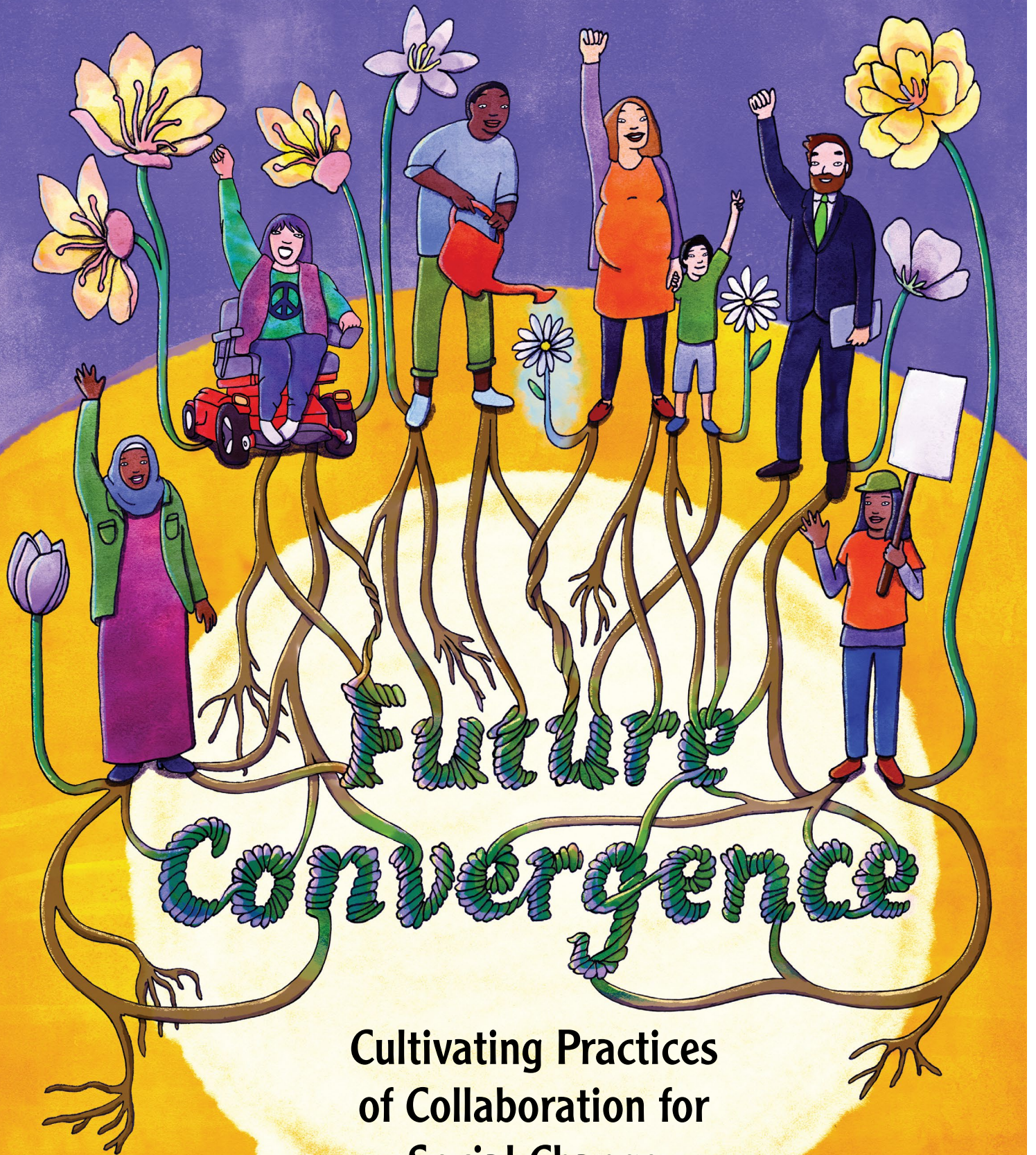


THE FORUS BAREFOOT GUIDE



**Cultivating Practices  
of Collaboration for  
Social Change**

By the Forus Barefoot Guide Writers' Collective



THE FORUS BAREFOOT GUIDE

# Future Convergence

## Cultivating Practices of Collaboration for Social Change

By the Forus Barefoot Guide Writers' Collective

2021



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**Forus**

Forus is a member-led network of 69 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from all continents representing over 22,000 NGOs active locally and internationally on development, human rights and environmental issues.



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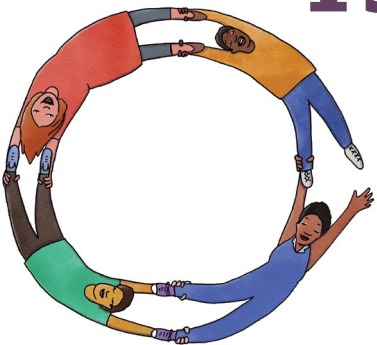


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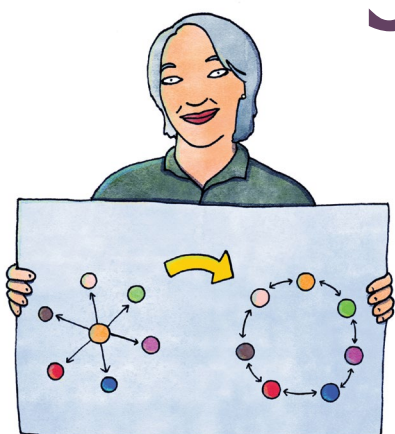


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# Dear Readers...



*Welcome. I am Anka, one of four Forus Barefoot Guide hosts. We all know that collaboration is vital for systemic and genuinely transformative social change. But how do we practice collaboration in these times? That is the question driving this Barefoot Guide. This publication originated from questions and writings of members of Forus participating in the Forus Leadership Development Programme from 2017 to 2020. We then drew in contributions from many other members and allies of Forus. It has been a global process of collective learning and collaboration reflecting the same values and approaches we describe in this Barefoot Guide.*

*And I am Manu. This Guide values our human history on this planet as a dense and intricate story of committed social change actors. From our ancestors to today's activists, we have always struggled against greed, hatred, fear and the love of power. Throughout history we have pursued a deeper humanity, from the intimate love we have for those close to us to the solidarity we express with others, even if on the other side of the world. These conscious and unconscious strivings, from the smallest acts of kindness to the largest movements for social revolution, have carried us forward as we stumble into an uncertain future.*



*Sani is my name. Humanity is facing a complex and deepening existential crisis, of our own making, where several global megatrends are coalescing to produce a catastrophic situation for humanity and the planet. Moving through and beyond this crisis to create a dignified life for all on a life-sustaining planet, may indeed be our greatest accomplishment ever. We have to find new ways in which to respond together, requiring unprecedented levels of trust, care and collaboration on a scale never seen before in our history.*



*And I am Morgan. We believe that civil society organisations have a unique and historic role to play to challenge, re-orient and galvanise actors from all spheres of society to work together, reducing polarisation and nurturing our common humanity. We need to learn to engage government and business to put people and planet before power and profit. But we also need to change ourselves as civil society, to step out of our silos and corners and turn towards each other to mobilise and multiply our collective potential.*



This Barefoot Guide has some challenging perspectives of what must be faced and what we are striving for. We explore real experiences of innovative initiatives, practices, ways of collaborating and leadership forms that offer hope for a way forward for humanity.

Like all Barefoot Guides this is not a book of answers and recipes, but one of sharing our questions, experiences and insights for you the readers to learn from, for your own challenges and practices. That is where the answers lie.



# Understanding and Facing the Deepening Global Crisis



Anka, I'm frustrated. Global disaster is staring us in the face, but we seem to be wandering about in confusion like lost sheep! Why have we become so hesitant to act?

Many people are overwhelmed and depressed, needing a clearer perspective of what we are facing and what a different future could look like. And helping them to know about and join with the many people and organisations who are already collaborating in all kinds of surprising, innovative and effective ways, is vital.



## BEGINNING WITH QUESTIONS...

We seem to be so busy with our project deadlines, budget balancing and donor demands, but how often do we stop to look for what really matters? Are our projects really shifting power in ways that make any long-term differences?

Many of us know we should change how we go about social action and that this requires us to collaborate more, to tackle the big questions of the future. But how do we free ourselves from the forces that keep us trapped and tinkering in our isolated initiatives?

Challenging questions, but let's begin with this one:

## What really matters?

### OVERSTEPPING THE PLANETARY BOUNDARIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Burkhard Gnärig (2015) identifies several megatrends that have combined to produce the grave reality that is being faced in our world today, characterised as humanity being at "the edge of a precipice". The most significant of these coalescing crises are climate change, poverty and inequality.

For the last 150 years, the exploitation of the Earth's resources to feed rampant consumption and economic growth for the profit of a few has become unsustainable, beyond the planet's capacity to provide and restore itself. In 2009, the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Australian National University introduced the concept of *planetary boundaries* as the "safe operating space for humanity". If any of these boundaries were exceeded there would be an increasing risk of "irreversible and abrupt environmental change".

Nine vital categories were identified and at that time it was claimed that we had already overstepped in the categories of *climate change, loss of biodiversity, the destruction of soils as a key carbon sink and interference with the Earth's nitrogen and phosphorous cycles.*

“

*Slowly, like the rising sun, it is dawning on us, as we wriggle out the past, that we find the present most perilous and the future daunting with its quiet and relentless refusal to completely reveal itself..”*

Mongane Wally Serote



In Paris 2015, the Conference of the Parties 21 (COP 21), saw all countries committing to keep global warming well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels while trying to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C. This half degree matters a lot in terms of the scale of the impacts on the Earth's ecosystems and on its population. The findings of the Intergovernmental Panel in Climate Change (IPCC) show that the world will face severe climate impacts even with 1.5°C of warming, and the effects get significantly worse in a world with 2°C of warming. We need to halve our annual emissions by 2030 and work to restore the earth's "soil carbon sponge" to reach net zero by 2050 to even have a chance to limit warming to 1.5°C.

Thus, we have only a small window of several years remaining in which we can introduce decisive measures to limit global warming and adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

While governments lurch forward from one United Nations CoP to the next, struggling to find agreement on ambitious commitments and policies, every year hundreds of thousands perish and hundreds of millions are hit by "natural" disasters, loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, population displacement, health effects and more. This suffering is accentuated by huge economic losses again impacting the most vulnerable and marginalised citizens on the planet.

