

Internationally Networked NGOs

Seizing opportunities and managing risks



samen werkt.



The Spindle
connecting innovators for development

Internationally Networked NGOs

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Partos (partos.nl) is the membership body for Dutch-based organisations working in international development.

The Spindle (thespindle.org) connects innovators among Dutch and global actors into an online and offline movement for inclusive development.

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As an umbrella organisation for Dutch-based development organisations, one of the core functions of Partos is to support our members to anticipate, and adapt to, complex and fast-moving changes in the international cooperation sector. Characterised by the "hyper connectedness" of economies, cultures and populations, this global reality places pressure on development actors to continually adjust to evolving power relations and funding modalities.

It is for this reason that Partos established its innovation platform, The Spindle, in 2016. The aim of the platform is to connect Dutch and global actors into an online and offline movement to harness and nurture innovations towards inclusive and sustainable development.

As part of The Spindle network, Partos conducted a study of the future of (Dutch) development cooperation in 2017-2018. The study resulted in two reports: *Adapt, Counteract or Transform*; and *Joining Forces, Sharing Power; Civil Society Collaborations for the Future*. Both reports propose a number of pathways for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to explore new ways of cooperation in response to changing institutional and organisational arrangements in the international development arena.

The present publication builds on this earlier body of work by harnessing the real-life experiences, critical reflections and unique visions of leaders of several Partos members. These conversations provide interesting insights on how NGO networks approach internationalisation as a specific strategy for dealing with the challenges of international development cooperation. For example, what does it mean to move from a donor-recipient relationship towards a truly equal partnership between Northern and Southern NGOs? Another issue highlighted in the interviews is how international NGO networks can successfully manage the transition towards "mutual capacity development" as part of a broader shared agenda. This is particularly relevant at a time when NGOs working in both South and North are struggling with how to translate the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and other global targets into meaningful and mutually supportive actions at the local and international levels.

By confronting some of the "elephants in the room" in international development discourse, this report offers interesting, as well as practical, perspectives for NGOs interested in addressing these issues head on. Hence, it makes a valuable contribution to the search for new approaches to working in international networks that are both egalitarian and innovative.

I would like to commend the NGO leaders involved, as well as all the authors other contributors, for this insightful and instructive guide. I trust that it will not only provide readers with a road map for navigating an increasingly complex international development arena, but also inspire all of us who are interested in building a just, equal and sustainable world. This publication demonstrates that one of the first steps towards achieving this vision is personal as well as institutional engagement: as strong, persistent, and well-connected actors.

Bart Romijn
Director Partos

Introduction

By Anne-Marie Heemskerck and Heinz Greijn

A growing number of Dutch NGOs participate in, or are in the process of forming links to, international NGO networks and partnerships. We refer to this as "internationalisation."

The member organisations of Partos, the branch organisation for Dutch development NGOs, are at different stages of internationalisation. Some members are currently exploring modalities for joining international networks, while others are already actively involved in such networks, or have recently become members. On average, many Partos members have been part of international networks for at least 10 years. For these NGOs, therefore, this is an opportune moment to reflect on how to further optimise the functioning of these networks.

There are diverse reasons, as well as a variety of pathways and institutional arrangements, for participating in international NGO networks. Networks range from loosely knit informal groupings, temporary or longer-term alliances based on partnership agreements, to federations with some form of centralised governance.

In order to promoting greater understanding about internationalisation processes, Partos organised a number of workshops for its members in 2016 and 2017. The workshops were designed to raise awareness among NGO leaders on effective internationalisation strategies and how to mitigate risks associated with international networks.

Some of the questions explored during the workshops included:

- **What do we hope to achieve through working in an international network?**
- **Can there be more than one objective when designing internationalisation programmes?**
- **What do we expect from partners and what can they expect from us?**
- **Are these expectations compatible?**
- **How do we find the right partners and will be responsible for what?**
- **How will the decision-making process work?**
- **How much autonomy do we want to maintain as a network?**
- **To what extent should we formalise collaboration in the network?**
- **What are the risks of participating in an international network and how will we deal with those risks?**

One of the conclusions from this experiment was that there is very little research and literature available to help NGO leaders with formulating answers to these questions. This is the purpose of this publication. In order to draw on the extensive hands-on experience among Partos members, we conducted in-depth interviews with six leaders of five Partos-aligned international NGO networks (Chapter 4). These interviews also constitute the foundation for the analysis contained in the first three chapters in this guide.

The leaders featured in this guide are by no means the only ones within the Partos membership with knowledge in this field. Resources permitting, we would have loved to extend this research to a much larger group, including NGO leaders from the South. The selection was also based on several other criteria. For example, we focused on established networks rather than alliances put together in response to specific funding opportunities, such as joint projects conceived under the framework of the Dutch-funded MFSII and *Dialogue and Dissent* programmes¹.

The following is a brief overview of the chapters in this Volume.

In order to provide a frame for understanding these diverse internationalisation experiences the first three chapters offer some broad perspectives for understanding NGO internationalisation processes. In Chapter 1, Gerrit de Vries elaborates why NGOs choose to establish or join international networks. He explains that the decision to engage in international networks may come from different drivers that may be contextual, strategic, or institutional.

On the other side of the coin there are also risks related to internationalisation. In Chapter 2, Heinz Greijn highlights some of the experiences mentioned by interviewees that offer insights on risks associated with internationalisation and what NGO networks can do to mitigate these risks.

In Chapter 3, Rita Dieleman explores how to establish international NGO networks in such a way as to achieve the vision of members, while avoiding some common pitfalls. She also outlines specific strategies proposed by the interviewees on how to engage in international networks.

Chapter 4 contains interviews with the six NGO leaders who contributed to this publication.

Until recently, Farah Karimi served as General Director of Oxfam Novib, which is not only one of the oldest development NGOs, but also has one of the longest track records in internationalisation among Partos members. Oxfam was founded in 1942 in the UK and the brand soon spread to many other countries although these different branches worked independently of Oxfam programmes in other countries. It was not until 1995 that the different "Oxfams" formally joined to create an international network.

Jacqueline Lampe has served as CEO of RNW Media since 2016 and currently leads the process of transforming the organisation into an international network. She draws on her experience working with AMREF Amref Flying Doctors, the oldest and largest African health NGO, which is headquartered in Kenya.

Jeroo Billimoria has founded many networks and organisations in India and the Netherlands, including Aflatoun (1991), Childline India Foundation (1996), Child Helpline International (2003) and Child and Youth Finance International (2011). She provides insights on how to facilitate collaborative systems change in different contexts and how to identify opportunities as well as risk factors in working with governments and other stakeholders.

Nico Roozen and Mandla Nkomo are leaders of Solidaridad. As Executive Director since 1987, Roozen led the transition of Solidaridad from a Dutch-based international NGO into an international network with eight regional expertise centres. Mandla, Director of Solidaridad Southern Africa, reflects on this transition from a Southern perspective.

In 2003, ActionAid, a UK-based international network, moved its headquarters from London to Johannesburg, South Africa. Ruud van den Hurk explains why the Dutch NGO Niza decided to internationalise and join ActionAid in 2007.

We hope that leaders of development organisations, who seek to improve their internationalisation strategies, can learn from these experiences and build on the insights shared in this guide.

¹ MFS II (Medefinancieringsstelsel) was the grant framework through which the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocated €1.9 billion to 20 alliances of Dutch development NGOs and their Southern partners between 2011 and 2015. MFSII was followed by a new policy framework "Dialogue and Dissent" for strengthening civil society in low- and middle-income countries. "Dialogue and Dissent"- financing is channelled through strategic partnerships with 25 consortia of CSOs in the Netherlands and abroad for the 2016-2020 period. Each of these consortia focuses on lobbying and advocacy in a specific thematic area such as water, food security, sexual and reproductive health and rights or gender equality.

Chapter 1. WHY do NGOs engage in international networks?

By Gerrit de Vries

'Start with WHY!' The core message of Simon Sinek's famous Ted Talk² is also applicable to the formation of international networks of NGOs. Before thinking about structures, constitutions and processes it is important that all members of the network are explicit about the underlying rationale for establishing or joining an international network. Once the WHY question has been clearly addressed many of the choices that need to be made concerning the network design fall into place.

NGO networks are not all built for the same purposes. This chapter provides an overview of the most common drivers that motivate NGOs to engage in international networks. It will help leaders to make the network rationale explicit and to create a shared understanding among partners about "the WHY" of their network. The chapter concludes by illustrating how resolving the WHY question right from the onset not only contributes to a successful internationalisation process but ensures that monitoring and evaluation of the network's performance is both useful and meaningful.

There are many underlying factors that may propel an NGO's decision to engage in international networks. These drivers may be transformational in nature, for example when an organisation considers the internationalisation process to be an integral part of changing its vision, mission or core strategies. In other cases, organisations may be interested in enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness, without necessarily changing their core focus. Drivers for engaging in international networks can be categorised into three main groups: contextual, strategic, or institutional.³

1.1 Contextual Drivers

Global Shifts

NGOs face continuous pressure to adapt to changes in the political, economic, social and technological systems that are becoming increasingly global in scope. At the same time, global relations are shifting, with more influence moving towards the South.

Another global shift is the growing gap between rich and poor.⁴ This gap not only exists between rich and poor countries but is becoming increasingly visible within countries, making it a worldwide phenomenon. In addition, a variety of non-traditional funders are entering the inter-

national development cooperation arena. They include social entrepreneurs, technological start-ups, global social movements, impact investors and private companies from emerging market economies. These new actors bring their own distinctive values, expertise, partners and motivations.

Reflecting on some of these shifts, the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness introduced five important principles for effective development cooperation: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, focus on results and mutual accountability.

Over the last two decennia these principles have also played an important role in the formation of international NGO networks. Networks with Southern members can strengthen Southern ownership in international processes. They can also play an instrumental role in harmonising the diverse interests of their members and, through a better understanding of the different development contexts in which members work, help to align the work of Northern and Southern actors.

