

5th of December 2017, 09:00-12:00 (ICSW, room C14-014A+B)
NEW WAYS OF COOPERATION FOR CIVIL SOCIETY WORLDWIDE
Addressing inequality in civil society partnerships

A workshop prepared by Partos in cooperation with Africans Rising, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CIVICUS and WACSI.

INTRODUCTION

Emele Duituturaga (director of PIANGO, co-hosting organization of the International Civil Society Week 2017) welcomed the audience and opened the meeting by saying that representatives of over 100 countries gathered here which shows how small and at the same time diverse our world is. The challenges that we share have changed over time. Inequality (within countries) is an issue of growing importance. The present paradigm is based on neo-liberalism. For the implementation of the SDGs a lot is expected from the private sector. Our challenge is how to work with the private sector. And with the diminishing ODA-funds we become more dependent on domestic resource mobilization. What does this mean for the way we cooperate? Important is that we do not sit back and let others decide, but that we as civil society together search and pursue for different paradigms. This search should go far beyond a new paradigm for development and economic growth. What we need is a new paradigm for life!

Anne-Marie Heemskerk (Partos, The Netherlands Association of Development CSOs):

Development partners face a world which has changed dramatically over the past decades. There is a strong belief that in order to tackle the global challenges that we are facing, we need more equitable civil society partnerships based on solidarity, trust and a clear division of roles. Instead of being equal partners, civil society actors within the development system often end up in funder-implementer relations. The aim of this workshop is not to do the usual finger-pointing but to understand why development system has this tendency, how this affects the cooperation between civil society actors in the Global North and the Global South and how we can overcome this tendency.

SETTING THE SCENE

Jelmer Kamstra (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate for civil Society). In his presentation Jelmer explains the two paradigms of social transformation and managerialism that are effective in the development system and how this influences the way we cooperate. Managerialism, the more technical, neo-liberal approach, can be useful in linear, fairly predictable programs, where donors use implementing organizations to outsource services on the basis of value for money. Social transformation, the more political approach, is useful in diffuse political and social change processes, where civil society actors play a political role. What we see is that managerialism is often applied in contexts that are uncertain and difficult to understand, and where the political, social transformation approach would be more appropriate.

What is the role of CSOs in the two different paradigms?

- a) social transformation : autonomy is crucial ; intrinsic value; political role for CSOs; citizens are right holders and CSOs claim their rights.
- b) managerialism : CSOs are complimentary to the state, not autonomous; used as value for money – outsourcing ; citizens are customers and hold governments to account using performance indicators.

What are the differences in donor support?

- a) social transformation : local CSOs take the lead; donors provide financial and other types of support.
- b) managerialism : donors take the lead as they have to ensure value for money.

What does this mean for the relations between donors and CSOs?

- a) relations with CSOs are a mean and a goal in itself; long-term and value based relationships; CSOs must be locally-rooted and legitimate; relationship is built on trust.
- b) managerialism : contractual short term relations based on compliance with targets; CSOS have to be professional to qualify on the basis of set standards; this is a relationship based on control, risk reduction, etcetera.

The Netherlands Dialogue & Dissent Program that aims to support Dutch CSOs in their political role, and acknowledges the unique role that CSOs have to play, is the new and only present program based on the main principles of the social transformation logic. But when you look at the way donor support and donor relations are organized the Dialogue & Dissent Program positions itself more in the direction of the managerial approach. This ambiguity results in a tension that is felt during implementation of the program.

[Click for the full presentation by Jelmer](#)

From the discussion with the audience

In the discussion with the audience that follows participants indicate that they recognize the situation as described, especially the fact that the accountability system of the managerial approach creates the power imbalance. Northern based CSOs should be sensitive to this. Questions are raised about the legitimacy of the 'dissent' part in such case and the sovereignty of state and the risk in specific situations of CSOs having to replicate undemocratic policies. Others argue that the pressure on the budgets for bilateral aid and the restrictions because of anti-money laundering policies and other bureaucratic requirements make it very difficult to get rid of the managerial approach in practice, despite the good intentions. Therefore we should moderate our expectations of the social change that grant making programs alone can bring about.

REFLECTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

Matel Sow (WACSI) as a representative of the organized civil society, presents her views on what is necessary for equal partnerships. To begin with Matel stresses the importance of participation by Southern partners in decision-making spaces where agendas are drawn up, as we need to recognize contextual expertise. She questions herself: if we had money free from strings attached, would we apply the same framework? The answer is no. When it comes to donor requirements and compliance it is often the case that local capacity is not taken into account when defining templates. It is therefore important to design templates together with Southern partners so that they can spend more time implementing projects instead of filling up complicated forms.

Another problem she identifies is the encroaching of Northern CSOs that are implementing in the same spaces and as such create some sort of competition, putting pressure on the available technical

capacity and resources, sometimes poaching Southern CSOs into INGOs. She notes the lack of coordination and collaboration, resulting in duplication of interventions. A key aspect of development must be to strengthen the role of CS as a way of achieving goals. The competition amongst local organizations generates distrust from the communities that they should represent. Core funding is very rare so CSOs become very (project)activity based, with a lack of attention for the follow-up based on the needs of the community.

In short: equal partnerships are based on trust, mutual gains, valorizing and leveraging on different assets;

Elie Casagara, World Vision International (World Vision), as a representative of an INGO operating in the system, begins by saying that for the equality of partnerships it is important that all money is put on the table. We need civil society partnerships to advocate for common causes at local, national and global level. There is also a need to partner with government and private sector. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are the solution to have a real impact. The role of the INGOs is to link the local to the global.

World Vision is weak in partnering in the emergency response, while more equitable in the development programs. World Vision makes sure that the partnerships that they build are based on 3 principles

- Equity (mutual respect)
- Accountability (trust)
- Sustainability

Kumi Naidoo (Africans Rising + SA campaign against nuclear energy+ global campaign on bank divesting) – as a representative of informal civil society, operating outside the development system, challenges the audience by saying that civil society has been contaminated by bad practices over the years, partly by people doing things in very good faith. The spirit of volunteerism has been sucked out of civil society by the donor-funded model.

For Africans Rising it was therefore important to have a plan to ensure that they do not build on donor dependency (see the Kilimanjaro declaration): if within 5 years the movement is not entirely supplied by African-only resources, than they will shut it down. They expect it to be feasible to build their movement on active African membership, with members paying a monthly contribution of 1USD a month. Kumi “Financial autonomy enables us to be there when and where it matters, and to take risks”.

As Kumi states, civil society should set itself three important tasks:

- Solidarity needs to be much better coordinated
- We need a plan for financial sustainability
- We must improve the spirit of volunteerism

Kumi: “The M&E system has become a whole industry – let us remember not everything that counts can be measured and not everything that can be measured counts. We must learn to understand the limitations of the traditional development system. If we recognize the power differentials that the diverse geographies bring we are better able to conduct North-South conversations about equal partnerships”.

From the discussion with the audience:

The aid industry of the north is based on a charity narrative that is sold to citizens. Here the UN has a role to play: it is important to mobilize domestic resources to get rid of the charity narrative, create a SDG narrative and respect the sovereignty of states and its civil society.

THE WAY FORWARD

DISCUSSION IN GROUPS

In the second part of the workshop participants discussed in groups with a focus on the way forward. For this we made use of the World Café Methodology. The discussion focused on the changes that need to be made to the system and on the possibilities they see outside the system for equal partnerships. The main takeaways that were presented plenary:

- Citizen engagement in CSOs through some kind of active democracy
- More money for (Southern based) national CSOs
- Flexible funding channels for CSOs based on objectives and accountability
- Partnerships as exchange of services/information not only funding
- Less donor dependency via enhanced voluntarism and own resourcing
- Start at local level and constituency as to develop legitimacy and resources
- Donors should also be accountable – e.g. Keystone initiative

Below is the full harvest of ideas and suggestions made during the discussion in the working groups.

