anecdotes and not real action. And so I'm just really committed via, and thank you to you for making this happen, but I'm really committed to us all working through this 17 Rooms process to make sure that as we get billions more via SDRs recycling, or optimizing the World Bank, or African Development Bank, or getting the G7 to keep their aid promises—Inshallah—or even leveraging millions, billions, trillions more in private finance Mark Carney isn't greenwashing, then it'll be down to leaders like Kennedy to make sure, and the localization agenda to make sure, that we're really delivering and empowering those communities. And so it's just a vital agenda and too long talked about, not long enough and deeply enough acted on.

MCARTHUR: I just want to jump in here because I think the two of you, as I reflect on all these issues, are really an extraordinary combination. And it's worth hearing a little bit more about the evolution of your perspectives. And Jamie, I think you just referenced it. In your own work you've been—having known you for more years than I care to count at this stage—really just a master of connecting with the highest-level political conversations and helping them connect with the needs of developing countries, starting with things like debt relief and HIV/AIDS, and pushing for that empiricism in transparency.

But over the past couple of decades, there's been this arc of, first, don't speak on our behalf as a crucial political dynamic from the emerging and developing countries themselves. But also then from the communities saying, don't speak on our behalf if you're the government, for example, of a country that might not be representing the community in a way that the community feels is right. And Kennedy, you've been pushing from the community side up to say, listen to our voice—whether it's the local discussion, the global discussion, the philanthropic discussion. And it's almost like a merger from the top of the global system down to the community, and from the community system up to the global. I'm curious, Kennedy, how you experienced that from your perspective and just how has it felt to watch those debates change over time, even if as Jamie said, they haven't changed nearly enough yet? And that's of course, why we're pushing on this.

ODEDE: Thank you, John, for that. I have been one of the lucky people who happened to go to Davos, you go to the UN. And for many, many years, I just hear people talk. And they talk to the same people. So when I was in London, I reached out to my friend Jamie. I said, you

know what? I have this crazy idea. I went to Davos and I don't see the voices of the locals. They don't have a seat at the table. So I want to do something radical and I need your help on this. So I want to do a conference, a Davos for the poor. And it was crazy. Jamie's like, oh Kennedy, that's very, very strong, what you want to achieve, you know?

So we discussed it together and I said, okay, I think for us to have real change, we have to bring all this together. Jamie, you talk on G7, you talk about the high level. And of course, with the African countries on the debt, on these issues. The question here, can the world also hear the voice of those who are living the life?

So what happened is that Jamie really helped me a lot to work on it and we did what's called the World Community Forum. John, you'll remember that. So it was launched and that's where we got so lucky and we invited the ambassador, Samantha Power. And she promised, I get this, I want to work on this. So after that really happened, we followed up and I said, No, no, no, this thing is really, really serious, localization need to be pushed. She really followed up with us and we met part of the USAID team. But already something is cooking.

But I realized that, you know what? You cannot do anything alone. Grassroots actors cannot just by themselves. We need collaboration. And in this moment, you need people like Jamie and people like me to bring more people on the table so that they can hear from each other. And for me, that's when we can have the real change. I want to see SDGs being discussed in the slums, in the villages, as part of it, together with New York, in London, the U.N. headquarters.

So that's how this thing really started. And from that, we were able to launch something called Global Alliance for the community. So this alliance of really people from the south, mostly, where they talk about their issues to keep the momentum going.

MCARTHUR: And Jamie, your take on that arc and just having experienced those evolving debates?

DRUMMOND: What I would say is, and John you'll remember this, in the 1990s there was a pilot program for debt cancellation in Uganda. And what was key to that pilot program was, at least in our narrative, the Poverty Action Fund. That was a mechanism by which the government made transparent to the people of Uganda how the money freed up by debt relief was being spent—primarily in that case on primary education. And it got great results. Enrollment went up as did literacy at the time.