Gnärig argues that taking the example of climate change, the need to change our approach to global development is becoming sufficiently clear. We are interfering with a highly complex and closely interrelated set of vital conditions for the future existence of humanity and of biodiversity.

The alarm bells are ringing. Who is actively listening?

“

*We are interfering with a highly complex and closely interrelated set of vital conditions for the future existence of humanity and of biodiversity. The alarm bells are ringing. Who is actively listening?*

## GRINDING POVERTY

The extreme poverty that close to 10 percent of the world lives in, can be and needs to be eradicated, lying well within the means and capability of humanity.

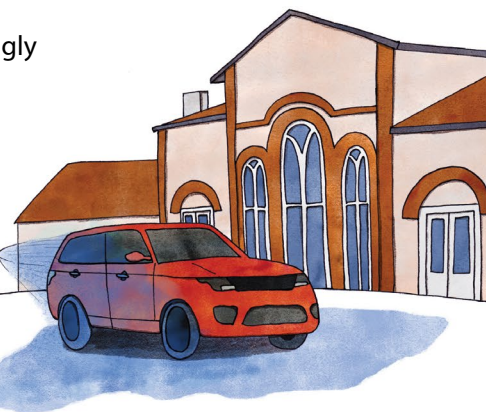
The vicious cycle of poverty means that lifelong barriers and troubles are passed on from one generation to the next and within these contexts the most marginalised groups such as women and children are disproportionately affected. They continue to bear the high cost of multi-dimensional poverty with deprivations experienced in health, education and living standards such as access to clean energy, sanitation and drinking water. Poor nutrition and health translate into stunted growth and low education outcomes for children.

Irene Khan, former head of *Amnesty International*, defines poverty as “a human rights problem that can be addressed most effectively through respect for human rights”. While there is no question that substantial financial resources are required to end poverty, the political basis of poverty eradication is the starting point. Supporting people to address power imbalances to themselves, claim and enjoy all of their rights is the final answer to poverty, not offering charity to the needy.

## RAMPANT INEQUALITY

Apart from the stigma and suffering it causes, inequality threatens economic development, slows growth and fuels market instability and crises and should be a concern for everyone. In a recent report Oxfam (2020) asserts that extreme inequality is out of control.

Hundreds of millions of people are living in extreme poverty while increasingly huge rewards go to those at the very top. There are more billionaires than ever before with rapidly growing fortunes. Meanwhile, the world's poorest are growing even poorer. Many governments, in the pay of the very rich, fuel this, massively under taxing corporations and wealthy individuals yet underfunding public services.



## DIGITALISATION

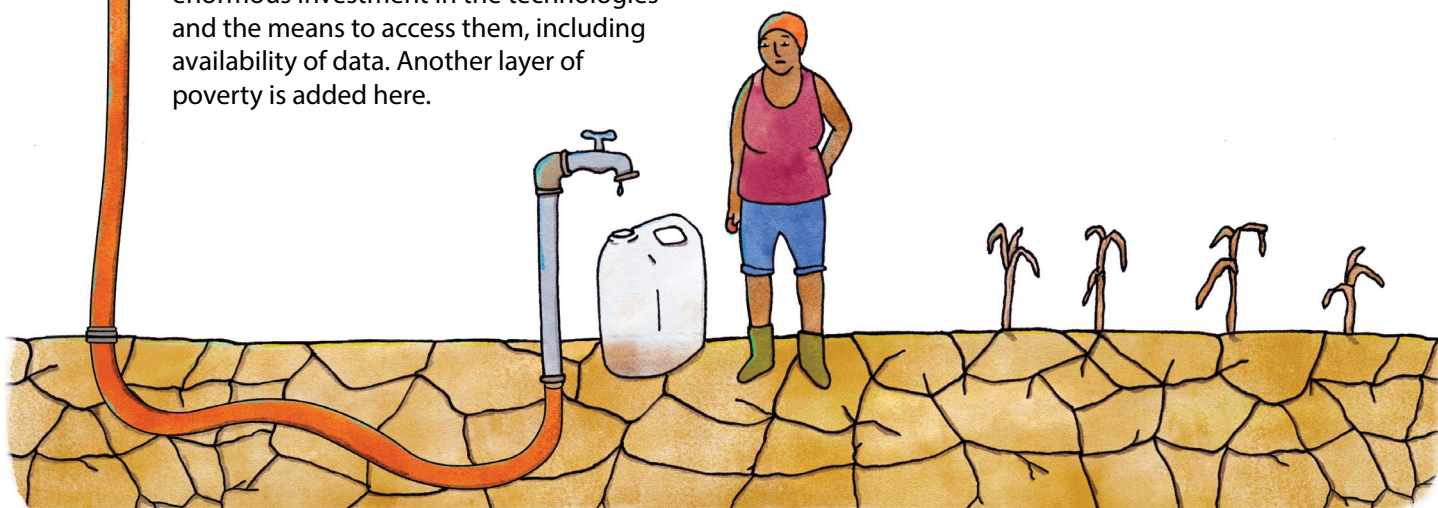
Digitalisation, the 4th Industrial Revolution, with technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics is ushering in profound social disruption, replacing complex jobs, wiping out wages, and impacting issues of security and individual privacy. Although its impact is uneven, it is clear that digitalisation, financed and more easily accessed and put to own use by the wealthy, can be a driver for development but also carries huge risks in enhancing inequalities on multiple fronts.

The COVID -19 pandemic has inevitably reduced civic space and forced civil society to rely on new technologies to organise or operate. The digital requirements to continue functioning favour those already operating online, at the expense of grassroots and community organising.

The shift from traditional forms of organising to digital platforms revealed many opportunities and shows many advantages for future forms of mobilising but has been unable to bring along dispersed and remote communities without enormous investment in the technologies and the means to access them, including availability of data. Another layer of poverty is added here.

“

*The digital requirements to continue functioning favour those already operating online, at the expense of grassroots and community organising.*



“

*But we are not completely at the mercy of these sea changes. As much as we are shaped by these developments there are opportunities that must be identified, strengthened and utilised to the benefit of all in society.*

This is a barrier to organising locally but also to collaborating with national and global stakeholders for mobilising solidarity and participating in wider social or systemic change initiatives, through movements, coalitions, campaigns and platforms.

Because of security and privacy issues, social media is a double-edged sword as we see activists being persecuted, threatened and even imprisoned for speaking out on social media. Some governments censor and shut down the internet to prevent communication and access to information by its citizens.

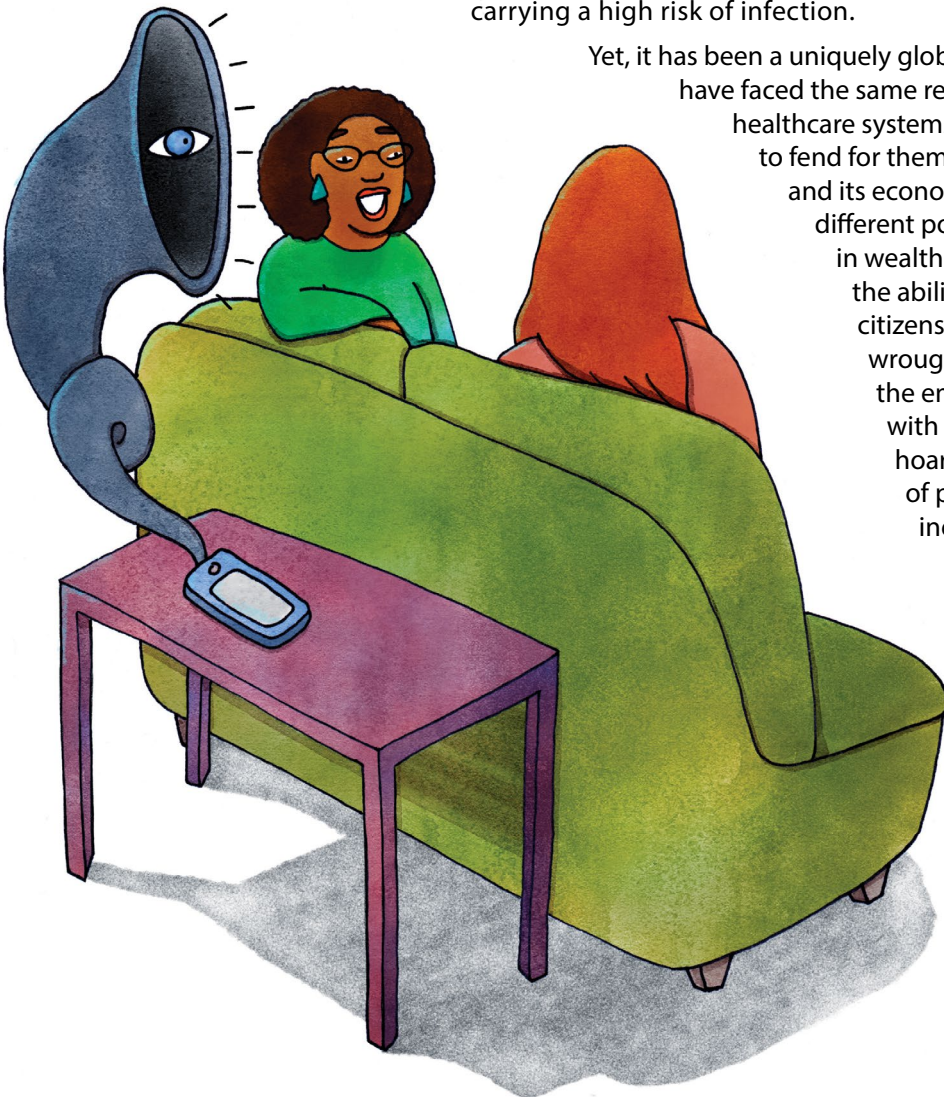
But we are not completely at the mercy of these sea changes. As much as we are shaped by these developments there are opportunities that must be identified, strengthened and utilised to the benefit of all in society. How to achieve this is an important debate that must happen in civil society.

### THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

World Vision has estimated that the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed as many as 150 million more people into extreme poverty (World Vision 2021).

