



Power Awareness Tool 2.0

Make power dynamics more visible



Samen
Werkt.

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The Power Awareness Tool 2.0

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Partos is the membership body for Dutch-based organisations working in development cooperation. The Partos Innovation Hub is a space where development professionals can learn, interact, experiment, and focus on innovation and collaboration to navigate the future and accelerate change.

For multiple years the Partos Innovation Hub has actively supported the 'shift the power' movement pushing for more equal power relationships within development cooperation. In the 'Shift the Power Lab' more than 150 development professionals are working in 6 working groups on 6 practical solutions for achieving more balanced power relations in international partnerships for development

In May 2022, at the launch of the Partos Shift the Power Lab, a working group was established to update the Partos Power Awareness Tool. The result of this work is in this publication.

The Power Awareness Tool helps partners to make power relations more visible. This makes it easier for partners to reflect on their power relations and agree on changes where necessary.

Partos launched the first version, PAT 1.0, in February 2020. Since then, several Partos members and their partners have been using the PAT. In 2022, the PAT 1.0 was evaluated. The evaluation examined user experiences of the Power Awareness Tool among Partos members and their Southern partners, mainly in the context of the partnerships established in the framework of the Power of Voices programme. Over 70 users contributed to the evaluation.

Conclusion of the evaluation: in most cases, the Power Awareness Tool works. A large majority of respondents (79%) indicated that the PAT exercise did lead or will lead to follow-up actions to balance the power relations between the partners. Almost half of the respondents reported enhanced awareness about power relations. One-third stated that the PAT allowed them to identify areas of improvement within their partnership cycle. For a quarter of the respondents, the correction of existing misconceptions about the amount of power that different partners had, was an important benefit. Other benefits include enhanced trust between partners and finding common agreements on how decisions should be made in the partnership. 94% of the respondents would like to make the PAT a regular part of their partnership cycle. They expect that repeating the PAT at regular intervals would increase the likelihood of generating lasting results.

According to the respondents of the survey, there are three areas in which PAT 1.0 could be improved. These include:

- More detailed guidelines for identifying the decision-making topics (41%)
- More guidelines for arriving at action points (33%).
- More explanation for the person facilitating the use of the PAT (22%)

Furthermore, 85% of the respondents were interested in an improved digital version of the tool.

In December 2022, we brainstormed with a group of users how the tool could be improved. The ideas have been incorporated in the Power Awareness Tool 2.0 test version. Two parties participated in the test.

- [TearFund Netherlands](#) tested the PAT with partners in Nepal and Bangladesh. An external facilitator from India facilitated the session.
- Singizi Consulting Africa facilitated a PAT process with partners of the [Power of Pride](#) alliance, which brings together [COC](#), [Pan African ILGA](#) and [ILGA Asia](#) in a five-year partnership (2021-2025)

The feedback from these tests has resulted in significant improvements.

Why use the Power Awareness Tool?

As the name suggests, the PAT makes partners aware about power relations in partnerships. Whereas power has many dimensions, the PAT focuses specifically on decision-making power in partnerships. The core question in a PAT session is about who in a partnership is making decisions about what. This is important, because in many partnerships, this is not very clear. Power is often exercised implicitly. Decisions are being made while not everyone knows this is happening. Often nobody has any quarrel with this. Maybe everyone agrees with the decision or agrees that the ones who have taken the decision have the mandate to do so. However, there are also situations in which some partners feel unhappy about how a decision has been taken. They believe that they have not been involved in a proper way. Maybe they believe they should have been the ones to take this decision, or they had wanted to have an equal vote in taking the decision. Maybe they feel that they have not been properly consulted. If such situations happen frequently, it may lead to frictions that undermine the partnership. The PAT helps to anticipate such situations by making partners more aware of where decision-making power is located in the partnership. The PAT makes power visible, and when it is visible, partners are in a position to discuss and agree on who should be involved in which way in making certain decisions. This way the partnership is more likely to remain healthy.

Please note that the PAT does not prescribe how partners should be involved in decision-making. That is up to the partners themselves to agree on. The PAT helps to have a frank and open-minded dialogue about this.



"A sometimes-mentioned fear amongst Dutch CSOs, is that using the PAT could result in friction in the relationship between partners. The majority of the respondents, however, reported no friction with their partners after having a discussion on the power relations that existed between them through the PAT exercise (67%) while a small percentage (18%) reported some friction with their partners."

Quote from the evaluation of the Power Awareness Tool

Preparation - Guidelines for the facilitator

A PAT session needs a facilitator. That can be a facilitator from within the partnership, or an external facilitator. From the evaluation of the PAT 1.0 we found that most partnerships prefer working with an external, neutral facilitator. In order to avoid a Northern or Southern bias in the facilitation, it was suggested to work with a team of two facilitators, one from the North and one from the South.