And in particular within the poverty action funds, there was this thing about parent-teacher associations at the community school level being able to check the per capita budget, i.e. how much of the global debt relief deal was translated via Ugandan national budgets to per capita, per citizen, per young Ugandan students' daily spend on education, as verified by the parents of those young people and those communities. What a powerful model. What a great way to do things in this world, that the global and national deals are verified by citizens through a transparent process at the local level. That is how everything should be done.

Based on that, we went on to campaign for more debt cancellation, then campaign, as you know, for the global fund to get fully replenished and set up. And a whole series of things went forward that were all based on the same idea, that the local communities would

scrutinize, hold accountable, and own as a result these global deals and flows to the local level.

And I, as you know, went forth merrily with a movement to make poverty history—One, Red, we did our work for several decades. But every time we took the double check, is the story still holding?—it became less and less clear than it was. And you're getting increasingly anxious over time that it was a story, not a stood-up reality.

And so I think we need to embed the hardwire that accountability to the local level and ownership by the local leaders into the whole process in new and better ways than we did before. We can't rely on sturdy anecdotes. It has to be the hard-wired reality. And that's very much a work in progress, the localization agenda that we managed to that, and Kennedy's leadership in particular. I think we're getting there. I think USAID has come on board, all of the key multilaterals, everyone's saying the right things.

The reality of climate action means people can't jump on planes to, you know, check with spreadsheets whether things are happening. The reality of COVID is you can't do that anymore. And the reality of Black Lives Matter and #MeToo is you should never be doing that in the first place. It's wrong. It is not the way to run the rodeo. It is quite wrong.

But you do need an improved understanding between taxpayers and the policymakers in the global north with citizens in the global south if we're going to work on these things. And I think it is increasingly going to be citizen-to-citizen relationships that will get us there. But the policymakers obviously have a key role. And then you get into the practical details of, how does it really work? How do you fight the Beltway Bandits in Washington, D.C.? How do you get around these things? And that's the meat and potatoes of making the change here.

ODEDE: Jaime, just to add something on this, it is a very good point. And I think although we're talking about localization now, Jaime let's be honest, for many years, there was no data to really support localization. So I want to hear from Jamie, what is changing? Because honestly, for me, I think it's COVID. I don't think I'm crazy. I think COVID, for me, it's like, Wow! This are times that everyone now are willing to talk about localization. For a long time, it was rejected. You talk about localization, it's been that less impact, you cannot scale. So, Jamie, over to you for that.

DRUMMOND: Yeah, I know, I think you're absolutely right, Kennedy. What I would also say is the framework was enabled by the Leave No One Behind part of the SDGs. I think it's a credit that part of the agenda. But the point is that's vital, but a little bloodless. What I mean is, it needed the imperative of the reality of the pandemic. And I think climate has resulted in there being a sort of a little bit of what they call in Scandinavia "flight shame," *flygskam*, or whatever, you know, you just don't want people to be jumping on the plane so often to check on things. That means you have to take the local leadership more seriously than the global north leaders of development allowed it because it challenges their power and privilege and their jobs. And then Black Lives Matter, I think, in the middle of a lot of the COVID realities piled on the pressure as well. So I just think it's all pointing in the same powerful direction. We should have been there already anyway. But it's all pointing in that direction.

KHAN: Jamie, I want to pick up on a comment you made, which is everyone is saying the right things, which implies that people are not doing the right things. And John, there's some resonance in this conversation with the discussion we had in an earlier podcast on Room 1

with direct cash transfers with Minister Lawson and Michael Faye, and the nervousness that people have in putting cash in the hands of local people. And I think Kennedy and Jamie, you're talking about putting power in the hands of local people. And I'm sure there's a lot of obvious arguments against that which aren't good, but you referenced the Beltway Bandits, and power, and things like that. But I'm curious if you could share what are the quote unquote good arguments that people are making around why things should still be centralized and what evidence or what stories or what case do you have against those arguments?