Society's vulnerable people are clearly revealed under the glare of the pandemic. Women, who comprise 70% of health workers globally, are on the frontline in fighting the pandemic while so many have been even more vulnerable from an upsurge in domestic Gender Based Violence experienced during the pandemic lockdowns. So many of the poor have lost their already precarious jobs whilst many who have kept their jobs work on the frontlines, carrying a high risk of infection.

Yet, it has been a uniquely global shock as almost all countries have faced the same realities; people at risk of the virus, healthcare systems unable to cope, many left unable to fend for themselves due to lockdown restrictions and its economic effects. At the same time, different political contexts and differences in wealth and resources have impacted on the ability of countries to protect their citizens from the dire economic impacts wrought by the pandemic. We have seen the emergence of “vaccine nationalism” with wealthy nations over-buying and hoarding vaccines at the expense of poorer nations, driving further inequality in the face of civil society's longstanding call for free and equal healthcare.



## COVID-19 SPARKS NEW COLLABORATIONS

In many countries civil society organisations stepped forward in unique and unprecedented ways, rallying against the impacts of Covid-19 and once more raising the question of societal power. While governments across the world grappled to respond (not including the many officials who took leave), interesting collaborations spontaneously developed between ordinary people, neighbourhood organisations, social movements, NGOs, private sector and academia, activating a wide variety of resources and capacities to deal with the unfolding crisis. Many local organisations anticipated the challenges and their manifestation across a range of areas, preparing and mobilised to meet these by pooling resources to respond to the immediate, desperate needs of communities. They also developed detailed advocacy actions and put in place rights monitoring mechanisms and strategies to continue their response to rights violations. Through these and the continued monitoring and reporting of corruption, civil society affected serious influence on the exercise of governmental power during Covid-19.

If the Covid-19 pandemic has any positive outcomes hopefully it is that it will force all of us to reconsider what we know about ourselves, the world in which we live and the true nature of the societal change we can and must bring about. How can civil society seize this momentum to actually change this situation now that it is more visible than ever?

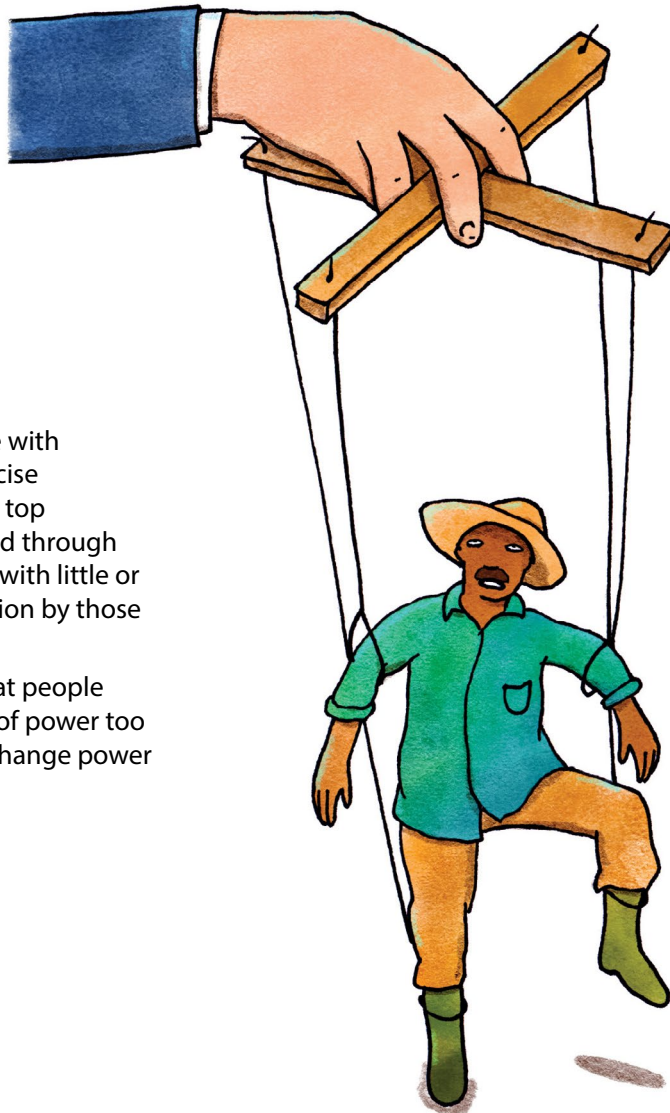
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*But history has shown time and again that people and communities have agency and a lot of power too and, in certain circumstances, can even change power dynamics that once seemed unmovable.*

## Let's talk about Power!

Central to the pursuit of change is the question of power: who has the right and power to design, legitimise and operate the institutions which govern and organise our lives? Who has the power to determine which interests are built into the process? Who has the power to determine which outcomes are prioritised? The answer of course is those with “power”. In our world, power and its exercise continue much as it had before, from the top down, at the exclusion of the majority and through the institutions of elite decision-making, with little or no meaningful consultation or participation by those most affected.

But history has shown time and again that people and communities have agency and a lot of power too and, in certain circumstances, can even change power dynamics that once seemed unmovable.



## WHAT ON EARTH IS POWER?

Power is the influence gained from control over material, human, intellectual and financial resources. Power is paradoxical and relational: the “powerless” often have hidden power to discover and the powerful often have a fragile power that depends on the “powerless” not knowing their own power.

**Divide and rule.** Power is perpetuated through divisions such as gender, age, caste, class, ethnicity, race, North-South and through institutions such as the family, religion, education, media, the law, etc. Power can become pervasive when clothed in strong and exclusive ideology. Ideology becomes the whole belief system that people buy into validating the current power structure, even if against their own interests. “Poverty and inequality are normal and acceptable.” Ideologies are enforced through the family, education system, religion, the media, the economy, and the state. Ideology enables unequal power structure to be sustained without force, but the threat of police and military force, should anyone seek to rebel against the dominant system, is always present.

“

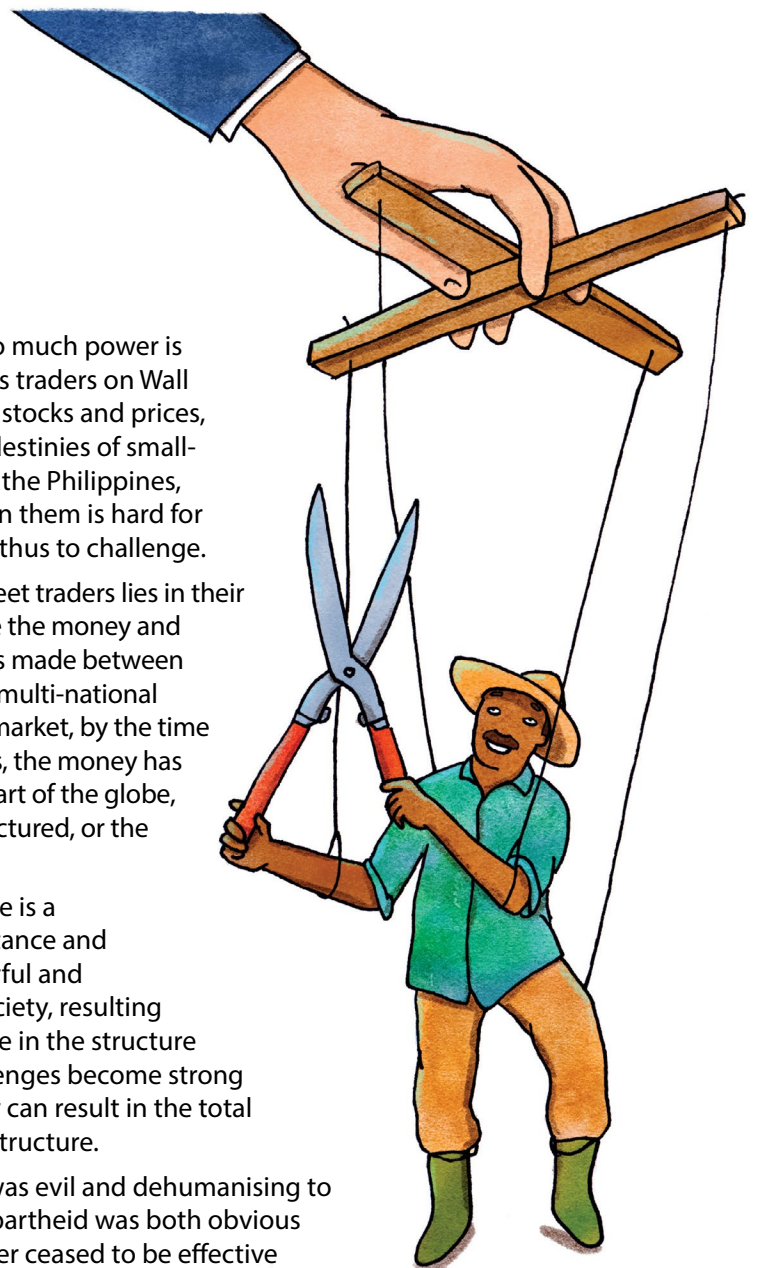
*The “powerless” often have hidden power to discover and the powerful often have a fragile power that depends on the “powerless” not knowing their own power.*

**The invisibility of power.** So much power is obscure and hidden. Futures traders on Wall Street, manipulating global stocks and prices, hold huge power over the destinies of small-scale farmers in Tanzania or the Philippines, yet the relationship between them is hard for farmers to see, to trace and thus to challenge.

Part of the power of Wall Street traders lies in their invisibility and ability to take the money and run. Even if the connection is made between Kenya coffee bean growers, multi-national corporations and the stock market, by the time counter-organising happens, the money has already moved to another part of the globe, the entire value chain restructured, or the markets completely altered.

**The fragility of power.** There is a continuous process of resistance and challenge by the less powerful and marginalised sections of society, resulting in various degrees of change in the structure of power. When these challenges become strong and extensive enough, they can result in the total transformation of a power structure.

In South Africa, Apartheid was evil and dehumanising to all people. Opposition to Apartheid was both obvious and dangerous. But its power ceased to be effective when people believed enough in themselves and a better future and found courage despite their fears.



The edifice of power cracked and eventually collapsed because a powerful shift occurred in the minds and lives of the oppressed. That shift was fundamentally rejecting *what is* (racial oppression) and cohering to *what must be* (equality, democracy and freedom).

