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STARTING ADVOCACY PROGRAMMES FROM THE SOUTH

Rethinking multi-country programming

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Introduction: multi-country programming as a missing factor shaping civil society organization collaborations

Over the past ten years, I have been involved with multiple research, consultancy, and evaluation projects on advocacy programmes administered by civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Netherlands, their partners in the Global South, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the main donor for these programmes. I have also been closely involved in the debate on relations within the sector, seeking to contribute to the transformations that so many think are needed. As a researcher, I observe a major lacuna in the debate: Multi-country programming is not being discussed as a factor shaping collaborations among CSOs. In this chapter, I discuss why I think this is an important factor and how it could be addressed. Here, I speak from my experience, which is rooted in the Dutch context, especially related to advocacy programming. My focus in this chapter is on what I call ‘advocacy for development’, defined as ‘a wide range of activities conducted to influence decision makers at different levels with the overall aim of combatting the structural causes of poverty and injustice’ (drawing on Morariu & Brennan, 2009, p. 100). This can include activities such as lobbying or demonstrations, awareness raising, legal action, and public education, as well as capacity building, constructing networks and relationships, and articulating views and interests through these networks and relationships.

In this chapter, I address the role of what I call ‘Northern CSOs’, which includes non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based in the North and international NGOs (INGOs) that have multiple offices worldwide but have programmes that may be led from the office in a single country, such as the Netherlands. The key feature to be addressed is the *role from a distance* of managing multi-country programmes, which is a typical role for a Northern CSO office. Below, I introduce

the practice of multi-country CSO advocacy programming by the Netherlands government and explain how the roles of Northern and Southern CSOs are constituted through such programmes. I then point out important limits in how power in CSO programming in development is presently discussed using the concept of 'shifting the power'. Finally, I propose an alternative approach that starts out from Southern agency in specific contexts, turning programming upside down while also capitalizing on Northern CSOs' power.

The case of the Netherlands' support to CSOs

The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs places high importance on advocacy as a means of achieving inclusive development, as civil society advocacy can help articulate and advance the voices of societal groups – especially those who are marginalized. To provide support (and also partnership; see van Wessel et al., 2020), the Ministry has published calls for proposals that encourage large submissions to be sent in by consortia of CSOs, taking this approach in 2010, 2015, and 2020. Each time, support was offered for five years. Commonly, programmes costing 40 million euros or more over the five years are funded. In the present policy programme, Strengthening Civil Society, for example, 42 consortia are supported from 2021 to 2025 at a total cost of 1.364 billion euros. Typically, three to six highly professionalized CSOs, including many INGOs, form a consortium. In the current programme, it is mandatory to have at least one Southern-based CSO partner in the consortium. Many have more. Typically, the consortium develops and manages a programme that is in large part carried out by 'local partners' contracted by one of the consortium members at country level. The funded programmes typically cover multiple countries in the Global South – sometimes straddling different continents – and are based on a programme-level Theory of Change centred on a single theme, such as climate change, food security, or women's rights. The Ministry's policies provide space for contextualization and adaptation over time. The current funding programme seeks to advance local ownership: Consortia must have policies to ensure control is shared with local partners. However, generically formulated, decontextualized advocacy programmes produced by the CSO consortia are initially approved as the starting points for programmes. Country selection is done by the CSOs, but the Ministry has increasingly sought to set conditions to align programming with its own priorities regarding themes, policy objectives, and countries. Importantly, at this stage, the 'local partners', who are to carry out much of the programmes, are commonly not yet part of the process.

It is after a programme has been approved by the Ministry that the 'consortium member' CSOs select their country-level 'local' partners. This selection can be based on multiple criteria, such as ideological alignment, sound financial management, and other requirements set by the back donor, as well as capacities and existing relations. Fit with the programme's basic objectives, understandings of issues, and strategies is also a requirement. Country offices of Northern CSOs have a leading role here and are often given significant space to decide which

partners to contract, provided they fit the programme. Although this contracting mostly happens on an individual basis, in some cases, groups of in-country organizations can apply to be funded. Such groups could be a country-level CSO and its partners or the informal groups it supports, for example. Sometimes, programmes seek to capitalize on existing CSO networks in a country, but, in many cases, direct relations between a consortium member organization and its country-level CSO partners are the most important, as these are the entities between which contracts are made. The CSO consortia leading the programme do often seek to build coherence between global and country-level work, stimulating exchange, alignment, and collaboration among country-level partners. In some cases, this works (see e.g. a story about a Nigerian coalition in van Wessel et al., 2021). A programme can also provide opportunities to develop relations, shared objectives, and coordinated strategy. However, collaboration is not necessarily sought by partners, who may primarily seek funding to advance their organizational interests and objectives, which may only partly match the programme. Moreover, partners may feel placed in what some might call an arranged marriage with CSOs that are not their natural partners.