Transboundary issues

Many of the issues that NGOs address are transboundary in nature. The cause and effect chains related to climate change, international trade and migration are not confined within national boundaries. Decisions on these issues are increasingly taken at the intergovernmental level and in the boardrooms of international companies. For NGOs to be effective in influencing international decision making they therefore need to collaborate internationally. An example of this is the fair trade sector, where NGOs and CSO networks mobilise stakeholders across entire value chains and work to connect producers in developing countries with consumers in the Global North. Another example is transboundary collaboration by NGOs to advocate against tax avoidance.

Changing funding environment

More than ever before, bilateral, multilateral and also private donors are channelling their funding directly to local actors rather than through head offices of international NGOs. The role of embassies and donor offices in programme countries is becoming more important. Solidaridad is an example of an NGO network that has succeeded in substantially increasing its funding base in the South as a result of their internationalisation process.

Furthermore, new sources of development financing are changing the international cooperation arena. They include governments from emerging economies and private funders. Some international networks aim to tap these non-traditional sources. ActionAid, for example, expects that its Southern members will expand the proportion of funds raised in the countries they work in, especially in growing economies such as Brazil, India, Kenya, and South Africa.

External criticism

The stance taken by international NGOs (INGOs) towards local organisations has long been a subject of criticism within the development sector. INGOs are often accused of not relating on an equal footing to Southern NGOs and citizen movements. Northern NGOs in particular are criticised for using their financial muscle to dominate in development cooperation and for not paying sufficient attention to the voices of the poor. These allegations are persistent. One of our interviewees, Jeroo Billimoria, who has been active in setting up NGO networks both in India and internationally, shares her personal experience of often not being taken seriously by the NGO community in the Netherlands.

One way to address such criticism is to make efforts to build inclusive international networks. This is the case with ActionAid, which is governed from the bottom up with representations of the local communities in their boards at all levels. Several interviewees note that the need to facilitate the voices of their Southern partners and local communities was an important motivation for their internationalisation process. Overall, there is growing recognition that the voice of Southern partners is essential because they are the most knowledgeable about interventions needed to address poverty, inequality and injustice in the South.

1.2 Strategic Drivers

Strategic drivers refer to some of the most fundamental choices that organisations have to make in order to fulfil their mission. Strategic drivers may include choices about the roles and the division of roles within the network, ways to amplify the collective voice of members, how to enhance legitimacy, and ideas for improving the generation, application and sharing of knowledge.

Changing the division of roles among NGOs

There is growing consensus that the traditional model of an international NGO network, with a strong hub in the North, is ill equipped to respond to the complex nature of global development challenges today. With growing awareness of the importance of working with strong local partners and civil society actors, the role of Northern-based INGOs is shifting away from control over implementation of programmes to more cooperative approaches. These include (mutual) capacity building, brokering partnerships between actors in the North and South, and contributing to global advocacy movements to influence development policies.

A 2016 survey of MFSII⁵ partners from ten countries found that the main added value for collaborating with Dutch NGO networks was accessing (organisational) capacity development, resource mobilisation, knowledge, exposure and leverage in lobbying and advocacy. Most respondents said they did not approve of Dutch and international NGOs acting as "middleman" between donors and NGOs in the South. The survey found a widespread perception in the South that Dutch NGOs actively pursue this middleman role and sometimes even compete for decentralised funding in the name of "localisation."⁶

It is therefore important for the WHY phase to clarify the choices made concerning divisions of roles among network partners. In the interview with Farah Karimi, she clearly explains how Oxfam Novib defines its role in the international Oxfam network. In her view Oxfam's role should not be reduced to being a fundraising agency within an international network. She also believes that next to key roles such as lobbying, advocacy and mobilising its constituency, Oxfam Novib must remain closely involved in the implementation of programmes on the ground.

It must be noted, however, that interviewees had quite divergent views on the role of Northern partners within international networks. Solidaridad, for example, has chosen to hand over full responsibility for project cycle management to local teams.

Networking as a strategy to amplify the collective voice

NGOs that aim to influence policies on issues of a global and transboundary nature become more effective if they join their efforts and speak with one voice. As explained in the interviews with several leaders, the need to amplify

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sioZd3AxmnE>, 29 Sept. 2013

³ Adapted from John Hailey (2009), 'International NGOs of the Future: Convergence and Fragmentation,' INTRAC Seminar on Future Directions of international NGO Structures, Oxford

⁴ Partos 2018, 'Adapt, Counteract or Transform: The Future of Dutch Development Cooperation' p.14

⁵ MFSII is the co-financing framework for Dutch development organisations in the period 2011 - 2015

⁶ Rita Dieleman and Helga van Kampen (2016), 'Shifting Interests, Changing Practice,' Partnership Learning Loop, p.27.

their collective voice was an important driver for Oxfam Novib, ActionAid and RNW Media. An obvious prerequisite for speaking with one voice is that all partners share the same point of view on key issues.

Local actors have more legitimacy

It is not easy for international NGOs to influence policy in partner countries. Foreign advocacy organisations are often viewed with suspicion. Local actors have more legitimacy. Therefore, international NGO networks tend to have more leverage if local representatives of the network voice common positions. As Mandla Nkomo (Solidaridad) explains, "...influencing policies at the local and regional level is easier if it is done by people from there. If the (Dutch) director would lobby at our national government, he would be looked at with suspicion. What is this guy's agenda?"

Local knowledge is indispensable for effective development interventions

Local actors are more knowledgeable on local issues and on the measures needed to address these issues. Furthermore, because they speak the local language and do not need to bridge a cultural gap, they are better equipped to discuss sensitive issues with local communities, stakeholders and decision makers. All interviewees mentioned local knowledge as one of the essential and most successful drivers of international network formation.

1.3 Institutional and Managerial Drivers

Institutional and managerial drivers concern choices that organisations make in order to become more effective and efficient in achieving their objectives. These drivers include economies of scale, specialisation and branding.

Economies of scale

If network members harmonise their programmes, use shared financial and human resource management systems, or invest in interoperable technologies, standards and protocols, they can benefit from economies of scale. Members focusing on specialised tasks from which the entire network benefits may have a similar effect. Such tasks can include knowledge development in a specific area, coordinating an advocacy campaign targeted at a specific international actor, or managing an administrative task on behalf of the entire network. The collective costs for developing, acquiring and implementing these shared resources may be lower compared to a situation in which organisations have to fend for themselves. This can be an important driver for engaging in a network.

However, such division of labour does not always lead to a reduction in costs, as networks may need to spend significant resources to organise meetings of governing bodies

at national and international levels. ActionAid, for example, spends a lot of money on network coordination costs because it does not want to compromise on its principle of ensuring that representatives of local communities are able to participate in governance at all levels.

Branding

Having a shared brand can be a strong driver for engaging in international networks because it has the potential to generate substantial benefits. A strong brand name increases visibility, which in turn can be beneficial for fundraising and effective lobbying and advocacy. For individual organisations a trusted brand can be an important incentive for joining a network. Branding policies do not only involve the visible sides of branding, such as logos, websites, brand use in social media, but also a brand protection policy. It should clearly stipulate how the brand should be used, what are the pre-conditions and the quality criteria for members that go together with the right of using the brand.

It must be noted, however, that some organisations may not necessarily view the adoption of an international brand as a positive move. In some cases, the existing brand of the NGO might be even stronger within the country or region. Or, in spite of certain advantages, the organisation may be hesitant to join the network as it would mean giving up its own name and losing part of its history and identity.

1.4 Reflection

While we have identified a number of drivers and motivations for engaging in international NGO networks, the true reason why organisations enter into such alliances is not always clear cut. In many cases, a combination of drivers plays a role. Notwithstanding, it is important for organisations to identify the core reason, or reasons, for making this change. Having too many reasons, and not prioritising them leads to lack of focus in network formation. It is also important to be aware that some drivers might even have contradictory effects. For example, harmonising programmes to enhance efficiency may not always align with the need to be flexible and responsive to rapidly changing environments. A clear vision about the predominant WHY is therefore an essential step that needs to take place before starting with network design.

In addition, it is important that the WHY is shared with, and agreed by all involved. This demands time and good participatory processes. Kaats and Opheij⁷ identify collective (for the network as a whole), organisational (for network members) and even individual (personal beliefs and motives) interests that influence the choice of the WHY.

These different levels of interest should be tackled in such a way that leads to mutual gains. This ensures that the joint WHY will have an added value for all network members, rather than reflecting the self-interest of the most influential members. Recently, De Caluwé and Kaats⁸ have taken this thinking to another level. In light of the complexity of societal challenges today, they note, networks and their members should start by identifying shared challenges as the starting point for working together to find common solutions. They add that this may even imply going beyond mutual gains of network members. According to this perspective, ultimately it is the societal challenge itself that should drive a network to seek a common solution.

Finally, it is important to continue to ask the WHY question throughout the lifecycle of the network. Even when the WHY has been formulated well and embraced by all members, regularly monitoring during implementation contributes to learning from the process. Regular reflection is also crucial in ensuring that the implementation process remains relevant to the network's vision. Checking expectations about the intentions, added value and roles with all partners throughout the process is key to the success of international network relations.⁹

Some guiding questions for identifying WHY to engage in international NGO networks

- What are the most important reasons WHY your organisation should engage in an international network?
- Who are your stakeholders? How do you make sure that all stakeholders have a common interest or interests?
- Have collective, organisational and individual interests been shared openly, taken into consideration and aligned?
- What measures will you use to deal with divergent interests?
- What are your non-negotiables with respect to the WHY?
- To what extent are you prepared to relinquish power to the network? To what extent do you want to have influence or decision making power? Do network members have a common understanding and agreement about this?
- How can you make sure that your stakeholders and your own organisation are, and stay committed to, the WHY?
- How will you regularly monitor and verify the WHY during the implementation process? Is the WHY still the same, or is it changing over time? Is your WHY still contributing to the vision and mission of the organization and the network?