DRUMMOND: For me, a breakthrough moment, and I really think Kennedy should answer that question, was, Kennedy your response to our friend at USAID's memo. Remember he had a memo of, here's the reasons AID people say this is hard. And you checked with the community, the Global Alliance communities, and you gave him an 11, 12 point response. And I thought it was quite brilliant.

ODEDE: Zia, that's a really good point you raise. So they have their own backing, you know, in why they wanted this to be centralized, there is not enough skills. And something I love about USAID and the team, they said listen, we will be honest with each other. We, first of all, we're not here to judge. It was so nice to us. Well, okay, let's give you the reason. And I said, thank you so much USAID, now, we got this. Let me go to the local actors and discuss this.

I'm right here or wrong. Remember, it was more about assumptions. And, Zia, to be honest with you, it is a colonial mindset, honestly, without knowing. Colonial mindset, you know, they can't govern themselves, they aren't really good enough, they'll lose this money, I'm sure, Zia, that's from people who give them money, they will use it for drinking. And I'm like, there is no really evidence.

I had an argument about Afghanistan, and I said, American freed Afghanistan? They jumped in with helicopter and be like, we're going to save you. They forgot there was elders, there were youth groups. They didn't really work hard on localization, on making them it is their thing. It's not American. It is your thing. You see? So it was really powerful.

There are some people who if everything goes back to localization, they lose their jobs. So, Zia, to say it's about power, too. And then a lot of assumptions. So for example, when they say that local actors are corrupted—hmm, well sure, local actors are corrupted. So there's no corruption in INGOs. And then give us who are corrupted. You see, it's talk.

So it's really a power thing. And I think why things are going to change for me is that COVID, Zia, could prove to us that you cannot make things from D.C., from London. Locals, they have to own. And there's a bigger impact. I saw this communities that, okay, now we own this, we protect ourselves. So that for us is a really big opening. And, Zia, also when many INGOs were running out of the countries, wow, that's a red flag. Now they've can't be there. The local organizations were now left by themselves. So that really proved the point.

So what I'm asking is as we work on this thing we agree that with Room 11 is that we need to have more research to back localization. But right now is the moment that the world is really willing to listen to localization. So we have to really, really push hard.

MCARTHUR: So, Kennedy, you've just raised a lot of these empirical points and even stereotypes that people have and why they either are false or need better evidence to take on

the debate. There's a big, lurking issue here, which is how much of the problem is the national governments that are in between the global conversation and the local communities. So, one problem is, well, if you give resources to the national government, shouldn't it be their job to make sure that they reach the community? And is that the whole problem that we're confronting? Or is it more than that? How do you describe that multilayered aspect of power and how we need to shift the conversations of power from the international to national and to local?

ODEDE: During COVID you had a lot of issues whereby African governments were also complaining that they are not being treated equally, you know. But if you talk about localization agenda that we've been discussing, we really talk about involving local actors. Even the government, any government in the world, you will not achieve your goals without working with the community that are trying to transform their lives. So our message here is partnership. We are not against any INGO or what.

For us to achieve our goal, we have to put human-centered as the center of the discussion. We have to put localization as part of the development, but we have to decolonize development for us to succeed. Because the way the development works now, we are coming to save you, so you have nothing to offer. And I think that's what I love about 17 Rooms, you know, is a place that we can come with ideas and listen to each other and see what can we do to make the world a better place. We talk about localization, what does that look like? And you can see we had mayors in our Room, we had people from different places. Do we have enough local actors in this space? We also have to judge ourselves. Are we speaking on their behalf? Where are they? So you can see we also really was a space for us to start to start thinking open-mindedly about this.

So I talk about governments, you are right. But the thing is that we are pushing for this work by local, human-centered must be the approach for us to achieve our goal.

KHAN: So we've talked about localization as an issue, as an idea, and the movement behind it. I want to bring us to 17 Rooms now to talk about the actions and the solutions that you were proposing there. Could you tell us a little bit about what happened in the Rooms and what is the idea that you're putting forward and hoping to advance?