In line with principles of adaptive management (see Gutheil, 2021), the CSO policy programmes funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs were designed to be context-sensitive. Early in the process, these programmes have ‘inception periods’ during which programme-level Theories of Change are to be adapted at country level by the country-level CSOs involved (see e.g. Ho et al., 2020). The programmes are also expected to learn and adapt their Theories of Change over time. This contextualization and adaptation do not necessarily happen to the same degree across different CSO consortia or their different subprogrammes. The roles of Theories of Change are also diverse across different consortia, and these tools are not necessarily prominent in the programmes’ everyday running. Additionally, at country level, CSOs may make various choices in terms of how they shape their work, but this will not necessarily show up in reports. Given that interaction with country-level actors is limited, consortium member CSOs working from the Netherlands may have limited information on what actually happens at the country level. Their attention is necessarily divided over multiple countries and sometimes more than one programme. Although some staff members have the chance to focus on programme content, for many, other aspects take up much of the attention: managerial tasks (such as drawing up agreements, making sure financial management is in order and that reports are produced and of the right quality, making sure the programme criteria are met in terms of focus and addressing required elements such as gender, supporting learning processes, and making sure everything is set up and reported according to donor requirements).

From control to contribution

The power of Northern CSOs leading development programmes has been heavily criticized. Specifically, this critique focuses on their power as exercised

through managerialism, understood as administrative control, constricting the actions of others. In the current debate on decolonizing development, anti-racism, and #shiftthepower, Northern CSOs are often taken to be the main culprit. However, often working with large institutional donors, Northern CSOs are given responsibility for multi-million-euro programmes, with predefined understandings of issues, objectives, and other key elements. As they are a main channel for donors to distribute funding and carry out donor policies, Northern CSOs are often in a position where they appear to have little choice but to force their partners to comply with conditions that have been predefined in interaction with the donors holding them responsible for their assigned tasks. This form of control is a system feature rather than a feature of just the Northern CSOs involved, and it deserves to be addressed as such.

Researchers have also advanced more complex notions of power that move beyond control. Gaventa's power cube, for example, conceptualizes power as multidimensional, having different forms, showing up at different levels, and existing in different types of spaces (Gaventa, 2019, 2021). Scholars (e.g. Gaventa, 2021; Haugaard, 2012; Pansardi & Bindi, 2021) have also conceptualized power as 'power over', 'power to', 'power with', and 'power within'. While these ideas have been taken up and even become popular in some discussions on power in international development, engagement with power in the production of solutions for civil society collaborations has been limited to addressing 'power over' – much in line with the constricted approach to administrative control discussed above. This is the form of power that is about domination – the ability to constrain the choices of another actor. In this context, 'power over' is typically associated with negative terms: domination, coercion, and disempowerment. How to end this 'power over' is the central question addressed in the current search for solutions regarding power in CSO collaborations. The resultant calls for more direct funding of Southern CSOs aim to take 'power over' away from Northern CSOs and put Southern CSOs in control (Saldinger, 2021). Community philanthropy likewise aims to take 'power over' away from Northern CSOs and put Southern CSOs in control, integrating the aim of enabling Southern CSOs to have closer relations and interactions with their own constituencies. New governance structures/partnership setups aim to share/mitigate the 'power over' of Northern CSOs over their Southern partners and thereby make development more locally led. The wider debate on decolonizing aid addresses assumptions and practices underlying and reproducing 'power over', calling for more acknowledgement and recognition of Southern-based expertise and agency, the end of racism, and a reshaping of the language of development, which helps define and reproduce inequalities (see e.g. Paige et al., 2021).

