

Approach Working Group 3ⁱ

Where we come from

The CoP Shift the Power was established with the aim to address power imbalances between Dutch/International CSOs and CSOs based in the South. This is considered important for various reasons. First, unequal power relationships are considered unfair, and they lead to frictions. Second, they make partnerships between Dutch and Southern CSO less effective in fulfilling their joint mission, because the full potential of resources remains underutilized, (especially knowledge and legitimacy on the side of the Southern partners). Third, because power inequality puts Southern CSOs in a position that they are often being micro-managed, which constrains them in their ability to develop their own strategies and their own capacities.

So, the reason WHY we want to address unequal power relations is because we want to:

- Move from frictions to enhanced mutual respect, understanding and synergy between partners
- Improve the effectiveness of the partnerships by recognizing and building more on the knowledge and legitimacy of that Southern partners have
- Take away constraints that Southern CSOs face in setting out their own strategies and developing their own capacities

A Working Group was established to get a better understanding of the problem. This working group addressed the question why in the current aid system, Northern CSOsⁱⁱ and INGOs end-up being the most powerful in most partnerships for development. The Working Group focused in particular on the sub-system of partnerships resulting from the Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society: Power of Voices Partnerships (PoV). Based on a systems analysis the working group resulted in a comprehensive overview of 14 factors that lie at the root of the current situation of power imbalances. Whatever solutions we are going to develop to change the system, all these factors¹ must be addressed somehow. A key question is *where to start*.

From analysis to solutions

We will start to start our search for solutions with focusing on how relations between Northern/Dutch and Southern CSOs emerge. In the current situation Dutch CSO are the spiders in the web of building alliances. They select Southern partners based on Dutch and international agenda setting. It is in this stage of the partnering process that power configurations take shape with Dutch CSO in a dominant position. We need to imagine how we would like to see this work in a different way.

Step 1 Envisioning

Therefore, our first step 1 will be an envisioning process. The core question to be addressed: Let's imagine how a balanced power relationship between Dutch and Southern CSO looks like and how it could emerge?

In the process of envisioning, we will go beyond making a list of principles. We will not limit the discussion to power issues concerning who is taking which decisions about what, or who

¹ And possibly a few more yet unknown factors that may be identified at a later stage in the process.

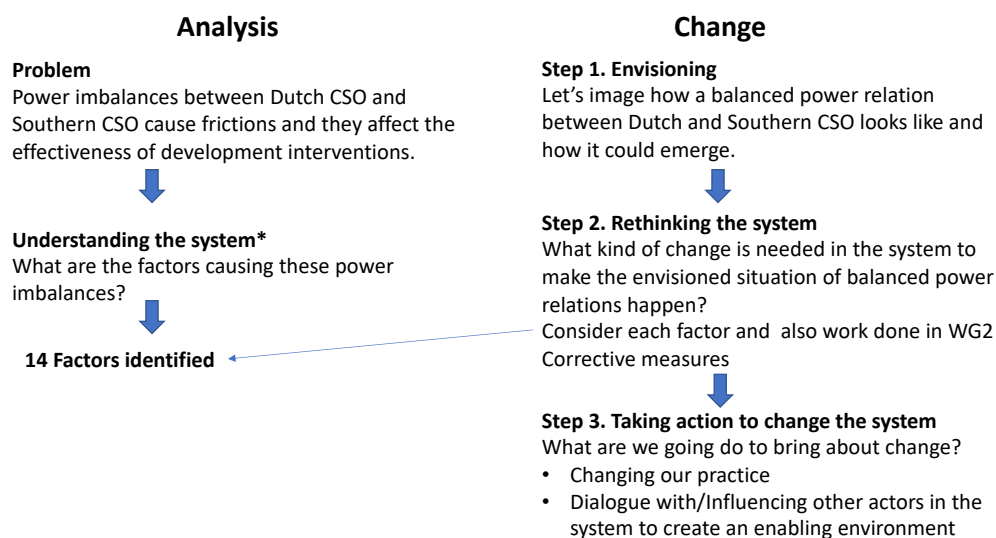
is in control of the money. We will elaborate on the entire spectrum of revised roles, responsibilities, modalities for risk sharing, change in mindsets and culture that is needed to bring about real change including: how agendas are set, by whom, how different agendas and interests can be consolidated or harmonised. Step 1 is most likely to be the most challenging one because participants will have to overcome their fear for the unknown.