When participants are invited, it is important that they are properly informed about what to expect and what is expected from them. A few essential elements need to be included in the invitation:

- Participants need to be informed who within the partnership initiated this PAT session and why.
- Participants should know that this is going to be a learning exercise, and not about holding each other accountable. If the PAT is used in a partnership that has been in existence for some time, the purpose is to reflect on how decisions have been taken in the past and to find out whether there is a need to change the decision-making process. If the PAT is used in a partnership that has just started, the purpose is to find out how partners should be involved in decision-making in the future.
- Participants should feel safe that sharing their sincere thoughts about decision-making in the past or in the future will not be used against them.
- In preparation for the PAT exercise, participants can be asked to do some homework by listing at least one important decision taken in the partnership in the past, that they would like to be reflected on in the PAT session (or in the case of a starting partnership to list at least one important decision to be made in the near future). It is important to emphasize that the discussion will NOT focus on content in the PAT session, whether the decision was good or bad. In the PAT session, participants will reflect on the decision-making process. *Core questions that will be addressed in the PAT session are: Who was involved in making this decision, and how? Are we satisfied with the decision-making process, or is there room for improvement?*
- Participants should know that the average PAT session will take about half a day. It is possible to have an in-person workshop (with the physical presence of the participants) or an online workshop. Hybrid options in various ways are also possible (see FAQ 2).
- Each partner should be represented by only one person. That person should know how their organisation is involved in decision-making processes in the partnership. (See also FAQ3 and 4 FAQ4 if more than one person of the same partner wants to attend.)

The agenda of a PAT session

A typical PAT session has the following agenda:

- Introduction
- Warm-up
- Step 1. Identification of important decisions (to be) made in the partnership.
- Step 2. Determining the actual level of participation in decision-making.
- Step 3. Reflection on the actual level of participation in decision-making.
- Step 4. Determining the desired level of participation in decision-making.
- Step 5. Action to be taken in order to realise the desired level of participation.

Introduction

Participants introduce themselves, and the facilitator explains who initiated this PAT session within the partnership and why. The facilitator explains the purpose of the PAT session, similar to what was explained in the invitation (see the above guidelines for preparation)

Warm-up

For participants to get to know each other better and get in the right mood for a dialogue, it is good to start with a warm-up or icebreaker game. If you are looking for inspiration, you'll find a few ideas here:

For in-person workshops (with physical presence of the participants):

- <https://teambuilding.com/blog/large-group-energizers>
- <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Energisers.pdf>
- <https://symondsresearch.com/quick-icebreakers/>

For online workshop:

- <https://www.collaboard.app/warm-up-and-ice-breaker-games-to-play-with-online-whiteboard>
- <https://www.mural.co/blog/online-warm-ups-energizers>
- <https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/online-energizers/>

Step 1. Identification of important decisions to be made in the partnership

Participants are asked to take 15-20 minutes for themselves to contemplate decision-making in the partnership. Each participant should come up with at least one important decision that has been made in the partnership in the past that they would like to be reflected on in the PAT session. If the PAT is used in a starting partnership without a long track record of decision-making, participants should be asked to think of at least one important decision to make soon. Subsequently, the facilitator makes a list of all these decisions. If some of the participants mention the same decision or the same type of decision, these are grouped together in one category. Please note that formulating the decisions in an unambiguous and meaningful way can be challenging (see FAQ 8 and FAQ 9 for more guidelines).

If this list is becoming very long (more than 10, for example), it could be useful to prioritize. This could be done by asking each participant to indicate the top 5 decisions that need to be discussed in these PAT sessions. The decision that gets the most votes is put on top of the list, followed by the decision that gets the second-highest number of votes, followed by the decision that gets the third-highest number of votes, etc.

As shown below, the facilitator draws a matrix with all the partners next to each other in the top row. Subsequently, all decisions that participants come up with are listed in the first column.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries						
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation						
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership at an important international conference						
Etc.						
Etc.						
Etc.						

Step 2. Determining the actual level of participation in decision-making

For each of the decisions listed in the first column of the matrix, the actual level of participation in taking this decision is assessed and scored for each partner¹. For this we use the ladder of participation in decision-making in diagram 1. Depending on the level of participation, the score will range between 0 (not involved) and 4 (partner decides).