I. What aspects of the current system need to be changed? What shift in roles do we need?

- Change short term vision of donors on what is expected from CSOS, especially the ones that are seeking change
- Donors and funding organizations should diversify funds and look for financial sustainability
- Make more money available (direct funding) for local CSOs for service delivery
- Donors should increase percentage of core funding to 50/50
- No funding for CSO projects, just core funding
- Facilitate reporting by mainstreaming requirements and offering a support system
- Failures are an important part of learning so should be allowed
- CSOs should be involved in budgeting process for bilateral aid. One approved make funding directly available to CSOs
- Change the narrative from one about charity to one based on the SDGs
- CSOs have to be really grounded in and representing communities they claim to serve.
- Focus on the strengthening of the voice of constituency based CSOs.
- Recognize all various assets that every partner brings to the table, not just the financial ones.
- Acknowledge that there may be overlap in roles and intentions
- INGOs should reflect upon their role in development as funders and build support for local actions and grass roots.
- We should focus more on our political roles.
- CSOs should determine programs not outside donors
- CSOs must monitor corruption of governments use of donor money

- The projects should be locally led and not foreign led
- Where possible funds for civil society should be channeled through governments
- Inclusion of program design
- Solidarity
- Needs to be changed: Role of intermediation of INGO
- Needs to be changed: The managerial role of M&E
- Adapting to needs in context
- Needs to change: donor agenda
- Needs to change: focus on short term targets
- Needs to change: quantitative reporting (Stop simplistic quantitative measuring, is suffocating).
- Start partnering at a national level (national partnerships b4 international partnerships)
- Strengthening, reviewing and aligning governmental policies

II. Think of possibilities for equal partnerships outside within the current system. Consider possibilities outside the system.

- More South-South cooperation amongst civil societies
- South-South volunteer cooperation
- More use of local volunteers
- Transparency between CSOs on each other's agenda's, approach etcetera.
- Governments to disseminate the right information for CSOs
- Involve CSOs in decisions about funding
- Donors to fund governments for the funding of CSOs (is practice in the Pacifics). Donors to assure that CSOs receive the money on time; and consider direct funding or soften the process.
- Educate constituencies (tax payers) to move away from the quantitative approach (tyranny of indicators)
- Give up power and controle
- Create endowments in the South to be managed locally (see example Kenya)
- Define equal partnerships between governments and civil society
- Raise money locally : CSOs become legitimate actors; entrepreneurial CSOs
- Northern agencies should monitor illicit/illegal flows of money
- Northern agencies commit to SDGs, not just in the South, and be monitored
- Northern agencies to fund institutional support
- Maintain CSO independence
- Shared values, common goals/objectives
- Enhanced CSO collaboration/networking as opposed to completion in- and external
- Capacity building around effective and equal partnerships
- Focus on sustainability of initiatives
- Coalitions and networks
- New models for financial accountability
- Demand longer (>5 years) core support
- Accountability mechanisms for donors
- Keystone accountability for intermediary
- Inter-country mutual learning
- Capacity to manage funds

- Challenge of many local CSOs: articulating development outcomes
- Need to stop thinking in North-South cooperation but find strategic partnerships towards joint goals where each has added value.

III-1 A thought experiment: what would we do together if there was no money involved?

- Peer support
- Information exchange
- Joint struggles on common goals
- Joint advocacy, drawing from experiences in similar contexts
- Disappearance of money will facilitate more equitable distribution of power
- Enhance spirit of mutual collaboration among citizens of a community
- Grow voluntarism, making use of cultural norms
- Know what your purpose is and engage with like-minded individuals
- Networking/mapping
- Volunteer groups, especially youths (where it suits)
- Issue driven cooperation
- That is a way to change from managerial support to social transpormation
- Diplomacy as a tool of influence
- Partnerships can be on exchange of services rather than money, e.g. university volunteers come and provide technical assistance
- When there is no money involved it forces every actor to focus on their added value to the cooperation
- Helping CSOs to voice their results to donors, to create mutual benefits

III-2 What are innovative ways of working together using alternative financial resources or new technologies?

- Smarter use of social media to reach out to community and target audience
- New work models (facilitated by social media) for dispersed coalitions
- Use share economy platforms
- Tapping into private sector for support and resources
- Ask private citizens to donate, for example, 1 USD per month,
- Collect membership fees and in addition seek funding from the government
- Make use of crowd funding platforms or social impact funds
- Increase citizens participation to ensure governments provide services (instead of CSOs); empower citizens to claim their rights.
- Make use of social media and mobile applications to inform public about their rights to basic services.
- Crowd sourcing
- Community philanthropy – community foundations
- CSOs providing services for income
- CSO contracts with governments (but be careful!)