### LISTEN. CRITICALLY REFLECT. ACT TOGETHER.

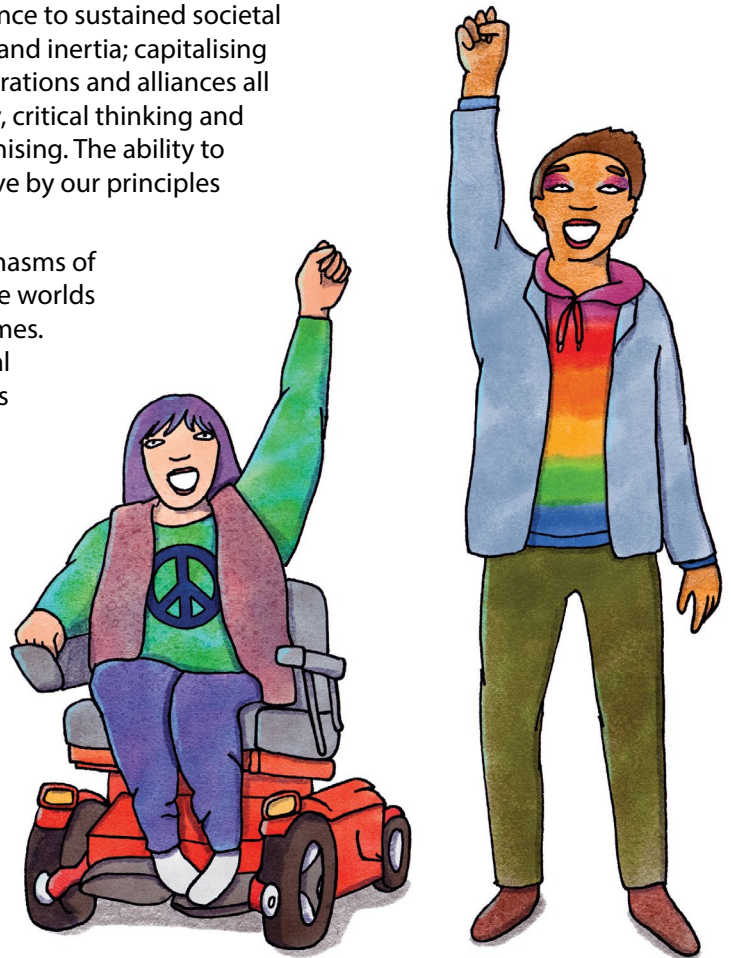
Power knows itself. Powerlessness does not. Change comes under conditions of shocks and stresses, when the powerful centres cannot hold, and the accumulated injustice bursts forth in anger and rebellion.

The journey from angry outburst to rebellion to resistance to sustained societal change can be long and arduous. Overcoming fatigue and inertia; capitalising on reforms; building wider and more enriching collaborations and alliances all requires vision and dexterity born of listening to reality, critical thinking and the skills to combine different types and forms of organising. The ability to articulate our vision, to role-model our values and to live by our principles must anchor all our advocacy and actions.

For a start, let us begin by recognising how deep the chasms of inequality, indignity, injustice and inhumanity are in the worlds we inhabit, that we fail to acknowledge in “ordinary” times. Let us “connect the dots” of fundamentally flawed social relations, economic paradigms, governance institutions and political systems to the circumstance of human misery, exclusion and oppression. Let us start with what is – as it is.

Let us de-link our approaches from the pre-determined “outcomes” we, our donors and partners trap each other in. Let us listen to communities and work with their needs, leadership, resourcefulness and energies instead.

The perilous present and daunting future *can be revealed* by a determined effort to name the monsters and reveal the truth. Humanity simply cannot continue on its current path without producing new and greater horrors for people and the planet. The forces which manipulate and distort reality are only powerful when unchallenged, to be dismantled by a collective awakening and action.



### We need to Listen. Critically reflect. Act together.



*Even though the issues are urgent, we do need to pause and reflect on what we are really facing. We may not have much time to act but let's really try to understand reality before wasting it on thoughtless actions!*

# Dear Matefele Peinam

*A poem by Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner*

dear matefele peinam,  
you are a seven month old sunrise of gummy smiles  
you are bald as an egg and bald as the buddha  
you are thunder thighs and lightning shrieks  
so excited for bananas, hugs and  
our morning walks past the lagoon  
dear matafele peinam,  
i want to tell you about that lagoon  
that lucid, sleepy lagoon lounging against the  
sunrise  
some men say that one day  
that lagoon will devour you  
they say it will gnaw at the shoreline  
chew at the roots of your breadfruit trees  
gulp down rows of your seawalls  
and crunch your island's shattered bones  
they say you, your daughter  
and your granddaughter, too  
will wander rootless  
with only a passport to call home  
dear matafele peinam,  
don't cry  
mommy promises you  
no one  
will come and devour you  
no greedy whale of a company sharking through  
political seas  
no backwater bullying of businesses with broken  
morals no blindfolded  
bureaucracies gonna push  
this mother ocean over  
the edge no one's drowning, baby  
no one's moving  
no one's losing  
their homeland  
no one's gonna become  
a climate change refugee  
or should i say  
no one else  
to the carteret islanders of papua new guinea  
and to the taro islanders of fiji  
i take this moment  
to apologise to you  
we are drawing the line here  
because baby we are going to fight  
your mommy daddy  
bubu jimma your country and president too  
we will all fight

and even though there are those  
hidden behind platinum titles  
who like to pretend  
that we don't exist  
that the marshall islands  
tuvalu  
kiribati  
maldives  
and typhoon haiyan in the philippines  
and floods of pakistan, algeria, and colombia  
and all the hurricanes, earthquakes, and tidal waves  
didn't exist  
still  
there are those  
who see us  
hands reaching out  
fists raising up  
banners unfurling  
megaphones booming  
and we are  
canoes blocking coal ships  
we are  
the radiance of solar villages we are  
the rich clean soil of the farmer's past  
we are  
petitions blooming from teenage fingertips  
we are  
families biking, recycling, reusing,  
engineers dreaming, designing, building,  
artists painting, dancing, writing  
we are spreading the word  
and there are thousands out on the street  
marching with signs  
hand in hand  
chanting for change NOW  
they're marching for you, baby  
they're marching for us  
because we deserve to do more than just  
survive  
we deserve  
to thrive  
dear matafele peinam,  
you are eyes heavy  
with drowsy weight  
so just close those eyes, baby  
and sleep in peace  
because we won't let you down  
you'll see



# Organised Civil Society: Redefining our Role and Relevance



*OK, Morgan, many governments and businesses are proving incapable of facing the growing crisis and are contributing to its escalation. So, what does this mean now for civil society now?*

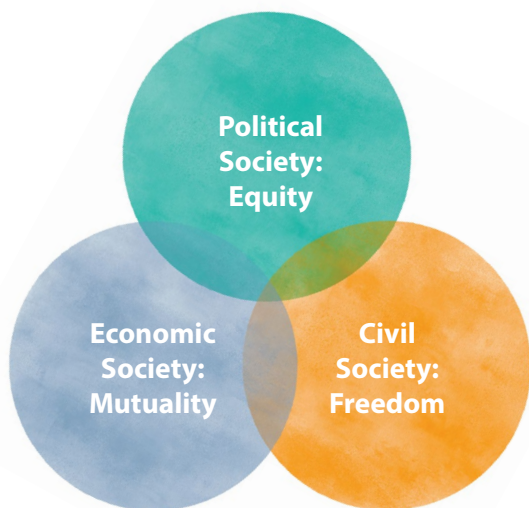
*That's the big question, Manu. In this chapter we throw the spotlight on civil society and how we might begin to respond out of our core values and capacities to step up our role in catalysing, facilitating or supporting social change. We should not give up on government and business because without them nothing will change. But we need to learn to engage them differently.*



We begin with a perspective on larger human society itself, on its shape and the fundamental roles of its actors in the spheres of economic, political and civil societies.

## The Threefold Nature of Society

Human society can be seen as a dynamic, threefold relationship between three interacting and overlapping spheres of **political, economic and civil societies**, each with an ideal, essential role in society to fulfil.



### THE THREE SPHERES OF SOCIETY: THEIR IDEAL QUALITIES AND PRIMARY ROLES



**Political Society:** Ensuring *Equity*. Governance for equity, justice, entitlements and security through law, human rights and regulation. State Institutions.



**Economic Society:** Cultivating *Mutuality*. Economic well-being through environmentally sustainable production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Business and the Market.



**Civil Society:** Fostering *Freedom*. Vibrant and free participation of citizens in civic and cultural life, expressing the deeper voice of community. Informal and formal local, national and international organisations.

These three spheres do overlap in places, where, for example, civil society may also provide economic development services or advocate for political change, or where businesses wield political power from out of their economic power etc. But each sphere has distinctive powers and unique societal roles to play, whether creatively or destructively.

Nicanor Perlas, a Filipino activist, makes the case for the importance of the creative tension between these three spheres for the healthy development of society. He views civil society as the “cultural sphere” of society, concerned with “the development of full human capacities and the generation of knowledge, meaning, art, ethics, and a sense of the sacred. Culture is the realm that gives identity and meaning, that represents the deeper voice of community. This is the realm that develops the full human potential of individuals and organisations and enables them to be competent participants in the economy, political life, culture, and society at large.” (Perlas, 2000) Civil society organisations thus play a unique and deeply humanising role in the development of society.