⁷ Edwin Kaats and Wilfred Opheij (2014) 'Leren samenwerken tussen organisaties,' Vakmedianet Deventer, p.98-103

⁸ Manon de Caluwé and Edwin Kaats (2018) 'Met de opgave verbonden', Managementimpact.nl, White Paper 15 May 2018

⁹ Partnership Brokers Association (2017), 'The necessity of Transformation: Emerging Partnership Lessons from Diverse Contexts,' page 18 -19; and The Partnering Initiative (2019), 'Maximising the Impact of Partnerships for the SDGs: A Practical Guide to Partnership Value Creation'

Chapter 2. Managing risk in international networks

By Heinz Greijn

Risk is the likelihood of negative effects resulting from factors that are not within your control. Many international networks require member organisations to relinquish some of their autonomy. This affects an organisation's ability to control decisions or actions that may impact negatively on the organisation and its mission, which itself leads to increased risk.

This chapter discusses a number of actual or potential risks related to joining or creating an international network that were identified by NGO leaders interviewed for this publication. Five types of risks are highlighted:

- Risk of reputational damage
- Risks related to power imbalances
- Risks related to lack of added value of network results
- Risks related to "agency"
- Risk of disclosure in a shrinking space for civil society

2.1 Reputational damage

A variety of circumstances can lead to reputational damage. A newspaper that publishes an article about a project that is found out to be not very effective, can cause reputational damage to organisations implementing or funding that project. Inefficiencies in development cooperation can give rise to public debates affecting the reputation of specific organisations or the entire sector. Recently, integrity has been an issue. Leaders of two organisations featured in this publication described how they experienced reputational damage as a result of incidents or alleged incidents that occurred within their international networks. In 2016, two Dutch newspapers accused Solidaridad of tax evasion through a member in Panama that was operating as a mailbox company. While the allegations were later proven to be false, it took Solidaridad a lot of time and effort to set the record straight.

A second example is the discovery of widespread sexual misconduct and exploitation of young girls in Haiti by employees of Oxfam UK, following the earthquake in 2010. Oxfam UK had not reported this to the Haitian authorities nor to the Charity Commission and the information only came to light when a British newspaper reported on the scandal in 2018. One of the repercussions was a severe public backlash, not only targeting Oxfam UK, but other affiliates of the Oxfam network including Oxfam Novib. While no systematic research has been conducted in this field, the reputational damage caused by such incidents can be severe and long lasting. One likely effect is that members and donors may lose faith in the of the organisation, resulting in a reduction of support. It is estimated that Solidaridad lost hundreds of thousands of euros due to delays in project funding and staff time spent on managing the mailbox crisis. Oxfam Novib lost hundreds of individual

donors following the Haiti scandal. Reputational damage is not limited to the loss of external support. Dedicated employees and volunteers can also become demotivated because of the negative publicity. A positive organisational culture, which is essential for an NGO to flourish, can also suffer a serious blow. This may be exacerbated by a repressive response from management. Such responses include introducing zero tolerance measures that may affect the morale of the majority of employees who act in good faith.

It is important to note that even organisations that are not part of a network are not immune to reputational damage resulting from incidents in the sector. A case in point is the widespread impact of the "Me Too" declarations of sexual harassment and sexual assault that have touched on diverse sectors, from the movie industry to sports associations, churches and schools.

In reality, reputational damage often affects an entire sector. Hence, the incremental risk resulting from participating in an international network should not be exaggerated. Simply avoiding participation in a network may therefore not safeguard an organisation from suffering reputational damage. Nevertheless, the effects are likely to be more severe for network members because of the association with the direct culprits or alleged culprits of other network members. For outsiders it is unclear to what extent network partners are co-responsible. This is especially the case if partners share the same name.

2.2 The centrifugal force of power imbalances

Formally, most international networks have boards or steering committees in which all members are equally represented. However, this does not mean that all members are equally influential. Size matters. Farah Karimi explains that, although all Oxfam affiliates are represented in the Supervisory Board and in the Executive Board with equal votes, Oxfam UK and Oxfam Novib have a leading role in setting the agenda. Also, Ruud van den Hurk acknowledges that power imbalances are real, and that power correlates with financial muscle.

A similar situation may emerge in the Solidaridad network. The interviews with Nico Roozen and Mandla Nkomo take into account that some regional offices could grow faster, and develop a stronger voice than others. Power imbalances in the network can cause frictions that, if allowed to become protracted, may lead to the break-away of some organisations (or regional offices in the case of Solidaridad). Power imbalances pose a particular risk for internalisation processes that aim to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of member organisations. The withdrawal of an important member can create a serious setback.

Moreover, if this leads to the disintegration of the entire network it would mean that the efforts made have been in vain. NGO leaders are aware that power imbalances can have a negative effect on collaboration and that such dynamics cannot be harnessed in a constitution. According to Roozen, even if all regions formally have an equal vote, "social and psychological dynamics in the boardroom don't work like that."

2.3 Lack of added value of network results

NGOs that choose to give up some of their autonomy to join an international network do so because they expect to get something in return. This could include greater leverage to accomplish their mission, or improved access to funding or knowledge. So, what happens if the network does not deliver on this promise? The organisation concerned may want to opt out.

Opting out of a network is not necessarily a big risk, but it becomes a serious problem if the departing organisation is left in a weaker position than prior to joining the network. The likelihood of such an outcome will depend on the extent to which an organisation's identity is expected to change in order to join the network. The deeper the transformation, the more difficult it may be to reverse. This is the case when an organisation has given up its own name to become a part of the international brand. An organisation may also become dependent on sources of funding that can only be tapped as a member of the network. Others may have shifted their focus to a specific intervention area for which there is no demand outside of the network.

In order to reduce the risks associated with an eventual exit, organisations can take measures to prevent or postpone an irreversible transformation. It is therefore important to be aware of potential transformations that may make it difficult for the organisation to opt out of the network in future. To mitigate such risks, ActionAid distinguishes between two types of members: aspirant members and affiliate members. Aspirant membership can be likened to a courtship phase when partners get to know each other better. During this period aspirant members are advised to refrain from making any irreversible changes. They may also not use the name ActionAid. It is only when the network of affiliate members and the aspirant members are both convinced that they have a good match that the aspirant member can become an affiliate member. Even at this point, the organisation is not obliged to adopt the ActionAid name.

2.4 Risks related to "agency"

An added risk for Southern NGOs that choose to join international networks is the danger of losing their credibility as genuine local actors with a local constituency and a local agenda. NGOs involved in advocacy networks are particularly vulnerable to accusations of being "agents" of Northern interests. The problem of agency is also increasing as governments in the South become more sensitive to governments and NGOs from the North extending their influence through local NGOs. Governments that want to reduce the influence of some NGOs may use legislation and regulation to deny registration, or, limit the operations of NGOs that receive funds from foreign sources. In recent years, such measures have become increasingly restrictive in many countries.

2.5 The risk of disclosure in a shrinking space for civil society

One of the effects of government restrictions is that the space for civil society has severely shrunk in recent years. NGO activities that were previously allowed are criminalised. NGOs that continue to engage in activities that can be interpreted as violating the law run the risk of being prosecuted or being outlawed and denied state protection from attacks by third parties. With NGOs finding it increasingly difficult to operate freely, many change their strategy from openly contesting the status quo, to what is referred to as "transformation by stealth."¹⁰ However, this may make it more difficult for such NGOs to join an international network as they may run the risk of exposing their "hidden agenda." This was the case with partners of RWN Media in the Middle East who requested the network not to publish their activities on the international website. The reason is that issues of sexuality and other controversial subjects tackled by the network are considered too sensitive to discuss openly. RWN Media's strategy is to create safe spaces online and on social media for young people to engage on these issues. These could be become a target for the government if they are publicised in international networks.

¹⁰ Banks N., Hulme, D. and Edwards E. "NGOs, States, and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?", World Development Vol. 66, pp. 707-718, 2015

Considering risks

In view of the above, what can be said about considering the risks when joining or creating an international network? In the following section, we list a few suggestions from the interviews, and other sources.

Considerations concerning the risk of reputational damage

- Select partners on the basis of a common value system. This to ensure that there is solid common ground to discuss issues in a constructive way if, and when they arise.
- Carry out a risk assessment (including risks concerning integrity, effectiveness and efficiency)
- Develop measures to mitigate risks that may occur in the future. Consider whether the benefits of promoting the network as a brand - such as improved fundraising opportunities or a stronger voice - outweigh the risks of reputational damage.
- Agree on how to collectively manage reputational damage if things go wrong.

Considerations concerning risks related to power imbalances

- Be aware that harmful effects of power imbalances dynamics or heated disagreements cannot be harnessed in a constitution alone. It is essential to have capable leaders who can handle disputes and an organisational culture in which power and diverging views can be discussed openly.

Considerations concerning risks related to disappointing network results

- Adopt a phased approach to joining a network to allow time for aspirant and established members of the network to explore the advantages and disadvantages of network collaboration.
- Be aware of any organisational transformations that may make it difficult to exit the network in future.

Considerations concerning risks related to agency and the risk of disclosure in a shrinking civil society space

- For CSOs based in countries where the civic space is shrinking, agency-related risks can be a strong deterrent to joining an international network. It is important for all partners to be aware of these risks. One mitigation strategy is to invest in a strong and active local constituency that is difficult to ignore by those in power.

Chapter 3. HOW to engage in international NGO networks

By Rita Dieleman

In the previous two chapters, we examined some motivations and drivers, as well as risks associated with international NGO networks. This chapter tackles the next question that arises: how can you establish international networks that contribute towards achieving the collective mission of their members while avoiding some of the likely pitfalls? The analysis and recommendations build on the experiences of the six Dutch-based NGO leaders interviewed for this volume.

3.1 How to create network roles that are fit for purpose

As they work to define or adapt their roles within international networks, NGOs face an array of choices. The interviews indicate that organisations may opt to shift towards a more specialist role, for example in knowledge development, technology development and innovation (RNW Media) or lobbying and advocacy (Oxfam). Others may choose to focus on coordination, such as hosting an international secretariat. Reflecting on this mediator role, Jacqueline Lampe and Jeroo Billimoria emphasise the importance of having a trusted and honest broker and facilitator to enhance the value of international networks.