The approaches to reimagining CSO relations begin from the starting point that the necessary transformation centres on power and thus conclude that addressing inequalities will open up a world of possibilities for Southern CSOs to flourish. Northern CSOs, then, are placed in a position where they must

hand over power. Power is a zero-sum game – a set quantity that is moved from one side to another. Northern CSOs must give up their power, privilege, and prejudice to decolonize their relations and focus on the empowerment of CSOs in the Global South. In publications on the topic, it appears to be self-evident that the role of Northern CSOs will decrease as this happens. Their role is to be supportive, but they are primarily to make way (see e.g. Bond, 2021; Paige et al., 2021). While I applaud these important efforts, I note that there is little discussion of possible futures for Northern CSOs, which is surprising given the other forms of power held by Northern CSOs (power to, power with), which could help development efforts with Southern actors in leading roles. Further, among the Northern CSOs I have worked with, I have thus far not seen a fundamental rethinking of the future of Northern CSOs that looks beyond the shifts in ‘power over’ that are presently being called for. There is thus also not much of an energizing alternative vision for the future, it seems, when it comes to the question facing Northern CSOs – how to collaborate with Southern CSOs, beyond power shifting.

In the academic literature, some works do provide alternative perspectives. A rare discussion of INGO roles provided by Mitchell et al. (2020) described ‘transnational NGOs’ as declining in relevance and in need of fundamental transformation to remain relevant. They portrayed INGOs as defined by legacy architecture, collectivizing and redistributing resources, and based on a charity model that is not properly geared towards achieving the societal transformations the organizations want. These organizations are at risk of ‘successful irrelevance’, meaning they will likely be able to continue to exist and administer programmes as they have done before, satisfying the demands of the aid system, but that they will not be in a position to address the root causes of inequality and injustice. According to Mitchell et al. (2020, pp. 230–266), fundamental changes are needed from within INGOs; these authors call for new organizational models, leadership, and structures that address the standards and regulations that are currently geared towards legality and accountability rather than facilitating the changes and transformations to which these organizations want to contribute. Other scholars have pointed to alternative ways of conceptualizing Northern CSO roles in CSO collaborations in development that relativize these roles. For instance, Shipton and Dauvergne’s (2021) analysis of South–BRICS–North collaborations centred on CSO collaboration in the Global South and showed Northern CSOs in complementary roles. Roepstorff (2020), analysing localization of humanitarian action, problematized the conceptualization of localization in North–South binary terms, given how local actors are enmeshed in international networks. Although I concur with these insights, they do not yet address the centrality of Northern CSOs administering multi-country programmes in development or advance alternatives that break the constraints that this practice imposes on all parties involved. Below, I offer such an alternative, proposing that programming be turned upside down by centring it on Southern agency, while simultaneously

capitalizing on the ability of Northern CSOs' power to support action led by Southern CSOs. From these starting points, avenues for building new roles for Northern CSOs are presented.

Turning programming upside down

It is widely accepted that development programming needs to be context-sensitive. Adaptive management is prominent in development discourse, but this process is as yet poorly institutionalized (Gutheil, 2021). However, even if it were taken up more broadly, adaptive management is a Northern-based paradigm (Gutheil, 2021) that maintains the idea that development can be initiated from outside a particular context and subsequently be adapted to that context. This implies that starting points in terms of understandings, interventions, and objectives are already set. It is thus not a paradigm that allows for local leadership, but one that allows for local leeway. In recent years, a team of researchers with whom I have worked have studied how CSOs in India give shape to their roles (Katyaini et al., 2021; Rajeshwari et al., 2020; Syal et al., 2021; van Wessel et al., 2020). Across the board, it struck me how the CSOs we spoke with, while in 'partnership' programmes with Northern CSOs, were in a universe far removed from the programme context in which their work was supposed to fit. Without exception, they were seeking to fulfil their potential by relating to the possibilities and constraints of their context, as they interpreted them, based on their contextual expertise. Crucially, the capacity to engage with their own contexts defined the nature of the action and change they envisaged. International collaborations or influences were seen as complementary rather than leading and, ideally, as supportive. These CSOs shaped their roles while embedded in relations with their constituencies, other CSOs, and the state. Engaging their contexts from their own perspectives, the CSOs constructed the nature of their work and their way of relating. Contexts and relations both offered possibilities and imposed constraints for the organizations, as was the case, for example, with relations with funders or the state, which would offer avenues for action or constrain the space for action, imposing understandings and ambitions and forcing the CSOs to reorient, at least publicly. Their roles were thus relationally defined in reflexive interplay between the organizations and their relations and contexts, rather than being simply a matter of 'traits' such as organizational type, capacities, and preferred strategy.