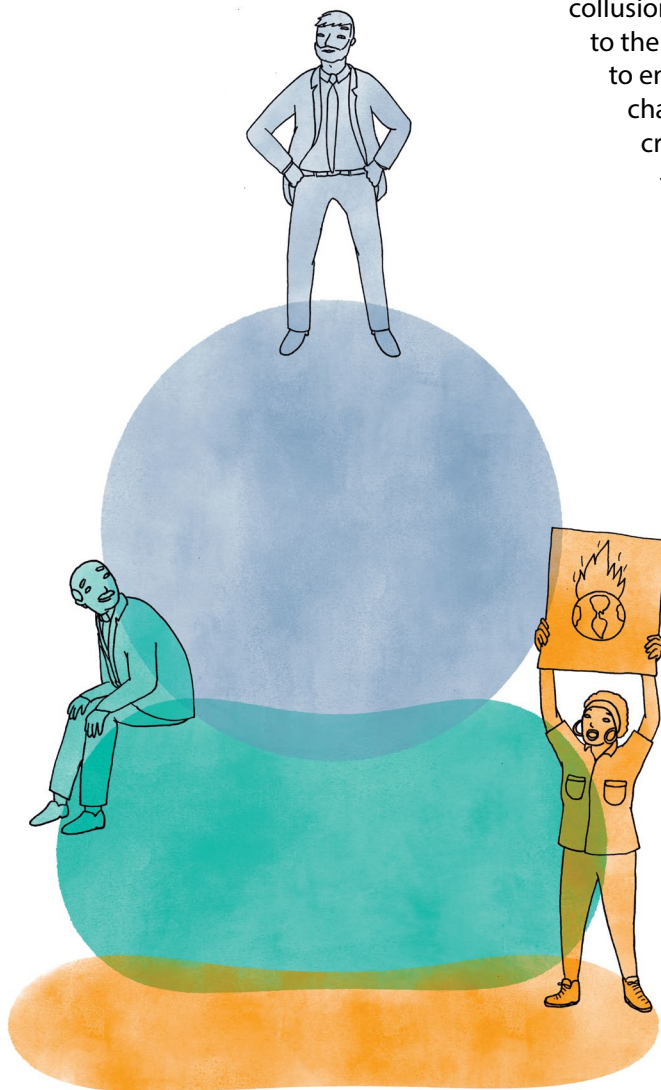
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*People are not passive bystanders. There may be a shrinking of space for civil society, but this should not be confused with shrinking civic impulses and civic forces for change.*

Creative and destructive forces in society come alive where the three come together in their attempts to challenge and shape each other. If, for example the State is failing to foster or defend the institutionalisation of equal rights, for which it is primarily responsible, then civil society may step forward to prompt it to do so, as it does. Human history provides telling accounts of this dynamic relationship between these sectors.

In recorded history these spheres have always been out of balance. Early slavery and feudal-based societies were dominated by political society and then later, slavery and colonial, capitalist-based societies were dominated by economic society and its imperatives. This continues today with the domination of economic society, creating a more severe and growing imbalance between these spheres, resulting in the kind of crisis and dysfunction we currently experience. The dominance of the corporations and their profiteering through crass capitalism and their collusion with a supplicant political society, leading to the further exclusion of the most marginalised, to environmental degradation and climate change, is all coalescing into the existential crisis we all face today.

Yet, paradoxically we have seen, in response to this imbalance, a rise in the mobilisation and power of civil society on an unprecedented scale. People are not passive bystanders. There may be a shrinking of space for civil society, but this should not be confused with shrinking civic impulses and civic forces for change. The threats to civil society these days have come precisely because it has started to grow, to find its feet and become a challenge to the powers of economic and political interests.



## The many forms of organised civil society

Civil society contains a vast array of organisations, from small to huge and from the very informal to the very formal. In this Guide, these are the kinds of organisational forms of Civil Society that we write about:

**Community-based Organisations (CBOs).** These are largely voluntary, often informal, and usually a neighbourhood response to local issues, accountable to their members. CBOs sometimes connect with each other to take on common campaigns or even to form wider social movements. Some may attract funding and start to formalise and even morph into NGOs, though at risk of losing their original mission. Their strength comes from being strongly rooted in authentic community.

**Social Movements.** Active citizens organising around particular issues form social movements, running initiatives like campaigns to use their collective power to seek more systemic social change. They may be coalitions of smaller CBOs or local movements. Also accountable to their members, they may operate locally, nationally or even internationally. They can form strategic alliances with other actors to enhance their power and some even enter into integrated change programmes with government and business, as equal partners. Their strength also comes from being rooted in community with the power of numbers behind them.

**Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs).** These are more formal, professional, funded entities, often accountable to a Board of Trustees and required by the state and donors to be registered. Like social movements they may take local, national or international forms. Their strength lies in having a consistent, professional practice, able to offer reliable support to programmes of change, including social movements.

**Coalitions, Alliances and Campaigns.** These are usually temporary organisations bringing together a variety of actors, like social movements and NGOs, around specific common foci, be it around a particular event or issue to advocate for progressive policy or to win or defend a particular right.

**NGO Platforms.** These are associations of NGOs that come together to build common capacities, to defend common interests or to advance the common agendas of member organisations. They usually take on a national form and can, like Forus, be an international platform of platforms. We also speak of **networks** which is used interchangeably, referring to platforms or groups of CSOs formed to pursue collective goals that may be short or long term.



# Holding up a mirror: Reflecting on the challenges for Civil Society Organisations

Contemporary challenges of CSOs arise from the process of organised civil society maturing and evolving, adapting itself to internal re-alignments and to increasingly complex external forces.

## THE TORTUOUS PATHS TO CIVIL SOCIETY COLLABORATION

**The limits of welfare and humanitarian aid:** Many CSOs begin as CBOs or small NGOs, as a response to a local need, often as a welfare or humanitarian service to people needing support. Some may begin as a spontaneous expression of outrage following a breach of human rights.

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*However, this is also often the point at which they realise the need to collaborate and organise with others who are also working in the field, to give more weight to their advocacy and push for more systemic changes.*

Sometimes governments welcome, endorse or support innovative local community initiatives, opening up new areas of service that they could even eventually take on more systematically and widely. Resource-constrained governments may simply not have the capacity or resources and depend on CSOs and donors to fill the gaps. In some countries, governments see these initiatives as a useful way of abdicating their own responsibilities, especially those wanting to dismantle the Welfare State, as part of effectively privatising their responsibilities.

The shadow of a welfare or humanitarian response to the needs of the less fortunate is the entrenching of dependency, often deepening their marginalisation and poverty in unintended ways. In a way, communities, who are victims of poverty and marginalisation often become victims of the very organisations trying to help them, becoming dependent on that victimhood to be able to claim their next round of funding.

**Giving weight to rights-based advocacy.** At some point many CSOs realise that they cannot continue providing welfare services in a sustainable way. Some of these may start to push for the State to take on the responsibility, either through advocating changes in the law or holding the State to existing laws. Here the language of practice may shift from “servicing needs” to “demanding rights”. The experience that CSOs have in providing services means that they can speak with some authority and legitimacy about the issues.

However, this is also often the point at which they realise the need to collaborate and organise with others who are also working in the field, to give more weight to their advocacy and push for more systemic changes. This work may be viewed as a threat by the government and the initiatives of CSOs are sometimes impeded or repressed.



**Teaching people how to fish.** NGOs often take another route: that of funded capacity development. The typical route here is “helping people to help themselves”, “teaching them how to fish”, training them in technical skills to reduce their dependency on outsiders. This represents a major part of funded NGO work, in almost every field imaginable, whether education, agriculture, health etc. However, it has only been a recent phenomenon that NGO capacity-builders have realised that many communities already possess valuable hidden experiences and skills that need to be unlocked before the skills-training they bring becomes useful and that many can teach each other. Leading social movements like Shack Dwellers International have long used community exchanges as a major approach to skills sharing and development with the added benefit of building solidarity between communities in the process.

**Right of access to the river.** But “teaching people how to fish” does not help if they do not have the right to fish in the river or if they are in conflict with others over limited resources.

Rights that enable fair and equal access to resources and opportunities, that enable new capacities to be used, must also be achieved or people will be left feeling defeated. This is part of a systemic approach.

**Development in Action:** Capacity development has particular bite when supporting and accompanying campaigns and movement-building, when there is strong will for social change in people and with that a strong will to develop themselves.

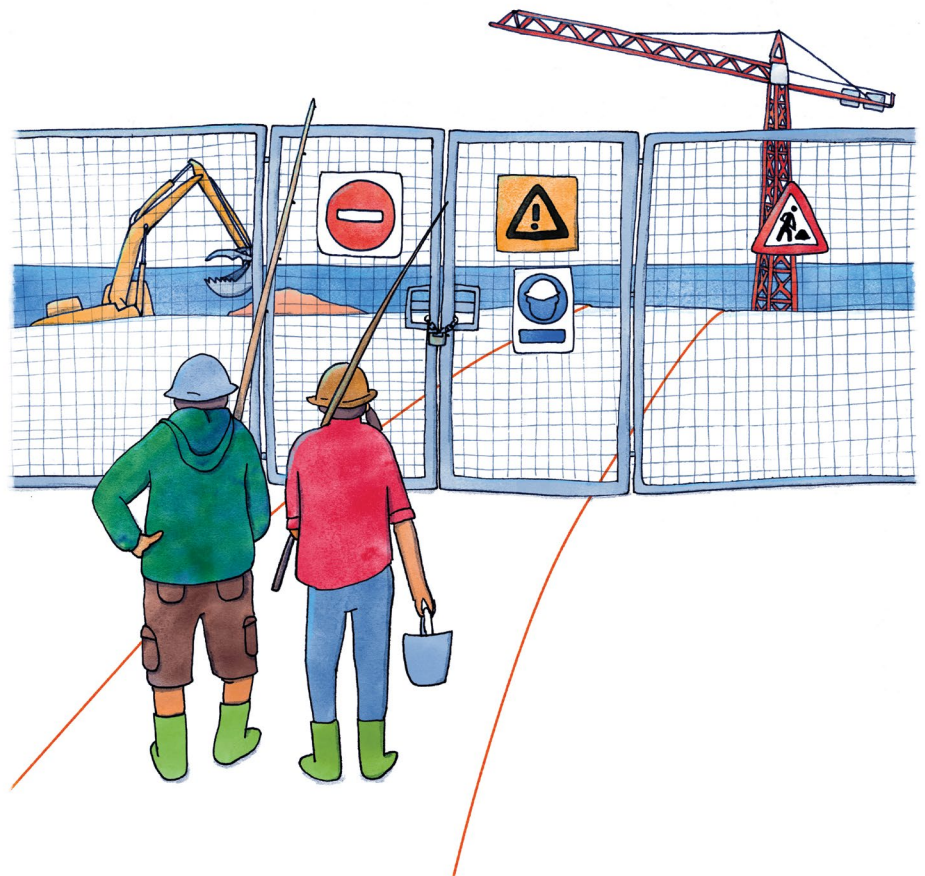
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*Teaching people “how to fish” does not help if they do not have the right to fish in the river or if they are in conflict with others over limited resources.*

## NGOS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS – A SURREPTITIOUS SYMBIOSIS

As fascinating empirical research from Marlies Glasius and Armine Ishkanian (2014) shows, there is often a “surreptitious symbiosis” that exists between social movements and NGOs. It remains virtually impossible to engage in the kind of sustained activism that can bring about long-term social change without interacting, at least in part, with funding and governance structures. Although the activists who spearheaded the Arab uprisings or Occupy protests often reviled NGOs in public, behind the scenes, they often drew on their resources, used their meeting spaces, their printing services, and their legal and research expertise.