Diagram 1. Ladder of participation in decision-making



- 4. Partner decides
- 3. Partner co-decides
- 2. Partner is consulted before a decision is made
- 1. Partner is informed about decision-making, but has no say
- 0. Partner is not informed in the decision-making and excluded from the decision-making process

For example, take row two of the matrix below, concerning decisions about the allocation of funds between countries. It is indicated that partners A and B usually make these decisions together after consulting partners C and E. The only involvement of partners D and F is that they are informed after decisions about the allocation of funds have been made.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation						
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference						

¹ If it is a partnership under development, participants will discuss the level of participation each partner should have and determine the scores accordingly. Depending on the level of influence, the score will range between 0 (not involved) and 4 (partner decides).

Subsequently, all rows are filled the same way as in the above example. From practice, we have learned that this is a rather straightforward process. However, if partners have diverging perspectives of the way they themselves or others are involved in the decision-making, the facilitator needs to lead partners in a discussion in which they share evidence and experiences on what actually happened when these decisions were made.

Step 3. Reflection on the actual level of participation

At the end of step 2, the matrix could look like in the example below. This overview shows how these decisions are actually being made.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F	Happy?
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1	
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation	4	2	2	1	2	0	
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference	2	3	1	1	3	1	

In step 3, the facilitator leads the group through the list of decisions, one by one. Regarding each decision, the facilitator asks the question: Do we agree with the way partners are involved in making these types of decisions?

- In case everyone agrees the facilitator puts a smiley.
- In case one or more partners does not agree, the facilitator puts a sad emoticon icon in the last column.

The end result of this exercise could look like in the example below.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F	Agree?
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1	☺
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation	4	2	2	1	2	0	☹
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference	2	3	1	1	3	1	☺

All decisions marked with a sad emoticon icon are the type of decisions that require a different approach. In the table above, that would be the case for the decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation.

At this stage, the facilitator should ask, regarding decisions indicated with a sad emoticon: *“Why do some or all participants disagree with the way these types of decisions are being taken?”* After a brief reflection by the participants, we go to step 4.

Step 4. Determining the desired level of participation

In step 4 we focus only on those decisions indicated with a sad emoticon icon. Apparently, one or more partners believe that they and/or others should have been involved in a different way in making these decisions.

For each of these decisions, the question needs to be answered: *How do we want partners to be involved in making such decisions in the future?*

To answer this question, the facilitator needs to guide participants in a discussion that should ideally lead to consensus about each partner's desired level of participation. The desired level of participation is indicated with a different colour in the matrix.

For example, in the table below, the desired level of participation is indicated in blue.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F	Happy?
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1	☹
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation	4 3	2 3	2 3	1 2	2 3	0 1	☹ ☺
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference	2	3	1	1	3	1	☺

Step 5. Actions to be taken to achieve the desired level of participation

In the fifth and final step of the PAT exercise, participants have to figure out what action needs to be taken to get to the desired level of participation. Of course, this is only applicable to types of decision-making where the desired level of participation differs from the actual level of participation.

In our example, it would only apply to decisions about selecting a team of consultants to evaluate the programme. The last column below summarizes the type of action to be taken to achieve the desired level of participation in decision-making about hiring consultants to evaluate the programme.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F	Happy?	Action to be taken
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1	☺	Not applicable
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation	4 3	2 3	2 3	1 2	2 3	0 1	☹ ☺	A, B, C, and E decide on terms of reference for consultants. D is invited to comment of terms of reference F is informed about the ToR and the selection process A makes a short list of technical and financial proposals. A, B, C, and E select team of consultants. A informs all partners about the decision.
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference	2	3	1	1	3	1	☺	Not applicable

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ 1: Can the PAT also be used within organisations to analyse power relations between different parts of the organisation? Can it be used, for example, by an international NGO with headquarters in one country and country offices in several countries?

A: This is possible. Instead of analysing power relations between partners, the participants will analyse power relations between the different offices, units and gremia.

FAQ 2: Should the PAT be held in one, uninterrupted in-person (with the participants' physical presence) or online session?

A: No, the PAT can also be organised over a prolonged period with a combination of in-person and online sessions, as long as the sequence of the steps remains the same. Organisations have experimented with various combinations. Step One (*identification of important decisions*) can be done by email or app over a period of several days or weeks. The same applies to Step Two (*determining the actual level of participation in decision-making*). One organisation used Survey Monkey for partners to indicate the actual level of participation in decision-making) Subsequent steps 3, 4, and 5 require higher levels of interactivity and are best conducted in in-person or virtual sessions.

FAQ 3: What is the ideal size of a PAT discussion group?

A: Experience suggests that, similar to focus group discussions, having 8-12 participants works very well. A smaller group is also possible, but facilitation becomes difficult with more than 12 participants. To avoid big groups, it is suggested that each partner should be represented by only one person. It is crucial that this person is well informed about how his/her organisation is involved, or is not involved, in taking important decisions in the partnership. A second reason for each partner being represented by only one person is to avoid that some partners dominate the discussion because they are with more than one representative.

