

Congressional effort to facilitate locally-led development. *Devex*, 1 April 2026

Local legend

If the foreign aid apparatus is undergoing a fundamental transition, you might as well take the opportunity to rethink the entire system — and improve it. [That's according to California Democrat Rep. Sara Jacobs](#), who cosponsored **the Locally Led Development and Humanitarian Response Act** alongside her colleague, California Republican Rep. **Young Kim**.

The bill — which aims to **boost U.S. funding to local organizations and lower the barriers** that have stood in the way of that goal — recently passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee, a sign perhaps that bipartisanship in Congress isn't a complete relic of the past.

“We know that excessive red tape and regulations make the process to apply for federal funding so burdensome that really only large implementing organizations have the resources to apply,” Jacobs tells my colleague Adva Saldinger.

That, in turn, perpetuates a vicious cycle of excluding smaller, on-the-ground groups. But steering dollars toward these groups is a tall order, especially considering that **the localization agenda has been a distant development North Star** for years now.

The challenge, Jacobs says, is compounded by the lack of staffing and expertise at the [U.S. State Department](#), which is now in charge of delivering U.S. foreign assistance after it took over what was left of [USAID](#).

“The absorption of foreign assistance entirely into the State Department, while I can see the theoretical reasons why it could make sense, **the actual implementation has been very bad**,” Jacobs says, adding that lawmakers continue to press leadership to beef up the resource-strapped department.

But she says **the lack of bandwidth shouldn't be an excuse to do nothing**, because the State Department still needs to get money out the door. To that end, Jacobs is working with the Senate to get a companion bill reintroduced and hopefully passed later this year.

“What we're hoping is to get the statutory language in this year so that next year, when [Democrats] are hopefully in the majority, we have the regulations in place, and then we can do the oversight to make sure the Trump administration is actually implementing it.”