Navigating these different choices may also force organisations to make difficult trade-offs. Solidaridad is a case in point. The organisation's headquarters in the Netherlands used to be actively involved in project management. According to Mandla Nkomo and Nico Roozen, when Solidaridad became an international network, Dutch staff were expected to gradually hand over this responsibility to the local teams. Not all employees were prepared to make this adjustment, leading some to leave the organisation. Farah Karimi explains that when it was faced with a similar dilemma, Oxfam Novib arrived at a different solution. While the Dutch office also had to pull back from direct programming and specialise in lobbying and advocacy, it did not withdraw completely from implementation on the ground. 'If we had focused only on lobbying and advocacy, we would have become a talking head,' Karimi argues.

3.2 How to move from power imbalances towards a culture that fosters mutuality

Buzz words such as *ownership*, *mutual accountability* and *South-led* have become the norm within the international development sector. In practice, however, most international networks do not provide a level playing field for their members. According to a number of studies^{11 12 13 14 15} less

influential partners - usually those with the least financial resources - often feel left out and not taken seriously. Their roles tend to be confined to implementing programmes that have been designed without their input. In other words, they may be formally consulted, but not really engaged in strategic decision making and development.

At the same time, partners with financial muscle are often reluctant to hand over power and responsibilities to other members. This is sometimes caused by genuine concern about partners' lack of capacity to administer funds, or by fear of losing control and not being able to be account for the expenditures to back donors. But it can also be driven by resistance to giving up power.

All interviewees touch on this core challenge in internationalisation processes. While lead organisations may genuinely try to practice equitable relationships, they still have to acknowledge the implicit advantage of "power correlating with financial muscle," as described by Ruud van Hurk (ActionAid). Billimoria mentions the dilemma faced by large NGOs with a long history of administering donor funds who may suddenly having to compete for a shrinking pool of money with some of their smaller network partners.

The measures mentioned by interviewees to address power imbalances can be divided in three broad categories:

- 1. Shaping network structure and processes in such a way that they reflect and foster mutuality;**
- 2. Shaping a culture among colleagues within the network to collaborate in a genuine equal and mutual fashion; and**
- 3. Exploring how to assign value to different types of assets that partners contribute to the network, not just funding.**

Interviewees came with a number of concrete solutions to create a culture and structure that fosters mutuality. For Billimoria it all starts with a collaborative mindset within the organisations. She believes that Child and Youth Finance International (CYFI) - one of the networks that she is involved in - cannot achieve its goal of collaborative systems change unless all network members become equal co-owners of the process. In her view, this cannot happen if one organisation acts as "donor" to other members, or if just a few partners develop ideas that others are then supposed to implement. Ensuring equity in network relationships requires strong collaborative leadership.

¹¹ Manon de Caluwé and Edwin Kaats (2018) 'Met de opgave verbonden', *Managemenitimpact.nl*, White Paper 15 May 2018

¹² Partnership Brokers Association (2017), 'The necessity of Transformation: Emerging Partnership Lessons from Diverse Contexts,' page 18 -19; and The Partnering Initiative (2019), 'Maximising the Impact of Partnerships for the SDGs: A Practical Guide to Partnership Value Creation'

Continuum of collaboration

Transactional	Transformative
One way accountability	Mutual accountability
Focus on mitigating risks	Shared risks and benefits
Defined outcomes	Undefined outcomes
Short term goals	Long term goals
One partner outlines the project/ framework	Co-creation
Contract based	Embracing unexpected outcomes
Transfer of vision	Creates joint vision/shared value

Drawing on Solidaridad's experience, Roozen and Nkomo emphasise the need for capacity building, or even a change of staff in some cases. Roozen explains that a lot of time was invested in developing the capacities of the regional and national teams "... as you cannot be in favour of capacity development without applying it to your own organisation." He recalls that Solidaridad lost some people in the process because they were unable to adapt to this new way of working.

Ceding power was also a strategy adopted by ActionAid UK. According to van Hurk, when the organisation became "too big and powerful" in ActionAid's own view, a decision was taken to relinquish some power in order to create more "affluence and influence." As part of the internationalisation process all members had to give up some of their autonomy. ActionAid refers to this as "dual citizenship," with the aim of strengthening accountability both to local communities as well as to the international members of ActionAid. Board members are expected to spend 24 hours with local families every two years, stimulating what ActionAid calls "immersion."

All interviewees also highlight the need to allow time for an international network to grow. Lampe emphasises how what she calls the thinking from within attitude needs time to evolve from theory to every day practice. She concludes that the trick is not to focus too soon on structures and systems, but rather to let the network grow organically first and then decide which structure fits best with its mission and chosen pathways.

3.3 How to design a network that promotes transformative relationships

Network design is another important challenge faced by all internationalisation processes. Interviewees highlighted the importance of moving towards relations within the networks that are characterised by principles such as co-creation, joint responsibility and decision making, inclusiveness, mutual accountability, ownership, equality, participation, collaborative leadership, and shared goals and values. These characteristics reflect transformative

relations, as opposed to transactional relations, as shown in the diagram above.¹⁷

The transition towards transformative relationships may involve progressing along a continuum from donor-recipient relations characterised by one or a few lead organisation(s), bilateral linkages between the lead(s) and individual members and one-way accountability, towards transformative partnership relations, characterised by co-creation, shared risks and benefits and mutual accountability.

There are different approaches for reflecting these transformational characteristics in the actual design of the network, and the extent to which this is done in practice. Some networks, such as ActionAid, are highly regulated, with a centralised decision-making structure. Others have a relatively loose structure with more autonomy for members. Aflatoun has adopted a "social franchise" model where partners broadly follow the network's approach but otherwise operate independently. Interviewees provided many examples of participatory decision making and working based on a joint vision and shared values.

Designing a transformative network also comes with a price tag. Participatory processes may not only imply higher costs for coordination, meetings and governance, but also require steering multiple actors and interests in one direction, which might take time considering diverse views and organisational interests of the members.

For networks that successfully manage these challenges there are also many benefits to be gained. Oxfam and Solidaridad, for example, found that while co-creation of innovation agendas and multi-annual strategic plans with all partners can be time-consuming and intense, achieving consensus at this early stage helps to minimise the risk of conflicts and potential delays during implementation of network programmes.

Another decisive step that Solidaridad has taken in its path towards transformative relationships is delegating the management of programme funds to country-based committees. According to van Hurk, this has led to improved

quality of interventions as decisions are made by staff who are embedded in the respective societies, speak the language and understand the local context. To ensure that national partners have the requisite management capacities the network made substantial investments to develop standardised network systems. These include joint systems for financial accounting, project management, results and impact measurement, and communications and branding. Systems were also developed around common standards for human resource management such as contracting, performance evaluation, salary structures and learning. All network partners are held accountable for meeting these standards.

Another positive outcome mentioned by all interviewees is the added value that members realise in terms of enhancing their scale and outreach (RNW, CYFI, Oxfam), impact (Oxfam Novib, Aflatoun, ActionAid), knowledge

development and sharing (ActionAid) and quality (Solidaridad). Some argue that decision-making processes have in fact become more transparent and participatory and that trust has been built over time. They see more unity within the networks, with more attention being paid to power dynamics and ensuring that all members respect the role and contribution of each partner.

However, it is important to bear in mind that the added value and role of each member might change considerably over time. It may also be difficult to satisfy all expectations amidst the realities of day-to-day practice. To maintain successful network relations, it is therefore important to hold regular reviews with all partners to check that they are still "on the same page" with respect to the network's joint vision, shared ambition, values, added value and roles.¹⁸

Suggestions from interviewees for successful network building

The following suggestions are a summary of the interviewees' suggestions on how to build and shape an international network from their perspective, and some considerations to bear in mind.

Before entering or creating a network:

- Make sure that members have a shared and compatible vision and that joint values and principles are clear. For example, what defines the network's ambitions, identity and profile?
- Ensure a balance between individual and collective interests: to what extent, for example, does giving up your organisational sovereignty and autonomy (which could include your name and brand) outweigh the collaborative aims and potential added value of the network?
- Stay in close touch with your own constituency so as not to lose your legitimacy and identity by participating in the network. One question to ask is whether the identity of the network reflects (and will continue to reflect) the identity of individual partners.

To overcome resistance to the redistribution of resources, power and responsibilities:

- Invest in developing and safeguarding common values and mutual understanding. Some networks have developed "ethical codes of conduct" or charters to describe the moral compass that will act as a guide for maintaining integrity and respect in relations amongst network members as well as with others.
- Good leadership is critical to the success of the network. Some important leadership traits include a facilitative and open mindset with skills in co-creating systems and solutions from divergent viewpoints.
- Provide capacity building support to staff to prepare them to manage the complexity of working in an international network. This includes capacities for engaging all network stakeholders on equal terms.
- Recognise and give space for cultural differences, not only between countries but also between and within (public, private and NGO) sectors. Ask questions about how others interpret decisions and partner behaviour.

To further shape the network:

- Celebrate successes and build on proven approaches to develop the network.
- Establish systems and procedures that reflect the joint values and goals of network members and conduct regular research to monitor their impact.
- Bear in mind that structure should follow strategy: first develop a shared vision, strategy and implementation plan before deciding on the structure and legal form that can best support the network's vision.
- Invest in diversified financial resources and work to enhance the self-reliance of all members, for example through franchising arrangements or providing capacity building support for partners to engage in resource mobilisation.
- Make sure there is a balance between participatory processes and executive power of the network.

¹⁶ The Assets-Based Community Development Approach developed by John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann in the late 1980s.

¹⁷ Characterisation is based on the Partnership Continuum developed by the Partnership Brokers Association used in the study, 'Intentions and Interests: Collaboration among MFSII alliance members and the relation between Dutch CSOs and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under MFSII and TUCP 2011 -215,' Partnership Learning Loop, 2016, p. 24.

¹⁸ Partnership Brokers Association (2017), 'The Necessity of Transformation: Emerging Partnership Lessons from Diverse Contexts,' pp 18 -19 See also: www.learningloop.nl

Suggestions from the author on issues to consider before joining an international network

The following are some questions to consider before joining, or creating an international network.