Step 2 Rethinking the system

In step 2 we will address the question What kind of change is needed in the system to make the envisioned situation of balanced power relations happen? In the process we will consider the list of 14 factors identified by Working Group 1. and the corrective measures identified in Working group 2. This will help us to rethink the system in a comprehensive way, and not go for the silver bullet solution.

Step 3 Taking action to change the system

In the the third step we will take action to bring about change. This may include i.a. changing our practice, engaging in dialogues with other actors in the system to create an enabling environment.



* Our case: The subsystem of partnerships that that emerged as a result of the Dutch Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society : Power of Voices partnerships (PoV)

The steps described above reflect a logical, not necessarily a chronological order. In fact we expect this to be an iterative process between the various steps over time.

Scope

We will continue focusing on the Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society with a view to influencing Dutch policy making in the field to the near and more distant future. Later on, we may also look into to what extent the solutions are applicable to other sub-systems of the aid chain.

The fact that we focus on a very specific donor that we know very well, and that is at the same time receptive to ideas about new ways of working together in partnerships, puts us in a position that we can make a unique contribution to the discussions about power in other

global networks and platforms, including: RINGO, Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), Civicus, Global Fund for Community Foundations, Global Alliance for Community Philanthropy. At the same time, we will stay in touch and learn from the thinking that is going on in other networks.

Who will participate?

All members of the Community of Practice will participate, including members of Partos, their partners from the South and a small number of dedicated experts. From the start of this community of practice, Southern partners of Partos members have been more than welcome to join, but this hasn't yet led to much Southern participation. We will reinforce our efforts to invite them to become member of the CoP, and, if they cannot participate themselves for whatever reasons, we will consult with them in the course of the process. Furthermore, we will make sure that the group of participants in this process is as diverse as possible including in terms of nationality and age.

ⁱ This approach was developed in the first meeting of Working Group 3 on 16 June 2021. Present in this meeting were: Pascal Richard (Cordaid), Susan Githaiga (KCDF), Marina de Paiva (Mercy Corps), Marijke Priester, Esther Meester (Wilde Ganzen), Alycke Slomp (ZOA), Margit van Wessel (WUR), Alan Fowler (WBS/IISS), Fleur van Werkhoven (Partos), Heinz Greijn (Facilitator, Partos).

ii Glossary

This glossary is partly an adaptation of the list of terms in annex 1 of the [Policy framework for Strengthening Civil Society](#)

Civil Society

Civil society is the sphere of uncoerced human association between individuals and the state, in which people undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes relatively independent of government and market. (source: Michael Waltzer)

Civil Society Organisation (CSO)

A CSO is a non-profit organisation, neither established by a government body nor linked to a government body either de facto or under its constitution, which is a legal person under civil law and serves a public interest. CSOs can include community-based organizations as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Community Based Organisation (CBO)

CBOs are groups made up of local residents. They are non-profit organisations working at local level to improve living conditions for local people, whose rights they represent.
International non-governmental organisation (INGO)

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An INGO is an NGO operating internationally with locations in various parts of the world, including offices in high-income countries. INGOs focus on a whole variety of themes in multiple countries.

Localisation

To be developed. There seem to be many different definitions of localisation. It is not yet clear which definition will help us most in this process.

Non-governmental organisation (NGO)

An NGO is a non-state, non-commercial organisation, which pursues a political or social goal.