Acknowledging the contextualized nature of agency

The studied CSOs often shaped their roles as part of existing networks, with key roles played by domestic actors of various kinds, engaging in ongoing change processes that were nationally or sub-nationally specific in important ways. To the extent that Northern CSOs were important, they appeared to be seen as funders and actors that could play complementary roles to contribute to reaching

the Southern organizations' objectives, as understood by the Southern CSOs themselves, taking their own organizations' understandings, capacities, and objectives as starting points. Agency emerged in how the actors related to the possibilities and constraints of their own contextual setting, as interpreted by the actors involved. Our findings reflect agency as conceptualized in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998, p. 970) seminal paper on agency, where agency is defined as

the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.

This definition encompasses three constitutive elements of agency. One, iteration, refers to 'the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971). The second element, projectivity, refers to actors' 'imaginative generation [...] of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future' (p. 971). Third, the practical-evaluative element of agency involves 'the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations' (p. 971). The CSOs in our research were indeed seen to act as agents in the sense that they built their perspectives on what they could be and how they could act on the basis of their engagements with their contexts over time, building understandings about what was possible, right, and desirable for them to be and do within these contexts.

I propose this temporal-contextualized understanding of agency as an important new angle from which to approach CSOs' roles and collaborations. With this understanding, reshaping CSO collaborations is not primarily a question of shifting power, but of acknowledging and starting from the agency that can transform CSOs into change agents, with 'outsiders' to country-based processes playing supportive and complementary roles *of necessity*.

Re-understanding the roles of Northern CSOs

Here, I relate to two small but important existing lines of research. The first line has long stressed the need to approach CSOs' roles as contextual (Lewis & Opoku-Mensah, 2006). Some of this work has focused on identifying contextual factors to explain CSOs' roles (e.g. Marchetti, 2018). Other work has explored how CSOs relate to elements of their context (e.g. Kamstra et al., 2013) or how elements of the context shape CSOs' roles (e.g. Kamstra et al., 2016).

A second, still smaller line of research has shown that CSOs should be seen as agents who negotiate their roles within their contexts, manoeuvring possibilities (e.g. Aarts & Cavatorta, 2013; Hunt, 2008). These two lines of research show, respectively, the importance of context for roles and the importance of seeing CSOs as agents. Neither line of research yet goes to the deeper level of understanding how the embeddedness in context, over time, shapes CSOs' imaginings of what development could be and what they, as actors in that context, could be and do as *naturally privileged* interpreters of the situation – a position that could never be taken over by outsiders.

It follows from this that it has also remained elusive in the literature and in practice what Northern CSOs seeking to support civil society in the Global South should do about context – how relating to context and accepting the leadership of Southern CSOs within their own contexts can help shape Northern CSOs' roles, beyond the constantly repeated pleas for shifting or sharing power and addressing the ills of domination. Over the years, people working for Southern CSOs whom I encountered through diverse projects have shed light on this, consistently referring to specific forms of added value that Northern CSOs had for them, based on their contextually defined perspectives on their own roles.

These CSOs defined the added value of Northern CSOs based on complementarity with their own organization's needs. The Indian CSO representatives we spoke with valued collaboration with international CSOs to the extent that these organizations could help them attain their own established objectives. There was very little discussion of complementarity in terms of collective action on 'global' issues or the grand need for 'common ground' and collective endeavour, challenges that are commonly the focus of discussions on collaboration in CSO consortia and alliances. Although the interviewees were aware of the global nature of issues and were open to internationally developed approaches, the conceptualization of their role and of complementarity with international CSOs in executing that role was largely domestically oriented. A first complementarity they identified was enhanced reputation through association. Indian CSO staff valued being associated with international CSOs, stating that collaboration with international CSOs increased their visibility, credibility, and prestige in domestic CSO and government circles, stating, for example, that meetings with policymakers could be organized more easily when foreign names were attached. Similarly, participation in international fora could be helpful at the domestic level. As one CSO staff member explained, 'if your work is showcased in an international forum through partnerships and collaborations, the state might think of taking up some of your ideas in their policy'. Association with international CSOs thus appears to expand Indian CSOs' mandate in their domestic context in the eyes of important stakeholders, including the state. In the view of some interviewees, association with international CSOs also helped them to gain recognition internationally (e.g. with foreign funders that may classify a CSO in terms of traits such as capacity and values because of its association with international CSOs or networks) (cf. Kumi & Elbers, 2022). A second complementarity lies in