Concerning a network's vision and goals:

- Does the network have a shared vision and goals? How do these relate to the mission of the organisation?
- Is there a balance between collective and organisational interests?
- What is the added value and contribution of the organisation to the network and vice versa?
- What kinds of resources are needed to achieve the network's objectives? How and by whom will these be generated?
- How are/will the roles and responsibilities of members be (re)defined and (re)allocated?
- What type of leadership is needed?

Concerning mutuality:

- When is an organisation considered a network partner and what does that entail?
- How will risks and benefits be shared?
- Under what conditions will potential partners be allowed to join or leave the network and who decides on that?
- How and where will decisions be made? How will members be represented in decision-making processes?
- What is the mandate of different (decision making) bodies within the network and how will these bodies be constituted?
- How will the network deal with disagreements and conflict?
- How will due diligence and accountability be carried out?

Concerning learning and impact:

- How is learning integrated in everyday practice and how does it inform decision making?
- How can the impact of the network be made visible? What types of monitoring and evaluation approaches are needed for this?
- How do the different types of policies within the network contribute to the joint vision (for example in country and partnership policies, marketing, external and internal communication and branding?)

Chapter 4. Interviews with NGO Leaders

4.1 Farah Karimi



Between 2008 and 2018 **Farah Karimi** was Executive Director of Oxfam Novib, the Dutch member of Oxfam. Established as Novib (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Bijstand) in 1956, Oxfam Novib is the oldest development organisation in the Netherlands. From the outset, Novib sought to combine its core mission of fighting poverty through financing of projects in developing countries with advocacy. The focus was on influencing relevant policies within the Netherlands and at the global level, in areas such as trade, agriculture and development cooperation. Another core area was conducting awareness raising campaigns among the Dutch public on the need to address poverty, inequality and injustice beyond their borders. In 1995 Novib joined forces with UK-based Oxfam GB and other international partners to create Oxfam International, a worldwide association of independent organisations that work together to combat poverty and injustice. Farah Karimi explains why Novib decided to join this network and how its internationalisation process has worked out in practice.

In the 1990s Novib and Oxfam would cross paths frequently while lobbying at international fora such as the United Nations. In the case of Novib, which would typically also support its Southern partners to attend such events, the organisation often found itself lobbying for the same causes as Oxfam GB. Meanwhile, Oxfam GB had already embarked on its a process to align its work with several like-minded organisations. NOVIB was invited to join this emerging international network.

At the same time Oxfam was faced with a very specific challenge. Oxfam was not a protected "brand." NGOs in several countries had already adopted the name and

were using it to raise funds and build a constituency independently of the original Oxfam in the UK. This was causing major problems for Oxfam GB. The organisation was therefore very keen to formalise its cooperation with other NGOs to protect Oxfam's reputation, values and programmes. The creation of Oxfam International therefore provided a platform for pursuing a common agenda and supporting the professionalisation of NGOs who wanted to be affiliated with the Oxfam brand.

Our internationalisation process took a number of steps. First, we had to reach agreement on the use of the Oxfam name. Initially, it was decided that Novib would continue to use its own name. In 2006, after 10 years of negotiation, agreement was finally reached to rebrand Novib as Oxfam Novib, with a focus on joint lobbying and political positioning with its sister organisations.

As a result of becoming a member of a network you relinquish some sovereignty in exchange for a more powerful voice

Oxfam is a membership organisation that works through affiliates. The overall programme budget amounts to EUR 600-700 million annually. In joining such a large global network, Oxfam Novib has gained a much bigger reach in her influencing work by cooperating with her sister organisations to influence policies in larger countries such as Germany, the UK and the US. In my experience, becoming a member of a global network is a bit comparable to a country joining the European Union. You remain an independent organisation, but you relinquish some sovereignty in exchange for a more powerful voice.

While the entry of more, and diverse, members is changing the organisational dynamic, Oxfam Novib remains an influential member of the network and, together with Oxfam GB, plays a leading role in setting the agenda. Decision making in Oxfam International takes place through various platforms, including working groups, and consultations with members and affiliates. The directors of all 20 affiliates make up the Executive Board, which is the highest decision-making body of the network. At the same time, the role of the international secretariat is changing. From being a primarily supportive body to the Board, the secretariat is increasingly playing a more proactive, co-leading and co-implementing role along with Oxfam affiliates. As the internationalisation process has matured, decision making within Oxfam has also become more professionalised.

For a long time, the internal dynamics within Oxfam International were dominated by important differences in the working practices of its two largest members Oxfam GB and Oxfam Novib. Oxfam GB has its roots in humanitarian aid and was largely a self-implementing organisation in its

programmes in developing countries. Oxfam Novib, on the other hand, has always had a focus on strengthening of civil society and human rights in developing countries.

These significant differences in the two organisations' partnership approach created a major obstacle for the internationalisation process. Oxfam Novib traditionally supported local organisations to build their capacity, respected their autonomy and created space for them to raise their voice and influence policy at the international level. Some of the other Oxfams, by contrast, were more directly involved in implementation on the ground, in particular during major humanitarian crises.

These differences created a challenge for the integration process.

The reason was to improve efficiency and effectiveness

When I started as Director in 2008, each member organisation managed its programmes independently, even when these were located in the same partner countries. For instance, I discovered during one of my first visits in my new position to Nigeria that staff of other Oxfams in Nigeria were not aware about Oxfam Novib's presence in the country. This was neither effective nor efficient.

One of the first drivers for our strategy of pursuing closer cooperation and integration in the Oxfam network, therefore, was to strengthen the efficiency of Oxfam's programmes on the ground. We also aimed to ensure a collective voice through the establishment of a single management structure in each country.

Internationalisation requires context-sensitive strategies

Another longstanding concern for Oxfam Novib has been to increase the number of Southern-based members of Oxfam. Oxfam had to change from a predominantly British and western European organisation to a true global network. The only way to achieve this is to have more equality among members of the confederation. This is an issue that had a very high priority for Oxfam Novib and for me personally.

Oxfam International explored different approaches to acquire more affiliates in the South. One of the important insights I gained in this process was that many organisations from the Global South were not ready to give up their own name and brand to join Oxfam. In India and Bangladesh, for example, there are many well-established local NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) that already have a long and deep partnership with Oxfam Novib. These organisations were reluctant to take on the Oxfam brand because they felt their identity would be changed from a local organisation to a "western" one, which would impact their standing with their constituencies and communities.

One example is the experience with BRAC. From the early stages of the process of bringing in more Southern partners into the international network, Oxfam had invited the well-known Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

(BRAC) to join the network. However, after a short period of observation, BRAC declined the invitation. BRAC was already one of the largest development NGOs in the world and a long-time partner of Novib. Instead, BRAC chose to start its own international network, known as BRAC International, and to open offices in various countries.

We solved this branding dilemma in different ways. In India, the existing local programmes of five different Oxfam members (GB, Australia, the Netherlands, Hong Kong and Spain) agreed to merge and create an independent national organisation, Oxfam India. The new organisation has a fully Indian identity, with an Indian board, management and staff. Oxfam India also formulates its own strategy.

In South Africa, we abolished all existing Oxfam-related programmes and started a new organisation from scratch. In Turkey, a local women's organisation that had already been in existence for decades is in the process of joining Oxfam and will take on the name Oxfam Turkey.

With only lobbying and advocacy you become a talking head

In an increasingly hostile political climate with declining aid budgets it was important for Dutch NGOs to reinvent themselves. Oxfam Novib did this by profiling itself as an actor for change. We highlighted our strength through acting as one Oxfam, delivering innovative and large -scale programmes in complex partnerships and investing in lobbying and advocacy (L&A) capacities. The ultimate goal is to engage with, and influence the policies and behaviour of, other relevant development actors such as governments, large companies and international organisations.

At Oxfam Novib we have continued to combine our programme support with L&A. Lobbying and advocacy is needed at three levels: within the Oxfam member country; in partner countries; and at the international level (both the EU and UN through their headquarters in Brussels, Geneva, New York). In both their home bases as well as partner countries, there is also need for Oxfam programmes to target governments as well as the private sector. The perceived "value for money" of L&A, combined with the necessity of aid budget cuts, was probably what inspired the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to focus its support towards L&A alliances, with the assumption that CSOs would be able to find funding for their programmes elsewhere. What has been overlooked in such thinking is that with only L&A you become a talking head. Programme aid is also important because you need to have boots on the ground. When I discussed this issue with Minister Lilianne Ploumen, prior to the start of the new Dialogue and Dissent programme, I also emphasised that whereas influencing policy is relatively "cheap," it is also hard to find funding for it.

The added value of the Northern CSOs may increase as civic space in many Southern countries shrinks

The shrinking space for civil society is a growing issue for many civil society actors including Oxfam's Southern affil-

iates. Oxfam India, for example, has to comply with Indian NGO legislation that seriously limits its room for manoeuvre in L&A campaigns. One of the restrictions faced is that Indian NGOs are not allowed to interact with parliamentarians. An international organisation such as Oxfam Novib, which is not bound by Indian CSO legislation and can approach parliamentarians, can therefore play a valuable role in supporting its Indian partners. If used in a smart way, the added value of Northern members within international NGO networks may therefore increase as civic space in many Southern countries continues to shrink.

Because of their resource mobilisation power, "Northern Oxfams" such as Oxfam Novib and Oxfam GB will remain influential within the global Oxfam network. While this is not anchored in the constitution or reflected in the organogram, it is difficult to eliminate such power imbalances entirely. Instead, it is important to be aware of it and discuss such things in the open.

You don't want your role to be reduced to becoming the fundraising agency of an international organisation

Each Oxfam member organisation has a distinct mission, constituency and strategic approach. Internationalisation should be seen as a means to fulfil your mission. As an organisation based in the Netherlands, it is important to realise that Oxfam Novib's financial support and legitimacy primarily lies with its Dutch constituency. In my opinion one should not allow the Dutch identity or organisational role reduced to a fundraising agency within the international organisation. For me, it is therefore crucial that Oxfam Novib continues to be involved in programme implementation, and the creation and dissemination of knowledge and innovation in our programmes. It is also absolutely key that we remain active in lobbying and advocacy, and mobilising our constituency in the Netherlands.