ODEDE: Localization, at first, everyone was kind of not sure, you know what I mean, what they were going to say. But everyone was feeling really relaxed. Because everyone is coming with their own expert in the Room. So it was very interesting. So if they're doing an introduction and then what we did, very powerful, as I remember, was do we agree localization is important? And it was by vote, yes! You know, you're not supposed to be. Do we agree, you know?

So then moving from there, we talked about our SDGs. So then our agenda there honestly was how are we going to move forward with the localization agenda? What are the next steps? And realizing, do you know what? It's also about reaching out to more organization. And then it was amazing that we ended up also doing more research, looking for data. So, Jamie, are you going to add something on that?

DRUMMOND: Absolutely. I think where we got to is, and it was a fascinating and good tension between some specific governments that were in the conversation and wanted to move, and saying, look, in the next quarter, we've got to get legislation through our

parliament and budgets approved. Versus the complex, nuanced, carefully managed conversation that's necessary that doesn't want to just be beholden to a global north aid donor's legislative process. And so, that was a good tension personally which I like, because you need to make sure that your important big conversations are dealing with the opportunities you have before you to make change happen, and you can't just let them go. I find it very hard to them let go. So I thought that was a really good tension throughout, Kennedy. And I'm pleased that in that case, that that country is moving forward and it's an important one.

So, one of the key things was the recognition there's a lot going on already in this space. There's a lot of great organizations doing great work. We've got to get behind that work and elevate it rather than reinvent the wheel—and Kennedy saw the ring leading a whole host of those kinds of organizations and networks. Then there's ring-leading with others, right? None of us are doing this alone.

And secondly, also and I think this might be an important thing for 2022 for us to discuss, which is, I'm an evidence based, fact based activist, a.k.a. "factivist." It's incredibly helpful to discipline all of our conversations and work by some agreed methodology, some agreed data insofar as we can get it. Or agreement that the data is important, but we don't have it, through some sort of transparency tracker tool of some kind. So that if you're Samantha Power or Liz Truss or the new head of the German Development Agency, you know what the right things to do are to become more pro-local partner. Or if you're Mark Sussman or Mark Malloch Brown or Raj Shah, you know what the more pro-local things are to do based upon what those local actors are saying, and you're not having to do guesswork as to what it is.

So I think it behooves us now to codify that, get trackers and tools in place that enable people to measure their improvements in their performance against some agreed indicators. Who's deciding what those indicators are? Must be those global south local leaders. But the greatest minds around the world can partner and help brainstorm and co-create, because everyone says they want to. So it'd be great to leverage 2022 and the network to get something done this year and kind of give us some common ground to work these things through together.

MCARTHUR: Do you guys have a sense of what some of those indicators could be? What's an example of a bad measure today that you in your own minds at least think should be different? And what would it look like if it were better? Just to help make this a little more tractable in a measurement sense for our listeners?

ODEDE: I think to help the listeners to understand, maybe I can just go quickly through our four points that we came up with, you know, together. Number one was to learn from rich initiatives that already exist, especially emerging from the global south. And another one, which is important, is to demonstrate gracefully stepping back and shifting the mindset to reduce encroaching of local actors' agency and respect for their ways of being. For us to achieve the goal, we need them, not just as bystanders. They have to participate. We have to listen to their voices. We have to work with them, which honestly, John, right now, that is not happening.

And remember, from our Room 11, we talked some different agencies and we saw the stereotypes or assumptions. They thought that's how things were, they were totally not backed up, totally not making sense. And to also come up with other ways that are as proven.

For example, I like the idea of the cash transfer. For me, that's a really powerful model that has been seen to have a lot of impact. Why? We have seen that happening because local are involved. I've seen with refugees' stories whereby there's an impact when refugees themselves are involved in the solution. So we don't want solutions to be made outside and just to be practiced on the ground. No! Local actors, they want to be part of co-creating the solutions. I think that's really something that came very loudly.