the exposure to international frameworks and ideas offered by engagement with international CSOs. Through international collaboration, the Indian CSOs were exposed to new and globally current ideas and developments. This, again, helped the CSOs domestically, given the high status of such frameworks and the ambition of (and related pressure from) the Indian state to relate to such frameworks. As one interviewee explained, 'Global partnerships really help. A global mandate is necessary to highlight an issue. With a global mandate and global events, you can do anything you want – with its backing'. Relatedly, interviewees mentioned the added value of international CSOs' knowledge and expertise, which exposed them to new knowledge, approaches, and professional practices.

According to the Indian CSO representatives, a third type of complementarity offered by international CSOs involves international CSOs' ability to provide funding with a longer-term vision, in contrast to the short-term, visible results often demanded by domestic funders (van Wessel et al., 2020).

Similarly, a research project with Cordaid on linkages between civil society advocacy at international and domestic levels brought out that the interviewees (staff of diverse CSOs working in a Cordaid-administered advocacy programme in diverse Southern countries) approached this question from domestically defined perspectives. They articulated different forms of relevance for linking national and international advocacy. However, this relevance was consistently articulated from the perspective of national-level advocacy. For example, international-level advocacy was seen to strengthen national-level advocacy in diverse ways. Collaboration between international- and national-level advocates could support national advocacy by drawing attention and mobilizing support for country-level issues and efforts, strengthening national-level capacity, raising profiles of national-level advocates, and demonstrating that the national-level advocacy was part of a global effort (van Wessel, 2021). Roles for international-level advocates in the programme were also systematically framed in terms of their capacity to strengthen the national advocacy led by national-level advocates. International advocates could strengthen the capacity of the national-level staff members through, for example, coaching, training, translating, helping with connecting, and learning by doing together. International advocates could also support national-level advocacy by, for instance, helping with analysis and stepping in to conduct joint advocacy targeting international institutions. They could put their international advocacy expertise to work by sharing strategic information, analysing how developments and possibilities at different levels are linked, and broadening national-level advocates' perspectives. At the international level, international advocates could build support for national-level issues to influence national-level processes internationally, as well as drawing on national-level results for this international advocacy.

Another theme observed in previous work with CSOs in various contexts is that of handling constricting civic space. Here, too, my colleagues and I found that domestic-level CSOs spoke from the same position when they defined the added value of Northern CSOs. Staff from some Southern CSOs working in

conflict prevention and peacebuilding spoke of the protection they sensed came from being embedded in the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), an international network of CSOs working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. They mentioned the enhanced legitimacy they felt they obtained through their engagement with GPPAC, improving their image by association. In other cases, they reported being granted enhanced space because GPPAC provided the legitimizing umbrella of a global network (Arensman et al., 2015, p. 520). Notably, in other contexts, such associations may be detrimental, contributing to the delegitimization of domestic CSOs as foreign agents, bringing alien values into society, and lacking the legitimacy of an obvious domestic constituency. As Fransen et al. (2021) have reported, INGOs, then, may continue to provide support – but from behind the scenes, with domestic CSOs acting more publicly. Alternatively, in some situations, INGOs are able to speak out in ways that domestic CSOs cannot without risking reprisal (Fransen et al., 2021). An interviewee from a CSO in Uganda explained this, discussing the role of Cordaid in advocacy within Africa and referring to an international advocate working with Cordaid’s Global Office (in Cordaid, those in this role are commonly referred to as ‘experts’):

It provides protection for those who are speaking, and we’re trying to provide the voices. In this work that we do, governments sometimes are not happy when you speak the truth... You can be attacked then [...] But if Cordaid talks about it, there’s nothing anybody is going to do. Cordaid is not based in Africa. [Expert] does not work there. And they don’t know where [expert] is getting [the] information. That would be a kind of protection.