In this context, one of the biggest compromises we had to make during the internationalisation process was in our programming. The question we faced was: how do you maintain a say in programmes? As we strive to find solutions to such questions, the complexity of our work increases. It is a challenge to find the right people that can handle complexity and manage diverse stakeholders. It is also important to invest in developing shared values and a culture. These are issues that people need to be trained in and that need to be discussed constantly. I consider these issues to be among the most important challenges of internationalisation.

But overall, I would conclude that Oxfam Novib's internationalisation process has been largely successful because it has enabled us to achieve our goal of amplifying our voice within the Netherlands and internationally.

4.2 Jacqueline Lampe, RNW Media



In January 2016 **Jacqueline Lampe** was appointed as head of RNW Media, formerly known as Radio Netherlands Worldwide (RNW). One of the oldest public radio and television networks in the country, RNW has produced and transmitted programmes for international audiences since 1947. Following budget cuts that forced the station to stop broadcasting in 2011, RNW Media restructured itself as a media NGO that focuses on building web-based digital communities of young people. RNW Media facilitates safe online spaces in countries where freedom of speech is limited, providing a platform for young people to discuss sensitive or taboo topics. As CEO, Jacqueline is responsible for steering the transformation of RNW Media into an internationally networked media NGO. She also draws on her previous experience as former head of Amref Flying Doctors in the Netherlands between 2004 and 2015.

I joined RNW Media with a conviction about the need to "think from within"

Prior to joining RNW Media, I worked with Amref Flying Doctors in the Netherlands. Amref Flying Doctors started in Kenya. From its base in Africa, the organisation later expanded into a number of European countries and North America. One of the most important insights I gained during this time was the need to "think from within," which refers to local staff knowing their own society from within as citizens. Therefore, they are best equipped to think of suitable approaches to bring about change. Amref Flying Doctors has thinking from within imprinted in its DNA. Their African staff have a deep understanding of the health problems that Amref Flying Doctors addresses because they grew up in, and live in the continent. They are knowledgeable about local contexts and are therefore the best positioned to come up with real solutions.

The Dutch branch of Amref Flying Doctors opened in 1969. Amref's offices in other parts of the world were set up as independent organisations and entered into

contractual relationships with Amref Flying Doctors Africa. The partnership contracts cover the division of roles and responsibilities, as well as the decision making process. As the Dutch partner of Amref Flying Doctors, the role focused on mobilising funds and bringing in an international perspective. I do not agree with the school of thought that international partners have nothing to contribute to the development and implementation of programmes. They can contribute valuable knowledge and insights to inform work on the ground. But while perspectives from various parties need to be considered, it is important that Southern partners take the lead in strategy and implementation. It is for this reason that AMREF profiles itself as an international organisation based in Africa. I believe that there are still too many Northern organisations claiming that Southern partners are in the lead while keeping the final approval of strategies in their own hands. They don't walk the talk.

Our preferred option for establishing relations with Southern partners is to work with existing organisations

When I started working in RNW Media we did not yet have a large network of independent Southern partners. We had a large team, with many non-Dutch staff, based in the Netherlands, and we had a growing team of local colleagues in the countries where RNW Media was active. Most had a media background with little experience in working with NGOs. So while we had many contacts in the South, we had no independent partners.

At the time, we were undergoing a major strategic process in a very short period of time that resulted in a downsizing of our international operations, going down from 20 to 12 countries. This time constraint made it difficult to fully involve our Southern contacts in the developing our strategic plan for 2016-2020. Instead, our new programme was primarily developed by the Dutch-based team with inputs from our contacts in the South, as well as key donors and other stakeholders. On one hand, our fund-raising efforts were successful, with the Dutch government committing EUR 34 million for four years. However, we recognise that we need to find ways to ensure that our future strategies are developed in an inclusive way. For this we will need to work closely with, and fully involve our Southern partners. This will have consequences for our own role and our approach to fundraising.

Meanwhile, our transition towards an internationally networked media NGO continues to take shape. Our partner selection is based on a list of criteria. For example, we prefer to partner with Southern partners who are already well established on the ground because they already have a profile in their area of work with existing networks and a donor profile. So far, we have developed relationships with such organisations in Mexico and India.

So, what added value do we bring to these partnerships? One of the biggest contributions that RNW Media makes is to facilitate platforms that enable young people to openly talk about taboos and sensitive topics online. We support our partners and teams in restrictive societies to amplify

their voices for social change. We also contribute to the identification and analysis of young people's needs based on the data we generate on our platforms. This creates an evidence base to build persuasive stories for advocacy. Our worldwide outreach currently is over 600 million content views and 20 million interactions in a global community of over 10 million young people. This constitutes a formidable source of data that our partners can draw on to facilitate social change processes.

Our flagship programme, Love Matters, discusses sexual and reproductive health issues in an aspirational and accessible manner, providing a platform for young people to engage on these topics. The programme provides safe online spaces in countries where openly talking about love, sex and relationships is seen as taboo. It is also an important vehicle for diversifying our sources of income and driving our internationalisation agenda. The programme operates in a similar way as a social franchise, with partner organisations tasked with implementing and growing the model in other countries. RNW Media remains the franchise holder. In my view, we will be able to claim success if the Love Matters model is implemented in a large number of countries and partners are able to raise their own funds. Progress is being made in Egypt where Love Matters Arabic (not yet independent) has been very successful with YouTube uploads and in China where there is a growing market for programme-branded T-shirts with trendy designs.

We provide a safe haven to discuss sensitive topics, but this is getting harder

We are very careful in our partner selection because we do not want to compromise our progressive agenda. Some "non-negotiables" are our commitment to addressing pre-marital sex, abortion and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues. At the very least, we strive to ensure that these topics are included in our internal discussions in countries where it is too politically or socially sensitive to openly address such issues in public. In such cases, we work with our partners to explore more culturally appropriate ways to talk about taboo issues.

One of the risks we face is that our partners will become a target of government authorities. This has happened in China. As civic space continues to shrink around the world, we work to provide a safe haven to discuss sensitive topics, but it is becoming harder. We do not want to put our partners in danger. For example, our partners in Syria asked us not to mention them on our website. While we respect such requests, it can also create problems with our own accountability if this happens too often.

Another element of our work is bridging cultural differences. In the Netherlands we have a specific view of what is acceptable behaviour. In other cultures, you may have to adopt less direct approaches in order to achieve what you want to achieve. For example, you can work on human rights even in a country where human rights are a political or culturally sensitive issue. The same applies to abortion or LGBT rights.

Our transition will never be complete. As our partnerships become more established, we expect the role of RNW Media to gradually evolve into that of a facilitator of learning processes and innovation within the network. Will we open an international secretariat? I have no idea. I believe that form should follow function. If we do establish an international secretariat, it is important that the decision on where to host it is not linked to the question of which donor provides most of the funds. Furthermore, branding or promoting the Love Matters network is essential for growing the global movement of young people openly talking about love, sex and relationships. For branding and positioning RNW Media our programmes such as Citizens' Voice, Love Matters, and the Radio Nederland Training Centre (RNTC) training programme are essential drivers.

4.3 Jeroo Billimoria, Child and Youth Finance International (CYFI)



Jeroo Billimoria has an impressive track record in establishing NGOs and multi-stakeholder networks. One of them is Aflatoun, a Partos member NGO, which offers social and financial education to children and young people worldwide. Aflatoun was founded in 1991 in Mumbai, India. After moving to the Netherlands in 2005, Jeroo opened Aflatoun's international office in Amsterdam. In 2011, Jeroo went on to establish another NGO, Child and Youth Finance International (CYFI). She is also founder of Childline India Foundation and Child Helpline International (CHI). CHI is headquartered in the Netherlands.

Collaboration to achieve a shared vision has always been a central principle in the work of all my organisations. Collaboration is also the foundation of systems change. If you want to make changes in large and complex systems,

you cannot do it alone. You have to work with a wide variety of partners who should all have an equal voice in the change process. You must co-create a strategy with all partners and work together work to achieve transformative changes in policies, programmes and products. For this you need to have partnerships where everyone is equal.

Mission-focused collaborations create impact – forced coalitions are not the way to achieve this

The current focus of the Dutch government is on advocacy,¹⁹ but I believe that the funding approach continues to favour traditional development projects rather than to contribute to systems change. As long as this is the case, trying to bring different NGOs together in "forced coalitions" will not be effective. There is a "big daddy" culture in the Dutch development aid sector. Large and smaller NGOs fight for a shrinking pool of money that is primarily provided by the government. In reality, the large NGOs end up administering the funds and smaller partners have no choice but to toe the line of the big partners.

You cannot have a collaborative mindset if partners are dependent on one powerful organisation within the network for their funding. Nor can it happen when Northern partners come up with strategies that their Southern partners are expected to implement. I have often seen that people from the South are invited to meetings and events but are not treated as equal partners. For me, this has been the biggest frustration as a social entrepreneur. The corporate sector is more merit based, which I appreciate. If you prove yourself, they listen. What matters is achieving your goals.

My take on why inequity persists within international networks is that, traditionally, donors have been hesitant to fund collaborative systems approaches because they love projects. By funding projects with clear outputs it is easier to quantify results. Systems change takes time and requires the input of many organisations and stakeholders. It is therefore not easy to attribute success to a single programme or donor. Donors prefer to focus, for example, on the creation of 50 youth enterprises from a project that can be directly attributed to them, rather than five million youth enterprises that may eventually be created through systems change in the long term.

This project focus presents a glass ceiling that is difficult for an organisation to break, even when an organisation has a good track record. A case in point is our network's application for funding in response to the call for proposals under the Dutch government's Strategic Partnership, Dialogue and Dissent. In spite of our proven collaborative systems change approach – with evidence of scale and a proven track record – we were not able to convince the selection committee that this approach has high potential to create impact.

¹⁹ "Dialogue and Dissent" is the policy framework of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for strengthening civil society in low- and middle-income countries. "Dialogue and Dissent". Financing is channelled through strategic partnerships with 25 consortia of CSOs in the Netherlands and abroad for the 2016-2020 period. Each of these consortia focuses on lobbying and advocacy in a specific thematic area such as such as water, food security, sexual and reproductive health and rights or gender equality.