In countries like South Africa and Brazil, characterised by recurring spontaneous grassroots mobilisation and dissent (like protest sparked by poor service-delivery, racial discrimination or gender-based violence), some NGOs have seen their role as providing ongoing professional and organisational support for social movements that also connect with their aims.



Both sides can benefit, with grassroots activists able to access funding, technology and specialised professional support (e.g., from lawyers and researchers) for their campaigns from NGOs, and NGOs, many staffed by activists, reconnecting with their deeper purposes and possibly receiving an injection of legitimacy.

## THE DOWNSIDES OF DONOR-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

*“We have become slave to our brands, LogFrames, donors and our growth strategies. We have been co-opted and corralled by states and funders, signing away our independence and voice... We work in siloed projects designed to alleviate the consequences of poverty and exclusion, rather than to tackle structural causes.”*

Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah

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*In many ways the practice of many donors has become more about managing mistrust than offering genuine solidarity.*

Donor-power is a major shaper of development and a source of great tension. In essence, money is power and the way it is brought, distributed and accounted for shapes and colours almost everything. Donors, who are themselves often subject to the agendas of their back donors, exert an extraordinary influence over social change development dynamics, often in ways that they are blind to. Authentic, bottom-up priorities and impulses for change are often ignored or distorted because they don't fit donor priorities, and thus “development” and “advocacy” become donor-driven. Even if there is genuine donor support for community priorities and common interest in supporting authentic social change, this is too often spoilt by managerialist planning, compliance and accountability practices, based on simplistic understandings of how change happens. In many ways the practice of many donors has become more about managing mistrust than offering genuine solidarity.

## SHRINKING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is currently under threat in many parts of the world. CSOs, specifically those working with advancing the protection of human rights or of the environment, currently face severe challenges, and increasingly restrictive laws, violence, harassment and imprisonment. The Forus International Scoping Study of National NGO Platforms' Experiences in Promoting an Enabling Environment has confirmed this tendency particularly in Southern countries. See Forus (2021).

Legislative changes in a number of countries have undermined the independence of civil society actors and restricted their capacity to function effectively. Defamation laws, criminalisation of previously permitted legitimate activities, freezing bank accounts, bans on organisations funded by foreign sources, branding civil society organisations as foreign agents, and strict media reporting regulations are among just some of the legal measures that limit, or in some cases entirely suppress, civil society.



These attacks may well be because CSOs are proving themselves to be a force to be reckoned with. But they still need a collective response. The Forus (2021) report argues that “formal and informal collaboration between coalitions, NGOs, social movements and groups that represent communities still requires strengthening to face together challenging disabling conditions and attacks”.

These responses will have to show a strategic maturity that does not strengthen the opposing forces but works creatively to circumvent or dissolve their power. Civil society has so many unrecognised collective powers, in its numbers, its diversity and the sheer potency of its love for the people, for life and for humanity, that need to be revealed, strengthened and put to use.



## Weaving in new relationships and roles

In this section we showcase three examples of how organised civil society is bringing its agency into engagement with government and the private sector, weaving in new relationships and roles of collaboration.

### EXPANDING POLITICAL SPACE: AN EXPERIENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY DEFENDING COMMON STRUGGLES

*By Akmal Ali – Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisation (PIANGO)*

PIANGO strives to be the voice of our national NGO platforms at regional and international levels. Through the national organisations the network escalates development and transformation issues from grassroots levels and brings them together as a regional voice and escalates them to a global level. Within the region, there are countries that are fighting the effects not only of nuclear proliferation, climate change but also colonisation. So, the decolonisation agenda is huge for us. Whilst other countries are struggling with their own issues, we are still fighting colonisers.

We drive, coordinate and hold a space for the diversity of development and transformation debates and dialogues, as well as for collective action by civil society. PIANGO has been supporting the campaign against nuclear proliferation and as a result ten Pacific Island countries have signed the treaty and it has become an international law. When the Paris Agreement was formed, as an active civil society partner, we have been participating and contributing to COP dialogues and have influenced the climate change agenda in the region.



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*These responses will have to show a strategic maturity that does not strengthen the opposing forces but works creatively to circumvent or dissolve their power.*

## CIVIL SOCIETY SHOWS THE WAY IN ARGENTINA

By Teresa Casala, de la red Encuentro de Entidades no Gubernamentales para el Desarrollo (EENGD), Argentina

During the economic crisis due to the pandemic in Argentina, the state became paralysed. Most local governments collapsed, unable to provide services to the people. The different civil society formations, social movements, networks and alliances, stepped up to play a critical role in service provision to communities, taking over the role of local and provincial governments. Their relationship with the authorities became less confrontational as they resorted to dialogue and consensus instead of only confronting and challenging. During Covid-19 times these complimentary roles have grown stronger. The pandemic has forced them to collaborate around certain activities like food relief, education and informal traders (mostly women).

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*It is the time to position ourselves in the paradigm of “care”, to move from individualistic and personal “ego” to the “eco”, understood as empathetic listening with others, allowing us to fruitfully collaborate towards common objectives.*

We became aware of the importance of our monitoring role. For this reason we have strengthened the platform Pampa 2030 PLATAFORMA ARGENTINA DE MONITOREO PARA la AGENDA 2030 (National Platform for Monitoring 2030 Agenda), that was created in 2015 at the initiative of the trade unions. Pampa 2030 is composed of trade unions, faith-based organisations, foundations, people’s movements, feminist movements and academic institutions among others, to collectively monitor the implementation of the Agenda focused on the fulfilment of the SDGs.

The trade unions play a critical role in helping workers to represent and speak with one voice on matters affecting them directly, engaging the state in a different way from social movements.

We have strong social movements, using mass action and engaging the state in different ways. They operate more in the public spaces, effective in putting pressure on the state by being more confrontational and mainly using protests as a form of engagement.



The issue of leadership within these social actors is interesting. They are often led by charismatic and powerful personalities. Sometimes the leadership of these social movements do not always value working together with different organizations, losing opportunities that could optimise their impact. Thus, the full value of these networks is not realised both at local, national and global levels. If they were to cooperate more and work together, it could form a very powerful confederation.

Civil society organizations are currently working on a comprehensive regulatory framework that would help to strengthen the identity of social sector organisations and networks. At this point we are working towards one legal and fiscal framework and a statute of the socio-community worker that is being agreed for its approval. We seek the recognition of alliances between civil society organizations and communities, which will allow all contributions to be appreciated.

It is the time to position ourselves in the paradigm of “care”, to move from individualistic and personal “ego” to the “eco”, understood as empathetic listening with others, allowing us to fruitfully collaborate towards common objectives.



## A CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK ENGAGES WITH THE GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA

By Oyebisi, Babatunde Oluseyi – Nigeria Network of NGOs



In Nigeria we have a government that works closely with the private sector, that often makes decisions that are not in the best interests of the people. As civil society we see it as our responsibility to respond to such challenges and fight to bring our voice into the decision-making processes. To participate in such decision-making process, we recognise the importance of understanding the dynamics within the political space. We need to understand the political context as well as the critical issues that impact our work. It is important to mention that the relationship civil society has with the government is different to that between the government and private sector; theirs is a closer relationship, with the private sector being the first to be consulted on critical issues facing the country.

When engaging with government, it is important to be aware of the power that civil society also has; ours is the power of the collective. Our power also lies in our competencies and practices; our abilities in organising, mobilising, conscientising and building the voice of citizens. These competencies should not be taken lightly. They give us power!

When Covid-19 broke out, we realised that we could not face this crisis alone. We were forced to engage with the government on the country's response to the crisis. Our contribution came in the form of research. Civil society conducted an analysis of its impact on our sector and looked into how organisations were responding to the crisis. We commissioned research, documenting the situation and gathering evidence to provide an accurate picture of what was happening on the ground. The government was able to draw on this research to inform national responses and community level interventions.

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*When engaging with government, it is important to be aware of the power that civil society also has; ours is the power of the collective.*

## TIME TO CHOOSE: STAY LOCAL OR GO GLOBAL?

*"One of the ironies of the moment of world history that we are living in, is that precisely at a time, when many countries were securing Electoral Democracy, for the first time, or after a long hiatus... real power around a range of issues was actually shifting from the national to the global levels."*

Kumi Naidoo



It is a clear and hopeful sign that in so many countries we are learning to engage with local government and business in many new ways. But a bolder attitude and response is sorely needed because what needs to be addressed is also a global crisis. We have the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a vehicle to push reluctant governments and corporations to play their part, but that Agenda will be weakly implemented if we do not engage it differently. Do CSOs have a need to simply follow and support Agenda 2030's dictates or do we need to engage to expand the debate around its implementation?

Many are feeling that there has not been sufficient clarity and prominence given to human rights in the Sustainable Development Goals, which means that gains made may be short-lived or barely implemented. Is there a more political and influencing role we need to carve out for ourselves to ensure that the SDGs are meaningful to communities around the world? How could the SDGs be used by civil society as a tool to drive even more ambitious demands?

For many NGOs and NGO Platforms this will require a shift away from a role as mere service providers to that of facilitators and supporters of broader civil society organisations, especially social movements. Through this, marginalised communities themselves can engage in dialogue and negotiations to claim their rights and enhance their collective assets and capabilities, locally, nationally and globally. Real power lies in mobilised local communities, coalescing into social movements and other kinds of CSOs. But the question is how do the deep and diverse powers of civil society, rooted in locally mobilised communities, get transformed into national and global forces for change? We need to both globalise local struggles and localise global struggles.