(van Wessel, 2021)

These insights indicate a range of ways in which Northern-based NGOs and INGOs can contribute to the transformative efforts of Southern-based CSOs, centred on specific forms of added value associated with their status and capacities. This can form a basis for stepping away from multi-country programming and for reimagining roles. The idea may seem far-fetched, given how established the practice of multi-country programming is as what makes collaboration possible, with its coherent formulation, contractual accountabilities on the shoulders of the CSOs who administer these programmes, and ‘partners’ perhaps adapting within limits. However, the foundations underlying current practices continue to be undermined, and various innovative structures of collaboration are being developed and experimented with; this approach could be attached to these attempts at innovation.

Reshaping Northern CSOs’ roles

A Northern CSO staff member once wondered, when speaking with me, referring to their Southern partners, ‘Would they work with us if we didn’t have the

money?’ Given how many Southern CSOs see multiple forms of added value in Northern CSOs, there is reason to think that many would. Focusing on an organization’s ‘power to’ – its capacity for action – would mean capitalizing on its complementary added value in collaborations, whereas focusing on its ‘power with’ would mean capitalizing on the collective ability/empowerment that could emerge through collaborations. This would imply a shift from creating and managing interventions to contributing to change processes with others in the lead, while still making the most of Northern CSOs’ power, rather than delegitimizing and discarding it. Key elements of Northern CSOs’ roles in advocacy programmes that ‘start from the South’ would include the following.

Rethinking identity

To establish how and to what to contribute, organizations need an agenda, an understanding of the strengths they have and want to invest in further, and a vision on how these strengths can contribute to their agenda when they assume a contributing rather than leading role. Northern CSOs should ask themselves several identity-centred questions: What can our understanding of who we are, our role, and our legitimacy be when we don’t set the parameters for programmes but, instead, contribute? What do we bring to the table that is true to our understandings of realities and issues and how to address them, while respecting that we are contributing to the work of people whose understandings may be different? Organizations indeed would need to reflect on how to relate, as organizations, to the diverse understandings they confront in settings where they wish to contribute, as they would need to do more than simply accommodate diversity – They would need to accept that perspectives of others must be understood and accepted to build a contribution in interaction with these. Linking up in this way may require Northern CSOs to reconsider how, and to what extent, some of their driving values may lose their shine of universality in honest interaction with the diversity of values with which they find themselves faced in the Global South.

Linking up with what is already there

Related to the above, to be able to contribute to existing and emerging agendas of CSOs in the Global South, and to link up with these, Northern CSOs would need to identify locally salient agendas in the Global South around which people are organizing and then relate to these agendas without flattening diversities or rejecting unexpected approaches and priorities.

In addition, if it is accepted that Southern CSOs are to be in the lead and that collaboration is to be based on that leadership rather than on a Southern CSO’s fit with the starting points and requirements of an externally predefined programme, the legitimacy of Southern CSOs as partners would have to be defined on the basis of the approach and quality of their representation of local constituencies or locally recognized needs and values. This challenge has hardly been

addressed thus far, and it is one of the most important gaps in the debate on reimagining civil society collaborations. It is also one not easily resolved, given its magnitude and complexity (see Katyaini et al., 2021; van Wessel et al., 2020).

Collaboration can involve individual Southern CSOs, but, given questions of scale and the complexity of the issues, it is important to support existing, emergent and potential networks and movements and to engage with those that are working on an issue without the need for funding as a driver. This can help Northern CSOs to link up with advocacy processes in the South that are already underway and facilitate building on already flowing local energies, while also making programmes more process-oriented and contextually embedded. This approach moves advocacy programming away from an intervention orientation, which tends to overestimate the impact of individual programmes or interventions and to discount the efforts of other actors and processes involved. Networks and movements may be sub-national, national, regional, and/or international. Engaging with these to strengthen and contribute to them on the basis of the assessment of fit and added value may also help address the unhelpful tendency to think in terms of local/international and North/South binaries (cf. Roepstorff, 2020). Further, building collaboration on the basis of collective purpose and mutuality may help address the sensitive topic of the role of the Northern CSO 'country office', which is at once local and a foreign outpost competing with what some see as the 'truly local'.