KHAN: You know, I always find these conversations so energizing, because, and Kennedy you gave it an interesting name around "decolonizing development." That's a big, hard problem, and it will take many years. And yet so much of what you have done and what 17 Rooms is designed to do is to produce those concrete steps next year. So I'm curious with all of your leadership and your optimism around tackling this super hard problem, and I know you're committed to it for the long term, what are some things that you would hope to see happen next year as a result of 17 Rooms and other processes to start making traction?

ODEDE: Yes, I would like to see really more research and data being put onto the localization, because that can be really good for us for backing. There's less out there, we need more of that.

And then something good that I love about 17 Rooms, I hope okay to say this—do you know that we ended up having our own discussion beyond the Room? Jamie and I would be at a meeting with a couple of people, and we are trying to bring this discussion to different foundations. We're not here to change any policies directly, but we are here to bring in coalition to continue. Why is localization not part of your agenda? Let's say you are Ford Foundation, let's say you are the Gates Foundation, or any other foundation. We just want to discuss with you, we want to come in, you know, let's talk about this. In our Room 11, we have these discussions that we are still continuing.

So I hope to have more practical solutions, Because right now, as Jamie said, there's a lot of talk, which for me is still progress because for many years there was no talk about localization. So that already we have talk. That really give us, it's like a baptism. You are now baptized to talk about it. If I can see most of the foundations, governments, big institutions, and honestly even the United Nations, UN, we raised that with Ambassador Amina, she's an amazing woman, and she agreed with us is that is going to be important, the human-centered approach, localization could be part of the U.N. That is when we're going to really shake things.

DRUMMOND: Maybe my answer, you know, building what Kennedy just said, but my answers also sort of a bit simplistic in some ways. But it's like it's a regular, effective meeting of a coalition of the willing that's multi-stakeholder that has the donors that want to do the best, the foundations that want to do the best, and the local actors that are leading on the best regularly meeting and talking in a properly structured way to share challenges in becoming more local and really getting there. Which is very much a journey rather than probably a final destination, acknowledging there are lots of tricks and stumbles that will likely happen along the way and people with the best intentions getting things wrong.

And out of that, there will probably be, you know, carrot and stick type approach. We'll need some sort of Global South-led public facing campaign to keep the pressure up. That's already happening in lots of ways, but that could be bigger and stronger.

And then some sort of tool type thing that lets people know whether broadly we're pointing in the right direction. But that tool can constantly be updated as we live and learn along the way. And I imagine something like that would be a good process-y kind of outcome of this year and the next few years, and sort of builds on the leadership Kennedy and lots of organizations and networks have already put in place on this agenda. But I think it would also be a great way the 17 Rooms network could plug in and play in different ways and show their own leadership there will be challenging demands of the people who pay your bills. There has to be. And the people who pay all of our bills. And everyone's got to change here.

MCARTHUR: One thing I just want to draw attention to. Your group produced a terrific what we call two-pager, Room 11, with these four main areas of action. But you also commissioned, I think it really grew out of the Room, this nice paper by researchers at the Overseas Development Institute, ODI, which provided a pretty nice assessment of the broader systems questions here for those who do want to dive into the analytics a bit more.

And I think for our listeners, it's important to know that there have been so many of these commitments—well, many, maybe not so many, but many of these commitments, which are often measured by dollars. Like are 25 percent or 30 percent of our dollars, whether it's a government donor agency or maybe even a philanthropy, are those dollars going to local processes, local actors? And by and large, they've fallen short even where they've made progress over the past decade or two.

But what you are drawing attention to is the deeper questions of power, process, collaboration that need to be taken on, both for that to succeed, but also for it to mean anything. And so I find that multi-dimensional approach to decolonization, if you will—and to use your term Kennedy, which is obviously a very charged but intentionally charged word right now—to cause a bit of an awakening around these legacy systems.