*If you think about it, many democratic gains over the past hundred years or so started locally, became national and eventually spread globally. The right of workers to organise, the eight-hour working day and women's right to vote were all claimed and won locally before becoming national and international rights. Although the context, issues and crises are different today, the possibilities for civil society to impact national and global change still exist. In fact, the next chapter has some stories that illustrate how this is happening as we speak!*

# Movements, Coalitions and NGO Platforms Together: flexible webs and fluid spaces



*We have seen the crises in which civil society organisations work and their unique and diverse roles as collaborating actors, whether they are leading, catalysing or supporting social change...*

*Let's take a look at some in-depth experiences of the challenges, tensions, dilemmas and possibilities that they face.*



## The story of a social movement ally: The Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (Abong)

*By Iara Pietricovsky, Co-director (Abong) and Forus Chair*

The Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (Abong) has played a significant role and continues to do so in Brazil. In 1970s, the time of the military dictatorship, a powerful new impulse emerged of civil society organisations, becoming key actors influencing the future political landscape in the country. Social movements started to surface alongside NGOs, supported by more progressive factions within the Church, known as Ecclesial Base Communities, where the processes of political awareness, inspired and fermented by Liberation Theology, fed all the movements promoting the re-democratisation process. The NGOs were launched mainly by people returning from exile. Instead of the usual route they stayed independent from political parties and trade unions. There were more than 5000 different groups busy re-establishing connections with the people on the ground, planting the seeds of social movements to come. The way that they could operate legally was as non-profit associations.

The churches were places where radical intellectuals connected with these movements, promoting ideas and connections around the country, building a resistance and a common agenda. Initially this was focused on issues such as agrarian reform and democratisation, infused with a generic idea of human rights.

During the early 1980s, the Landless Workers Movement, (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) became the first significant social movement in Brazil. The Unified Workers' Central (Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT)) were also established in this period. They were not yet strong on women's rights and particularly not on issues of black women and anti-racism.

At the beginning of Brazil's democratisation process, birthed by the adoption of the new constitution in 1988, the civil society sector in Brazil was being significantly shaped by the social movements.

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*Although part of our work is to defend the interests of our members this is not our driving purpose. It is only a means to an end, to strengthen our collective capacity to support social movements.*

However, at this point there were thousands of organisations operating in the country, legally defined as non-profits and many of them linked to political parties, special interests and the church, doing many different things, but only some with a progressive agenda.

Those of us working in such organisations identified a strong need to define ourselves clearly as independent NGOs. We needed to find a way to distinguish our values and practice from the rest and to frame that difference clearly.

We did this by starting an association in the early 1990s. That was the beginning of Abong, the NGO platform in Brazil. Our platform defined itself through a commitment to support those movements in their struggles: *pro-equality, pro-democracy, human rights and social transformation*. These were the fundamental objectives which gave rise to this impulse. We pledged to cooperate with each other, including finding strategies to access public finance in Brazil in solidarity with the social movements.

So, Abong was founded with the purpose of coordinating our actions within civil society. We now have about two hundred and fifty members all over the country, differing in size and thematic areas and acting at various levels in society.

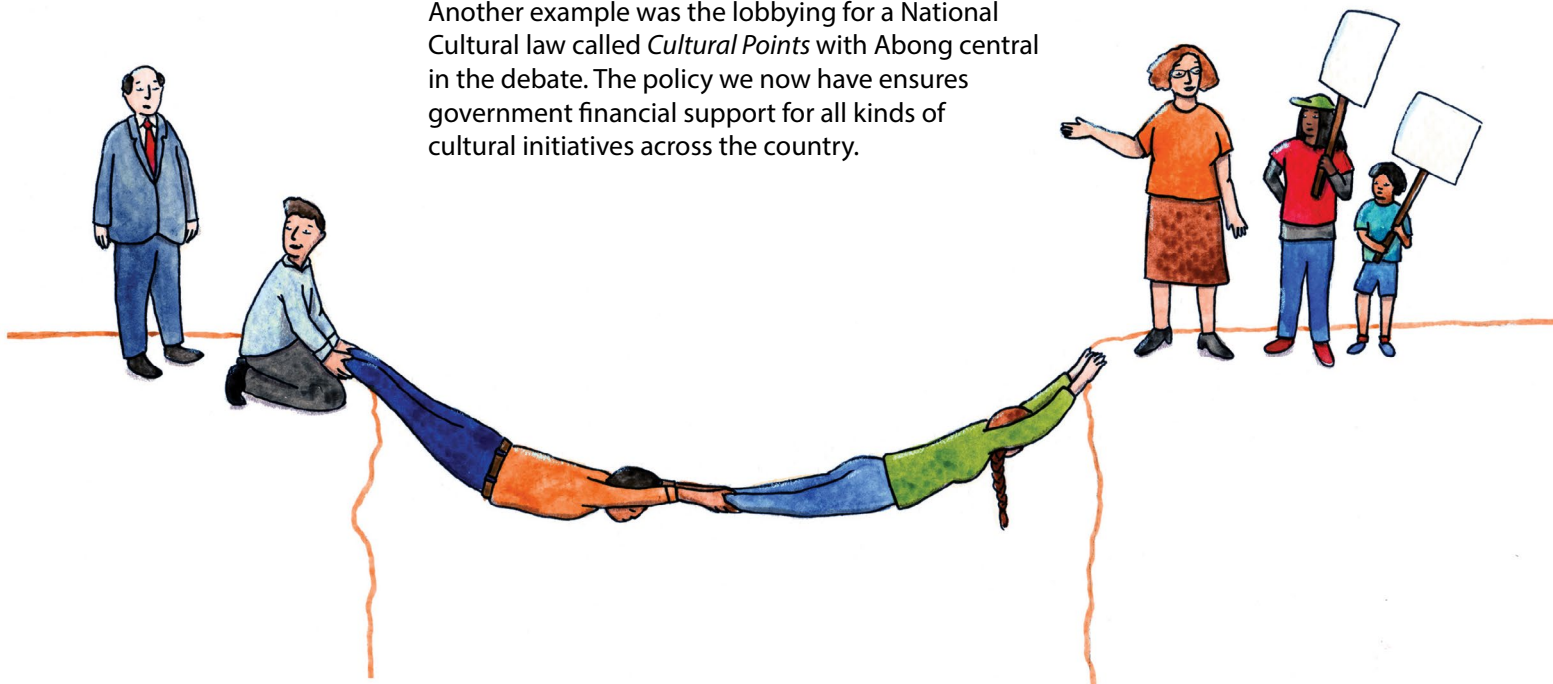
Many of our members see their core work as supporting the social movements and acting as advisors. This has historically shaped what we are and still defines our core mission in Abong as the leading NGO platform operating in contemporary Brazil.

### THE VALUE NGOS AND ABONG BRING TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT STRUGGLES

Although part of our work is to defend the interests of our members this is not our driving purpose. It is only a means to an end, to strengthen our collective capacity to support social movements. One of Abong’s key contributions is serving as an “institutional bridge” between social movements, the state and the public.

For example, in Bahia, Abong was at the centre of a dialogue to develop a law to advance the rights of disabled people, organising the engagement between the disability movements and state institutions, leading to the approval of policy “legislation”.

Another example was the lobbying for a National Cultural law called *Cultural Points* with Abong central in the debate. The policy we now have ensures government financial support for all kinds of cultural initiatives across the country.



We have worked together in solidarity with other cultural, women's and youth movements. In the runup to the recent Brazilian elections Abong worked closely with the Black Women's Movement. This is made easy because among our members we have strong feminist organisations who are well connected on the ground. We started a campaign of dissemination to raise awareness and the debate about structural racism in Brazil and encourage the population to vote for black women candidates.

Our desire as Abong is to work together with movements. We share an interest to engage in a respectful and reciprocal relationship which gives us a sense of legitimacy in these struggles. Therefore, we confidently add our voices in campaigns supporting black women and we are able to do this without being a movement ourselves.

There is also undeniable and pervasive racism at many levels, and we see it as part of our struggle to change this situation. We also reflect on our own attitudes and behaviours when it comes to gender and race issues. This is especially important because our NGOs are themselves reflections of the same challenges within Brazilian society because there is racism and discrimination in our own organisations, and we have to work on raising awareness about the structural nature of the problem, so deeply embedded in our society.

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*It took almost a decade of debating and struggling among ourselves and with social movements to achieve this clarity.*

### FINDING SOME CLARITY OF ROLE

Right now, there is a better clarity about how we are different to social movements. They are not institutionalised and therefore have no obligation to any legislative framework. This keeps open their space in taking positions and putting pressure on government, using a wide range of strategies, unconstrained by those frameworks. On the other hand, as formalised organisations, we operate partly inside “the system” and can work it to the advantage of progressive causes, and that is the difference. It took almost a decade of debating and struggling among ourselves and with social movements to achieve this clarity.

In recent years, with the rise to power of an anti-democratic far-right, Abong's struggle has also become a tool for maintaining the democratic advances of the past 30 years. While Brazilian civil society organisations have been attacked physically, financially, and bureaucratically, criminalised and stifled in their perspectives of participation and grassroots action, Abong positions itself as a support and diffusion entity, acting both internally and internationally to vocalise, denounce and create conditions for a healthy civic space in Brazil.



## CREATIVE TENSIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND NGOS

Although Abong enjoys a sense of legitimacy with the social movements this was not always easy. In fact, the question of legitimacy is a permanent tension between NGOs and social movements who struggle for social transformation. We have had many debates with the movements about who has the right to talk on behalf of what issues and when. I have a personal example of this, having worked all my life with indigenous people in Amazon in the centre of Brazil. I often used to hear, "you are not indigenous, you cannot talk on behalf of them." I said, "No, I can speak up because it is also my fight, my struggle." We need each other. Of course, how I do this and when, is crucial, in consultation and in ways that enhance their voices.

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*Social movements can go much further than us as we are limited by our institutional and professional character. But that also gives us access to play our bridging role.*

That debate has calmed down a little, but the tension remains. So, depending on the situation, the social movements may not want us to join with them, but in another situation, they can see the benefit of working together. Now it is also much clearer for us when to be together and when to stay out. When we are together our role is to amplify their voices, the key messages and slogans in their struggles. Within the terms of our mission and frame of reference it is not that difficult to identify our common struggles. Social movements can go much further than us as we are limited by our institutional and professional character. But that also gives us access to play our bridging role.

## HOW ABONG WORKS

Abong members are organised in several working groups pursuing a variety of issues or themes, for example anti-racism, women rights, youth and the homeless, etc. Each month, we focus on a specific theme towards developing these campaigns and joining with the movements at the same time.

Another example has been the issue of vaccines for COVID-19. Abong is working on the issue of intellectual property, advocating for the right to free vaccines, because our president is trying to divert the debate on vaccines arguing that government has no obligation to ensure universal access to vaccines for all people. We have a universal health care system and therefore government has an obligation to serve our common interests, equally.