FAQ 4: What to do if more persons of the same partner want to attend?

A: There may be good reasons for having more than person of the same organisation participating in a PAT session. If that is the case, it is important make sure that:

- At least one of the partners' participants knows how their organisation is involved in decision-making processes in the partnership.
- The participants of that partner choose one representative to actively participate in the scoring in steps 2 and 4. So, when it comes to scoring the actual level of participation (step 2) and the desired level of participation (step 3), each partner speaks with one voice through the representative.

FAQ 5: What to do if there are too many partners to invite them all to a PAT session? This can, for example, be the case if a national partner works with dozens or hundreds of local partners spread across the country.

A: In that case, it is possible to invite one or a few typical local partners, assuming that their perspective on power is representative of the group. In case of doubt, it is important to test this assumption afterwards. This can be done by asking some of the other partners who were not present at the session whether the opinions of the ones representing them.

FAQ 6: We want to include the donor in our analysis but do not want the donor to participate in the PAT session. What should we do?

A: It is possible to have one participant act as the donor in the PAT session. It is important to be aware that this 'stand-in' donor representative might not understand the donor perspective completely.

FAQ 7: Can the PAT be used for evaluations or mid-term reviews?

A: Yes, during a workshop about PAT 2.0 in May 2023, several organisations reported that they had successfully used the PAT to evaluate power relations in a partnership.

FAQ 8: Why not include a generic list of important decisions to be taken in partnerships with CSOs?

A: Decisions considered important in one partnership may not be that important for another. For example, if the partnership is composed of partners responsible for their own fundraising, decisions about allocating resources may not be a big issue. But if partners raise funds together, decisions about the allocation of resources become very important. In a similar way, partnerships of CSOs that focus primarily on service provision (for example, in health care), decisions about positioning in a political debate may not be very important. The opposite is the case for partnerships that focus on lobbying and advocacy.

In PAT 1.0, we included a generic list of examples of decisions, but this sometimes caused confusion and unnecessary discussions. That's why we did not include a generic list in the main text of this PAT 2.0.

Nonetheless, a generic list (see below) can be useful as part of Step One, provided it is handled with care. The facilitator should avoid lengthy discussions about this list. Some of these decisions may be important in your partnerships, whereas others are not important at all. Please note that in your partnership, there can be decisions that don't feature at all in this generic list.

Partnership building
Decision to start a new partnership
Decisions on who to approach as potential partners
Decisions about which potential partners to develop a partnership agreement with
Decisions about the terms to be included in the partnership agreement
Decisions about the content of the technical part of a funding proposal to the back donor
Decisions about the financial part of a funding proposal to the back donor
Decisions about the governance structure of the partnership
Implementing programmes
Decisions about which projects will be funded
Day-to-day decisions concerning the implementation of a project at the country/local level
Decisions about adjustments to project plans
Decisions about what is on the agenda for lobbying and advocacy
Decisions about adjustments to the agenda for lobbying and advocacy
Decisions about who will represent the partnership at the national level
Decisions about who will represent the partnership at the international level
Decisions about which external advisors and suppliers to hire for the implementation of a project
Monitoring evaluation and learning
Decisions about what type of indicators will be measured
Decisions about who is responsible for measuring which indicators
Decisions about who will conduct a mid-term review of the programme
Decisions about who will conduct the end evaluation of the programme
Decisions about the terms of reference for conducting mid-term reviews and end evaluations
Decisions about the content of evaluation reports
Decisions about lessons learnt that need to be documented and shared
Accountability
Decisions about what to report to the back donor
Decisions about who the results will be reported to
Decisions about adjustments in the agreement with the back donor
Follow-up
Decisions about which interventions/projects need to be scaled up.
Decisions about whether to continue the partnership programme
Decisions about which partners to include in the continuation of the partnership programme

FAQ 9: **Step 1. is about identifying and listing important decisions to be made in the partnership. How can important decisions be formulated in an unambiguous and meaningful way?**

A: The challenge is to formulate decisions that are balanced between being too general and too specific. For example, *Decisions about the allocation of resources* can be a formulation that is too broad for having a meaningful discussion. Every partner will, in one way or another, have some decision-making power in allocating resources. This issue is, at what level? Therefore, in many cases, it could be better to split the *allocation of resources* into several sub-categories, such as for example:

- *Decisions about the allocation of resources among countries*
- *Decisions about the allocation of resources among partners in a country*
- *Decisions about the allocation of resources to specific projects*

There is also a risk of becoming too specific and creating too many subcategories. Bear in mind that each subcategory tends to be discussed. If the subcategorization is too detailed, such discussions may end up in tiresome and time-consuming splitting of hairs. Avoid this by focusing on the big issues.