It does seem that this broadening of the conversation, Zia, we've seen so many reframes across different Rooms where the pandemic or just a stock problem needs an actual reframe and a new consensus in order to make practical progress, it seems, Zia, that this is another one of those, if you will. But I don't say those in the far-off sense. I say, gosh, it's amazing how many of this is coming up as this through line of our debates on the Sustainable Development Goals. In many cases, we're not even thinking about it the right way, let alone acting on it the right way. Curious, Zia, what's your take on that? And then back to our colleagues.

KHAN: I think that's exactly right, John. You and I have talked a lot about how COVID just sort of opened people's eyes to so many issues. And that's really the opportunity for a paradigm shift. You know, not just sort of incremental solutions, but a whole new way of looking at things, which we've seen with Black Lives Matter and the movements there. And this sounds like the exact kind of issue along those lines, too. Because I think what you're talking about, Jamie and Kennedy, is a true paradigm shift, a truly different way of looking at things that isn't just a superficial commitment to doing those things but recognizes the deep institutional commitments and culture and belief that exist that lead to that.

DRUMMOND: There's a whole range of people who need to change. And the hardest nut to change is that bit of the range of partners that is about taxpayer funded aid. So Global North taxpayer-funded aid is the most complex bit of the puzzle, probably should be, because you've got to deal with the political realities of Global North partners who are trying to

persuade policymakers to persuade the public, or the public to persuade the policymakers, to release more funding for people in other countries. And it's extremely complex and challenging and contested.

And it makes it easier for the advocates in the Global North to be able to say, Oh, we've checked every single step of the way, we've got our people on it to make sure nothing gets wasted. And by the way, the people checking to make sure the money doesn't get wasted look like you. Because that's the easier sell in those Global North markets for taxpayer-funded aid. But it is the enemy of localization.

And so cracking that nut has to be a key part of this. And it's so much more than a data or evidence thing. It's about solidarity. And it's about communities in the Global North and citizens in the Global North having solidarity with communities and citizens in the Global South, and vice versa. And hopefully, Zia, based on what you just said, because of COVID and the shared threat of climate change and other extreme threats, as of as well as shared opportunities, we can build that solidaristic network for the SDGs in every local community, south and north, and live that universal bit of the SDG agenda.

And it kind of is the only way, insofar as taxpayer funded aid is going to be part of the story into the future—and in some way it has to be—we have to crack that nut. We can't constantly dodge it. And so, I'm hopeful—I'm idealistic—but I'm also hopeful and optimistic, that the localization revolution is one that's equally and importantly about the Global North as well as the Global South. And it's about solidarity between communities and citizens in both of those places sharing challenges. And I think like the pandemic, like Black Lives Matter, like gender inequality, like the shared threat of climate change, they're all these things we have in common that we need to nail and articulate and share agendas for action on. That's what the SDGs have to become more so than they have been so far.

MCARTHUR: It makes sense, Kennedy, that we give you the last word on this as we bring it home, since it's your voice and those of your colleagues in the local leadership roles that we're trying all to elevate. So over to you to bring us home.

ODEDE: Thank you. Thank you so much. So I've been reflecting a lot as we are talking now—what is this localization and what is this localization agenda? And I'm going to make it really simple. As somebody who grew up in an informal settlement in a community, it is about dignity. It's dignity. And it's all about how the West have treated the Global South. That's why it also goes back to colonization. You can see a lot of colonial mindset. That's why, Zia, we're using the word decolonizing, you know what I mean, development. And for us to do that, we have to really look inside of ourself, which means a lot of things that, you know, for us to have a solution we have to treat local actors as partners.