I truly believe in the power of collaborations for joint change. Transforming policies and systems requires that all organisations concerned sit around the table on an equal footing. That is how the organisations I am part of have always approached their work. All our partners are all co-owners with equal power. Of course, this approach is not easy; it comes at the cost of your own anonymity. To facilitate collaborative systems change you need to adopt the role of an honest broker and avoid putting your organisation's interests at the forefront.

It is important to choose the approach that best fits the mission of your organisation or network

I urge the Dutch government to reconsider its focus on linking aid and trade and to maintain a broader focus on the SDGs and innovative development solutions. If you see a child living in poverty on the street, how is trade going to help? There are times when you need development programmes, and times when you need policy.

What I want to stress is that it is important to be able to choose the approach that best fits the mission of the organisation or network. Donors should therefore encourage, and be more flexible, in accommodating collaborative approaches. For example, Childline India Foundation is based on a social franchise model²⁰ that provides direct service delivery but has also worked towards changing child protection policy in India. Child Helpline International (CHI) is more of a technical support unit and a systems change organisation. It helps set up helplines and also change child protection systems. The members are the ones who lead the process; CHI assists.

The case is different for Aflatoun, which has a curriculum - a branded product. For Aflatoun, the social franchise model works best. For CHI and CYFI, however, it is quite different. These organisations do not have a tangible product, but rather they must remain in the background, with their primary role being that of an honest broker. That means they need to connect and convene other institutions in a global network and encourage them to provide services to young people. CHI and CYFI help focus this movement of players towards a "North Star" - an audacious goal that can rally a group of actors to working together in a common direction.

Ultimately, the chosen network management model depends on a client's needs and nature of the problem to be addressed. Across all my organisations, what is key is the process of co-creation and leveraging existing practices rather than re-inventing the wheel. My request to donors is for them to invest in organisations that are listening to stakeholders and their needs, rather than those who already work in pre-created formats.

Continuous learning is a key element in a collaborative systems approach

Irrespective of the specific network approach an organisation chooses, it must be flexible to the limitations and realities of that approach. One important lesson learned is that our collaborative systems change approach does not work in all contexts. In one country, we spent many years working with the government to encourage the development of financial literacy and financial inclusion policies. But suddenly the government changed, and we had to start all over again. This difficult experience taught us that it is important to invest in relationships throughout the entire "policy chain," not just at the highest level of bureaucracy. Thus, continuous learning is a key element in a collaborative systems approach. To do so requires a robust system for measuring and monitoring outcomes and impact. One of the actions we took based on this experience was to develop a list of criteria to enable us to identify where our approach can work, as well as risk factors that could contribute to failure. For example, it is difficult to operate a child helpline in fragile states because there you have to first build the state and establish rule of law.

Another element of systems change is identifying when you have reached the critical mass that you wish to achieve. This is the point after which the movement is considered to be mature and "propelled" enough that you no longer need to drive it. CYFI has expanded organically over the years but has now reached a tipping point where returns on investment are decreasing. We therefore took the bold decision of phasing out our programmes on financial education and financial inclusion.

To summarise, one of the obstacles and risks related to collaborative systems change approaches are that it takes a long time to generate results and it is hard to secure funding. Furthermore, coordination and collaboration are critical. You need a coordinating organisation that has a flexible approach with a facilitative mindset. This entails being happy to explore solutions from divergent viewpoints and with mutual respect for all partners. I believe the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs can play unique leadership role in paving the way for funders to encourage collaboration and listening to smaller, network-based organisations that are mission-focused. It should not force coalitions which are led by big organisations but invest in systems change and organic collaboration. It would be my pleasure to invite the government to a dialogue on this, and together take the important steps towards meaningful collaboration.

4.4 Mandla Nkomo and Nico Roozen, Solidaridad

Solidaridad was founded in 1969 as an initiative of Catholic bishops in the Netherlands, with the primary objective of reaching out to communities in the Latin American region. Protestant churches joined the initiative in the seventies and over the next decades Solidaridad broadened its geographic scope to other continents. The thematic focus of the network was further refined to focus on economic empowerment, fair trade and value chain development. In 2011, Solidaridad, was restructured into an international network organisation with eight regional expertise centres, with a network secretariat in Utrecht, the Netherlands. In this article, we present perspectives on the internationalisation process from two Solidaridad staff members with an intimate understanding of the network's mission at both global and regional level.



Mandla Nkomo joined Solidaridad in May 2017 as Regional Director for Southern Africa. As an African and relative newcomer to the network, he provides a unique perspective on the Solidaridad network from a Southern perspective.

had shown very positive results. The local committees were responsible for selection of partners and financing. The quality of the interventions improved because staff was embedded in society, spoke the language and understood the local context much better. We decided to continue on that path.

For me personally the transition of Solidaridad into a networked structure was like a dream come true. The reason for developing the networked structure is because it is the only way to achieve local ownership and quality in the development of programmes. We changed the organisation in three ways: governance, management and project cycle management.

Local staff know the local context, they have access to the national forums, they see where there are opportunities and understand the constraints. But also, times have changed. Self-esteem and trust in their own abilities have grown, especially in Asia. People in the region want to be in control of their own future. Our most successful programmes are those where our local staff are in the lead. Their results are built on our internal capacity development efforts. This is the vision behind the change.

Shifting global dynamics create barriers as well as opportunities for Southern actors

Nkomo: In 2013 I was offered a position with Solidaridad but I declined. I felt uncomfortable about the activist approach, which I felt was not focused on working with farmers. Now, we (Solidaridad) are at the cutting edge of what NGOs in general need to do. Our work in the South is increasingly affected by new realities in the international arena. For example, Northern donor countries are confronted with a large ageing population, which is a huge



Nico Roozen joined Solidaridad in 1984 and became the director in 1989. He brings valuable insights on the network's transformation over the past three decades.

The networked structure is the only way to achieve quality in the development of your programmes. Local staff know the local context

Roozen: Solidaridad was established by the Catholic Church. Later other churches joined the initiative. But gradually Solidaridad and the churches grew apart from each other. Or rather, the church became more inward oriented. The episcopal policy became "churches help churches" rather than "churches are helping the poor." Solidaridad's break away from the churches in 2011 created the momentum that was used to radically change the entire structure. Fortunately, members of the old supervisory board shared the new vision and decided to support the process through joining the new network supervisory board. Previous experiments with delegating fund management to country-based committees in Bolivia and Peru

²⁰ Social franchising is the application of the principles of commercial franchising to promote social benefit rather than private profit (source Wikipedia)

burden. At the same time there is a lack of opportunities for young people to find employment and there is pressure from immigration from the South. These developments call for a different vision on aid.

Another major shift in international cooperation is the rise of the sustainable development agenda. Customers expect goods and services to be produced and traded in another way. This "sustainability" criterion is also being used to reshape traditional development cooperation. For example, the Dutch are now saying "we want to change from aid to trade." In this new approach, it makes sense to support crops in which Dutch corporations have an interest as producers, processors or traders. This better aligns with the trade imperative of development support under this paradigm. For that reason, in Africa, for example, the focus is on the palm oil, cocoa and soybean value chains. Clearly, in this situation appealing to colonial guilt is not going to help you to raise funds from these countries. If your project proposal does not tick those boxes, chances to get funding become smaller. The same applies to immigration and climate change. If you are not a migrant sending country, or if you are not in a country that is of "strategic importance" with regard to climate change, "you cannot tick those boxes."

Another dynamic that is increasingly shaping the development cooperation arena is the rise of local funding sources in the South. African and Asian philanthropy is on the rise and is playing a bigger role in shaping development processes. Good examples of this include initiatives by Tony Elumelu, Strive Masiyiwa, Jack Ma and Mo Ibrahim. China is also flexing its muscle, setting up its own version of USAID or DFID. In the southern Africa region, the South African government is the biggest investor in development across economic development, health, and other socio-economic amenities. Solidaridad has not yet been able to tap into those sources. But there is need for caution in exploring these new funding streams as it will not be a free lunch however. Similar to the Dutch approach, it seems to me the way forward is to build mutually beneficial partnerships

Despite the African renaissance in recent decades, many countries depend to a large extent on foreign aid. In Africa we have to build local institutions and local capacity. That is the way to go. As a network we do this at three levels. First, we promote good practices targeting farmers, miners and factories. Second, we help to establish robust physical and systemic infrastructure. And finally, we work towards creating an enabling policy environment. You can invest a lot in building farmers' capacity to increase yields and produce high quality crop, but that will be in vain if governments take the wrong decisions. This is what happened in Zambia when the government decided to stop the export of soybeans while farmers were producing more than the country needs. We influence policy global and the local level. Influencing policies at the local and regional level is much easier if it is done by people from region. If Nico Roozen would engage in advocacy at this level, I would

be looked at with suspicion. People would wonder "What is this guy's agenda?" In that aspect we are different from commercial companies like TechnoServe, where senior staff at the local level are usually expatriates.

Roozen: A guiding principle in this change process was that the quality of the internal systems is of key importance. It is *one organisation, one brand, one reputation*. Your worst practice determines your reputation. Therefore, you have to work towards a standard quality of work.

We have four quality systems that steered and monitoring throughout the entire organisation.

- The financial accounting system. Next year (2020) will be the first time that we can present a consolidated financial statement for the entire organisation. It has taken us 10 years to develop this capacity and to reach this norm.
- The fully digitised project management system, Plaza, which makes it possible to monitor the performance of the project cycle centrally, including result and impact measurement and reporting.
- Human resource management standards for setting norms and ethics of decent behaviour, and contracting, performance evaluation, salary structure and learning.
- Communication and branding.

All these changes are based on the principles of participation, ownership and accountability. Relevant staff participate in setting the standards and subsequently all are held accountable for meeting these standards. Being accountable is an overarching principle. Standards are set by those who hold the relevant knowledge. For example, the financial controller teams in the regions participate in setting the standards for the financial accounting system. The network secretariat organises these processes. We started by working with the standards we used in the Netherlands. Now it works the other way around through network-wide participation.