Northern CSOs can explore how already-existing CSO advocacy on an issue in a Southern context involves diverse civil society actors and complementarities among them. This involves answering fundamental questions regarding CSOs' agency, as conceptualized above: What, exactly, are the different CSOs working on an issue trying to achieve? From what understandings rooted in past experiences do these CSOs work, and what future vision and capacities to work towards that vision are present? Through what kinds of relating to the context and other actors? What forms of support from the Northern side can best strengthen the ongoing efforts? Northern CSOs engaging with such questions can maintain an openness to working with actors that are meaningfully contributing to change but that would not normally be considered eligible as partners. This may include, for example, of social movements, platforms, and individual activists.

Such an approach could fit well with current tendencies to focus on strengthening voices in the Global South, but it would be good to be specific regarding what is meant by that. Starting from the South in strengthening voices can mean supporting exchange and integration of perspectives, knowledge, and scale in cases of complex, multi-dimensional issues. It can also mean facilitating the articulation and organization of the voices of societal groups that are relatively less heard, or whose understandings and agendas strengthen those who are not well represented in existing civil society or who are commonly left without needed support. Further, it could mean helping to make sure that the full diversity of voices in a context is covered – 'discursive representation' (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2008). Finally, it could also mean interacting with Southern CSOs and publics

on issues and perspectives that are new to them or on which new opportunities or threats are emerging.

Working with opportunities

From the social movement literature, we know that social movement coalition formation depends on multiple conditions, including social ties and the interactions necessary to build and sustain these, conducive institutional structures, fit in terms of culture and ideology, and resources. But also of central importance is what to come together *on* – that is, opportunities and threats that can energize and focus collective strategic action (Van Dyke & Amos, 2017). However, within the aid system, opportunities to work on something depend on opportunities to obtain funding. An organization's agency, grounded in its past engagement with its context, in which its visioning of possibilities is rooted, can become muddled with the burden of meeting outsiders' expectations, disrupting their engagement with the opportunities and threats that their agency enables them to identify and act on. Working with existing, emergent, or potential coalitions in a particular context can help make sure that Northern CSOs are working with the opportunities and threats identified by Southern CSOs as starting points for a programme.

Complementarity

On the basis of the above points, organizations can offer added value of various kinds to contextually embedded CSOs, networks, and movements, supporting their efforts to contribute to change processes in which they are involved. This would mean exploring where agendas can meet and uncovering how different approaches and strengths can complement each other in a Southern-centred change process. For Northern CSOs, this would require articulating and contributing specific forms of added value that capitalize on their power as Northern CSOs. This can bring out and strengthen Northern CSOs' roles in new ways, highlighting and advancing the importance of their specific capacities and contributions. This can include, for example, mobilizing public opinion in the Global North, engaging Northern institutions, raising funds, bringing in international frameworks and international dimensions of issues, engaging in convening, linking, and brokering, contributing technical expertise, coaching, and providing services. Building complementary roles and relations rooted in solidarity with what is already there or emerging in a context (Deveaux, 2021; Garbe, 2022, see also Chapter 2) can help avoid reproducing Northern dominance.

Conclusion

Moving away from multi-country programming and towards context-specific contributions to change would be transformative for Northern CSOs. To

contribute meaningfully to Southern-centred processes working with the elements delineated above, Northern CSOs would need to be highly knowledgeable about the contexts and the makeup of civil society in these contexts. Based on this knowledge, they could establish how to contribute to the ongoing work of CSOs, networks, and movements in a particular context in meaningful ways. They could build mutuality rooted in understanding, trust, and acceptance of a contributing rather than a leading role, while still working towards their own agendas and sustaining and growing their specific forms of added value. Given these requirements, it would make sense for individual Northern CSOs to limit their work to a select set of countries or regions and a well-demarcated set of themes.

The proposed approach would require establishing funding and governance structures to fit, enabling fundraising, agenda setting, strategizing, and execution of programmes, as well as their governance. Given how control over funding creates power inequalities, the transformations imagined above can likely only come about when supported by the changes in ‘power over’ on which so many are working. Innovative upcoming models for the structure and governance of CSO collaborations might be able to provide solutions here, offering alternative ways of handling fundamental questions of control and accountability. Approaches of donors also require transformation to facilitate turning programming upside down. This would change or even leave behind the central ‘fundermediary’ role of Northern CSOs and raise new questions of control and accountability from donors’ perspectives, which would need to be addressed. This may all seem far-fetched now, but, soon, it may not.

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