And so I think when we start doing that is when we are going to have a long lasting change. And honestly, it is deep, as Zia talked about, it is really deep. It is also about inequality. So we talk about COVID, but forget about COVID. COVID, that proves that the gap between the poor and the rich, the rich are getting richer and richer and richer. And we have to start solving these things. You see South Africa, what's happening, people going on the street. I was talking to my one of my friends that I'm scared that post-COVID, we're going to see a lot of uprising happening around the world because people are feeling diminished. They are feeling no dignity. So for us to have a better future, let's start investing in local people, local

organization, working with local partners. And remember it's about dignity. Thank you so much.

KHAN: Well, that was just a fantastic wrap up, Kennedy, I can't thank you enough for your leadership on these issues and Jamie for you being such a strong voice as well. Thanks for joining us today.

You know, another fascinating conversation, John, and this phrase "decolonize development" has really struck me. We have talked about how much of COVID highlighted these deep issues and how much COVID is an opportunity to really shift paradigms. And we've seen that in so many of these different issues. And when we talk about something like decolonizing development, that's not just a change in the practices, but it's all the underlying assumptions and all the underlying mindsets across a broad, broad system. So it's no small task.

And some people might even ask, well, do we really need research? It sounds like we've made the case. But it's surprisingly hard to do a lot of this in practice. I'll give you an example. At The Rockefeller Foundation, our board and our president, Raj Shah, continuously push us to think about how can we give more of our grant funding to local actors. It's a shared desire we all have. But measuring that gets really complicated. You know, when you give a grant to an international organization, how do you count that? How much is going to local actors? It's surprisingly complicated, and that feels like a pretty simple thing. You can imagine all the other things that we assume we know we don't. And hence, I think what Kennedy and Jamie are talking about as research being important truly is a critical need.

MCARTHUR: It does, for so much reflection for all of us who are involved in any part of this undertaking of global sustainable development. As I said in the conversation, decolonization is a provocative word, but I think it's an intentionally provocative word, and I think it's necessarily provocative word. If we look at all the different pieces of how everything works globally, there are some pieces of the system that might work a bit better. One of my favorite institutions, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, which was created only in the 2000s, they actually had a design from the beginning of so-called country coordinating mechanisms to bring together all the different types of actors within a country: scientific, health, civil society, and so forth. And then those national undertakings would put forward their proposals, and then civil society from the developing countries from the Global North, they all are part of the governance process. And I won't say it's perfect, but it's a relatively good model.

And then there are other parts of the world, systems, that have nothing of the sort. And we hear in this conversation, I think, from people who are so dedicated and have such track records how far we still have to go. So I do consider this a reframe, a paradigm shift, the challenge of a generation to sort through, not just on a research basis, of course, which is crucial, but an action basis. And I do want to encourage our listeners to learn more because it's just something where we all just simply need to learn and act more.

To learn more, you can find this episode at [Brookings.edu/17RoomsPodcast](https://www.brookings.edu/17RoomsPodcast). And coming up next time, Room 5 with Jean Duff and Blessing Omakwu to learn about their efforts to accelerate the positive influence of faith actors for gender equality.

I'm also please to announce a new podcast from our colleagues in the Africa Growth Initiative here at Brookings, Foresight Africa, a new podcast to celebrate Africa's dynamism and explore strategies for broadening the benefits of growth to all the people of Africa. You can learn more at brookings.edu/ForesightAfricaPodcast.

We'll see you next time.

I'm John McArthur.

KHAN: And I'm Zia Khan, and this has been 17 Rooms.

MCARTHUR: Our thanks go out to the guests you heard today, and also to the production team, including Fred Dews and Alexandra Bracken, producers; Jacob Taylor, associate producer; Gaston Reboredo, audio engineer, and Nicolette Kelly, audio intern. The show art was designed by Katie Merris. Additional support comes from Shrijana Khanal, Ian McAllister, Soren Messner-Zidell, Andrea Risotto, Marie Wilkin, Chris McKenna, Esther Rosen, David Batcheck, and Caio Pereira at the Brookings Institution, and Nathalia dos Santos, Sara Geisenheimer, Hunter Goldman, and Miranda Waters at The Rockefeller Foundation.

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