With the old structure we could have never realised the budget growth reaching 100 million euros a year

Roozen: We have a five-year programme cycle that is captured in multi annual strategic plans (MASPs). In the MASPs we agree on network-wide innovation themes. The innovation agenda is developed by thematic taskforces at network level. The themes for the programme period 2016-2020 are: landscape innovation, climate innovation, impact investments, gender inclusivity and sustainability solutions based on digital technology. Forty per cent of the EUR 80 million in support that we received from the Dutch Government for our MASP can be used for this innovation agenda. This is very helpful for creating a culture of innovation.

In order to execute this innovative agenda, we have delegated project cycle management to offices in the regions. Tasks include selecting partners, managing the programme cycle at the regional level and managing the

project cycle. Our Utrecht-based staff are responsible for international fundraising and corporate communication but not for project cycle management.

With hindsight this decentralisation has been very fortunate also from a fundraising perspective because both public and private donors are increasingly decentralising funding decisions to regional and national offices and embassies. These offices work exclusively will local actors. Within the old structure we could have never realised the budget growth reaching 100 million euros a year. Currently only 70% of our total budget is raised from European donors and 4% in the USA. The remaining part is raised in the South. We had not foreseen this development when we started developing the networked structure.

Our staff straddle two worlds, but we lost some people in the process because they were unable to adapt to the new way of working

Nkomo: One of the most challenging areas in the transition to a networked organisation was the culture. In the past we worked with project staff that were not accustomed to having boots on the ground. Now we work with brains and boots on the ground. To make such change you can do it either through educating staff or through changing people. We did both.

Also, in the networked structure the culture had to change. One example is in the area of fundraising. There is no regional office that can afford to neglect local fundraising thinking "the Dutch office will bail me out."

Our staff occupy a unique place in this sense because they are both locally rooted but globally aware. This is starting to shape the way we operate, the partnerships we build and the choices we make.

Our staff has intimate knowledge of the local situation and therefore it is easier for them to relate to local and regional decision makers. Of course, Solidaridad in Southern Africa is 80% funded by the Dutch government and the Dutch will always remain an important donor and supporter of our work.

Roozen: To make the change we had to invest a lot in developing the capacities of the regional and national teams. This is key. You cannot be in favour of capacity development without applying it to your own organisation. Just working with local staff is not sufficient because you still do not take them seriously unless you hand over responsibilities. There was resistance among some of the Dutch staff to hand over the project cycle management to the South. They would say that staff in the South did not yet have the capacity to take on these responsibilities. Sometimes they were right, and the pace of handing over had to be slowed down. At other times these arguments were rooted in a patronising attitude. We lost some people in the process because they were unable to adapt to the new way of working.

But a networked organisation also comes with risks

Nkomo: One of the risks of internationalisation is that network members can grow apart and become disjointed. This can happen as a result of unequal growth between the regions. Compared to being one organisation, in a network there is less room for cross-subsidisation between the regions. It is also harder to agree if there are no decrees sent from the centre. To mitigate these risks, you have to make sure to maintain a dynamic and inclusive structure and process. Leadership is crucial. The executive director has to be diplomat, a visionary and a leader of men and women.

And of course, we do not always agree but an instrument to avoid conflicts is the multi-annual strategy, which is co-created by the Continental Supervisory Boards (CSBs). There is room for disagreement during the development process but once the strategy has been adopted it is less likely that surprises will emerge that can lead to conflict.

When there is friction or tension it is the authority and prestige of the executive director that can force a decision while preserving trust

Roozen: We introduced supervisory boards at the international level and in each of the five continents. The international supervisory board (ISB) has the final decision-making power. The ISB is composed of six people, including five regional representatives and one independent chair. The ISB has the final say in appointing the executive director (ED). Other important decisions taken by the ISB are the approval of annual plans and reports. Regional plans are first approved by the CSBs before being submitted to the ISB for approval. Approval by the CSB is considered the most important from a quality assurance perspective. Approval by the ISB is based on a marginal review from the perspective of network consistency. Our entire organisational structure consists of 52 legal entities including the international office, continental, regional and country offices.

At the highest management level, we have an executive board of directors composed of the Executive Director (ED) and eight regional directors. The Executive Board meets twice a year, for four or five days each time, to discuss the regional plans and the innovation agenda. The regional directors participate in the network management team that is tasked with advising the ED. Formally the ED has the final say. The ED is personally accountable to the ISB. A team cannot be held accountable only a person. When there is friction or tension it is the authority and prestige of the ED that can force a decision while preserving trust. Trust is key because it is impossible to shore up each decision with watertight arguments. The ED also has individual performance interviews with the managing directors. These are some of the most inspirational and energising meetings of the network.

A loose network is a lost network

Some are concerned about me stepping down as the ED in 2020. Personally, I hope that the next ED will not be

from the Netherlands. But perhaps this is still too early. In the future I would even like to see the network secretariat moving, for example, to Mumbai. And of course, there are always centrifugal forces at play. This can happen, for example, if one region decides to go its own way because it does not depend on European funding anymore. As the ED you have to constantly work with the regional directors to ensure that they feel co-responsible for the entire network because a loose network is a lost network. There has to be somebody who repeatedly emphasises that all will be lost if we drift apart. An example is our innovation theme digitalisation. This project cannot work if we decentralise decision making on the algorithms. We must agree on standards.

Another example of a centrifugal force occurs when one region is much larger than the other regions in terms of resources. We started with EUR 40 million of our funding coming from the Netherlands. This contradicts the regional equality discourse. Even if at a formal level the regions have an equal vote, social and psychological dynamics in the boardroom do not work like that. One way to avoid such risks is to ensure that the resources are aligned with what you want to be. Currently, our offices in the South raise a much larger part of their funding. But we also make sure that the budget for the network secretariat does not exceed 2% of the total budget. If you make it much larger the secretariat start functioning as the headquarters.

4.5 Ruud van den Hurk, ActionAid



ActionAid Netherlands emerged from the former Nederlands instituut voor Zuidelijk Afrika (Niza), which was itself a merger of three Dutch organisations that focused on Southern Africa. Following the end of apartheid, Niza broadened its geographic scope to Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2007 Niza decided to internationalise and join ActionAid, an international NGO network with headquarters in South Africa. In 2012 Niza formally joined the network as an affiliate member and changed its name to ActionAid. Ruud van den Hurk has served as Director since 2008.

One of the reasons for aligning ourselves with an international network was the access to means in terms of knowledge, networks and finance. When Niza failed to secure MFS²¹ funding we started looking for an international network we could join. There were several options, but ActionAid was a good fit because we had partnered with them in 2006 and appreciated their bottom-up approach, which builds on the expertise and knowledge of local members. Another reason for choosing ActionAid was the network's inclusive governance structure, where target groups participate in decision making at all levels. All member organisations have community representatives on their boards, and community organisations are also represented at the international level. Among the pioneers of the ActionAid international network were ActionAid UK, Italy, Greece and India. ActionAid UK was a particularly powerful organisation. They acknowledged that they had become too big and volunteered to relinquish some of their power to build up the international network. They have been extremely generous, altruistic even, by giving up their position of power.

ActionAid is not just an aggregation of independent organisations that have joined the network. We have also helped

to create some of the member organisations, for example by supporting groups of women, youth or community members to get organised. Such groups start as associate members, even if they do not yet have a formal structure with a board, or a secretariat. Once they have evolved into full-fledged organisations, they became affiliate members.

As a member of the network, it is not mandatory to adopt the name ActionAid but many organisations do this anyway. One exception is ActionAid in Denmark that continues to use its Danish name Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke because it is an established brand in the country. In our case, giving up the name Niza was not a major issue. We consulted our supporters and agreed to gradually phase out the name Niza and introduce the name ActionAid. We did not receive any negative reactions to the name change.

Power imbalances are real and power correlates with financial muscle

The initiators of ActionAid's internationalisation process were also driven by the ambition for greater impact and sustainable financing. We often refer to the need for growing "affluence and influence." Today, ActionAid includes members in over 40 countries. All members had to give up some of their autonomy for the sake of the overall network. We call this "dual citizenship" with accountability downwards to the local communities and upwards to the international members of ActionAid. At the same time members become more alike because they start using the same approaches and standards, for example in finance or human resource management.

Managing a diverse international membership is a precarious challenge. Bigger, more affluent members will be able to exert more power than smaller, less affluent members. ActionAid International acts as a buffer between grant providers and grant takers. We also invest a lot of effort in cultivating relations that lead to mutual understanding. To ensure understanding and alignment at the level of the governance board or that of senior staff, national members from different countries can serve at other member boards. To increase understanding of community life our board members are also invited to spend 24 hours with a local family every two years. We call this immersion.

It takes more time than expected to establish an organisation with its own fundraising capacity

Currently most of our finances still flow from members in the North to those in the South. The ActionAid International Secretariat keeps track of the different financial flow volumes and qualities. The International Secretariat itself is funded by member contributions. As we continue to invest in the capacity of our members to raise their own funds, we expect that more members in the South will be successful in raising their own funds. Although the process is slow, some countries including India, Kenya and Brazil are making good progress.

We will carry out a review of our internationalisation process in the near future. This provides us with an opportunity to reflect on what has gone well, or not so well, and determine how to move forward. My hope is that we will move towards a constellation of strong members who function as knowledge centres and organising platforms for other members.

We had hoped that the process of graduating members from associates to affiliates would happen more quickly. We have learned that it takes more time to establish sustainable organisations with delivering fundraising capacity and professional accountability systems.

I think we have been successful as an international network in terms of knowledge development and knowledge sharing. On the other hand, our power to influence policies and decision makers can still be improved further.

We are an organisation of activists. This makes us vulnerable as in many countries the space for civil society continues to shrink. Ironically, being part of a wider international organisation can also limit what you can do. For example, when we campaigned against Shell in the Netherlands, ActionAid UK sounded a note of caution because they could be held liable for libel and defamation in the UK where legislation is much stricter than in the Netherlands.

²¹ Until 2015, this was the main vehicle through which Dutch development agencies (Co-Financing Agencies, or CFAs) received funding from the Dutch government.

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Amsterdam, September 2019