Currently we are involved in a significant process advocating for political reform in Brazil bringing together unions, academia, social movements and NGOs, and here Abong is part of the coordination team. We are acknowledged for having the centrality and capacity to work with these different actors and to develop effective campaigns within our civil society sector, bringing our knowledge and our legitimacy to the table. We represent them by going to parliament and participating in public hearings and debates, defending our common interest.

### OUR WORK ON ANTI-RACISM AND NAFTA

Abong's work to raise awareness and action around racism during the elections includes slogans of anti-racism to promote the idea that white people must defend black positions to be able to claim that they are anti-racist. It is working and can be seen in the recent election results where significant numbers of black women were elected for the first time, 95% of them come from our independent civil society organisations. Diverse identity groups, indigenous people, black women, including trans people, did very well even while Brazil went to a more conservative position with a more Conservative Party being elected. It's a contradiction because on the level of the municipalities, you see a lot of diversity coming up. This is the main difference that we have in this last election.

The proposed extension of the NAFTA free trade agreement (US, Canada & Mexico) to the rest of the Americas pushed by the United States also mobilised us to action. We had a huge campaign against the extension of NAFTA in Latin America, and we succeeded, together in association with the movements and other organisations that were even more institutionalised, including external actors such as Oxfam International. This time, as Abong, we said to them: *OK, you go talk to the governments, and we will be here, taking our struggle forward on another level and with the social movements working on the ground.*

So sometimes there is even more strategic flexibility. It was the moment that we found the kind of balance that transcended the differences that we have, among us. Again, it's not easy, it always requires a debate, and you have to work at this. It's like a ritual where you have to establish the differences in the responsibilities in each campaign and process. There are no quick or given recipes.

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*It's like a ritual where you have to establish the differences in the responsibilities in each campaign and process. There are no quick or given recipes.*





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*If we don't go straight to the people, and if we don't listen and try to reconnect in a way that is genuinely and humanly spiritual, then we will not be able to change anything.*

### LISTENING: OUR DEEPEST CHALLENGE

Our deepest challenge is around active listening. The Pentecostal evangelical church, though working from a conservative standpoint, have had big successes being there on the ground, listening to the poorest Brazilians and responding to their immediate needs. We can learn from this.

The movements, and many people living in the *favelas* have said that the leftists and our political parties have stopped listening to the people, forgetting to connect with them. It was the Abong members and social movements who did not forget. At the moment, we have the role to be there helping the communities, to defend themselves against the pandemic, because the state is not reaching the people.

On our side we must show our commitment to human rights beyond just beautiful intentions. If we don't go straight to the people, and if we don't listen and try to reconnect in a way that is genuinely and humanly spiritual, then we will not be able to change anything. People in communities have a kind of rationality in the decisions they make because their lives are in danger. Where they are, they have narcotics traffic on one side or the militias on the other, with no state to protect them and the leftists preoccupied in parliament trying to fight for power.

When Abong comes together with the movements this is what we need to do to properly connect. To listen. This way we can understand their decisions and where they are coming from. Sometimes our professional arrogance weakens our capacity to see that the answer is there already, implicit in their decisions and actions. This requires a humble position on our part, humanising our relationships and connections with the people.

This has been my learning from the pandemic and though I've had this insight before, it has never been as deep as it is now. When one listens actively you may be able to see that communities and movements already have their answers and we are only the channel to make it appear, to give it voice and significance.

Sometimes we just have to be together with them, to learn from them and build trust.



*Abong's approach and practice is inspiring but remember not to see it as a recipe. What have you learned from this to help you to think through your challenges in your context?*



# How the complex work of coalition-building can succeed

By Sarah Strack, Director of Forus

*How do you begin to form a successful global alliance of passionate activists and diverse civil society organisations from all corners of the globe, within a limited timeframe, around an urgent issue like climate change?*

Having worked for one of the biggest global networks working for climate action, I was quite involved in the lead up to and during the COP 21 Conference taking place in Paris in 2015.

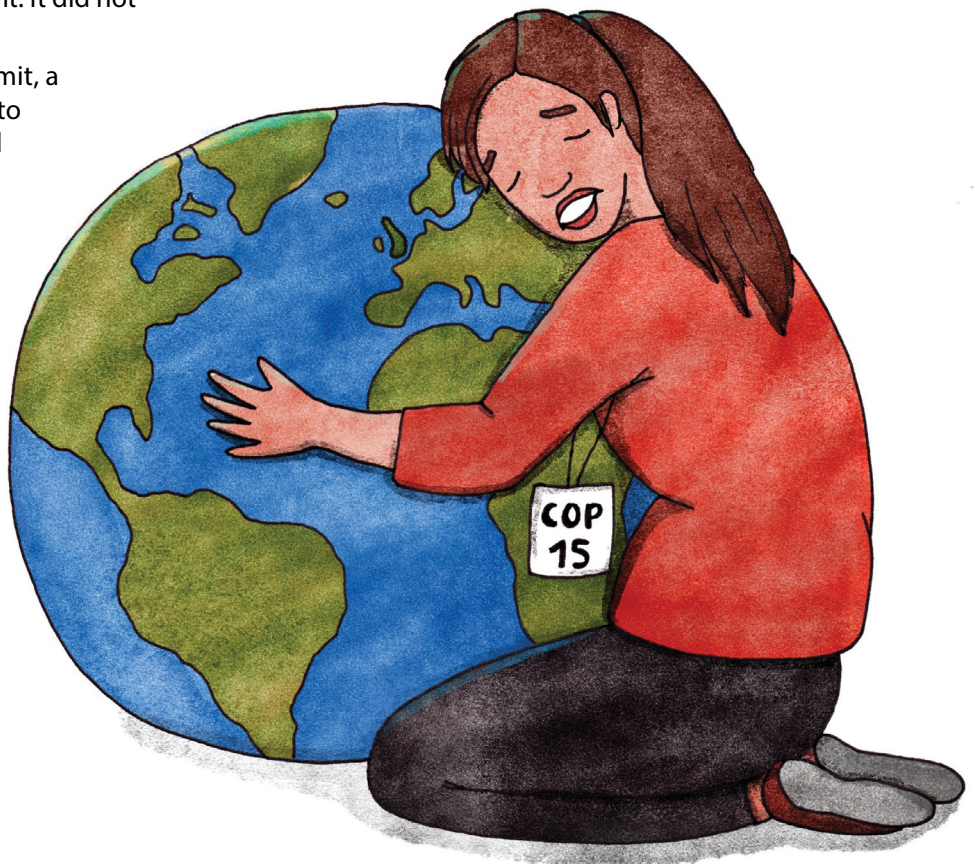
COP 21 would be the big moment for us to get the first universal and legally binding deal on climate change through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We were anxious. Our governments had been unable to agree during COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009, a depressing blow to the climate community. Many left their jobs after that and there was much disagreement within the civil society community, with some saying, *look, why bother pushing for an international agreement signed by governments, because they're just not able to deliver.* Many other civil society organisations withdrew from that strategy, saying *we're not going to focus on the big policy deals. Instead, we're going to do work at the grassroots.*

So, we had a split in the climate community between those who wanted to go for a big policy agreement and those who said we need to do something else. But then little by little, over several years, people started bridging those divides. As we were moving towards COP 21 in Paris in 2015, everyone started to realise that even if we did not have the same theories of change, we needed to get together to find some alignment. It did not have to be an either/or situation.

Well over a year ahead of the summit, a number of groups came together to form a diverse coalition, facilitated mainly by local NGOs based in France (the COP 21 hosts). It was called Coalition Climat 21. The push was to start strategising together on how to organise and catalyse the vibrant energies across the climate movement to bring its power to bear and push for the most ambitious, fair and binding agreement possible.

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*But then little by little, and it took several years to get there, people started to work on bridging those divides.*



## THE SEARCH FOR A COMMON NARRATIVE

The work of the Coalition was different from that of most broad platforms or networks because the common agenda was more focused, and even though the climate issue is multifaceted we had more of a common base to start with. But even within this common agenda we still had the challenge of aligning the diversity of standpoints and opinions of all the people and the participating organisations.

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*Yet the way that all of this was organised was surprisingly loose, made possible by skilful facilitation, with an emphasis on listening and trust building.*

Initially there was mistrust and poor communication between groups on different sides of the spectrum. But through a series of facilitated discussions between the many different actors, the coalition formed and evolved.

There were not only climate organisations involved, but trade unions, social movements and many other groups that in other circumstances would not have had climate as their main focus. It took many, many meetings, sometimes akin to a traveling circus, but it helped people to slowly learn to trust each other. Now we were all saying *we will mobilise in the streets and do the grassroots work, that is important, but we also have to play the inside game of trying to influence decision makers on the policy level.*

From a communications and advocacy point of view, the work was to develop common narratives, which would have to be very broad, but which we could then all use to reinforce the same messaging in the lead up to COP 21. It was a nervous beginning because the diversity of actors was so broad that I really was not sure whether that would lead to anything. The tactics that people discussed were also very different. But there was so much at stake that all the groups that were involved

were able to look beyond their own theories of change and priorities and then find the will and the ways to push towards that same goal.

Even those organisations at the forefront of the split after Copenhagen started to collaborate and cooperate again.

## WORKING WITH DIVERSITY AND EMERGENCE

The will of all the actors to come together was urgent and strong. You might have expected a major management headache building an effective organisation. Yet the way that all of this was organised was surprisingly loose, made possible by skilful facilitation, with an emphasis on listening and trust building.



That was what was needed to hold the diversity together, *to enable people to grow towards one another and to find their own ways in, to discover the role they had to play.* Had it been more “efficiently” organised and managed, rather than facilitated, it is quite possible that this organic emergence may have been stopped and conflict and resistance might have spoiled the process.

Instead of a conventional controlling organisation we saw the emergence of self-control and self-organisation.

But it was not a straight line to get there! It took a lot of time and many meetings, with people coming in and out and things having to be repeated again and again. But little by little I saw something remarkable emerge out of that, a sense of movement and coherence that I had never experienced. This does not mean that people did not have passionate arguments and debates but there was a real sense that we were working towards a common purpose. I was able to observe those battles and the shifting dynamics over a few years and how, with that common objective, the process was broad enough to accommodate that diversity of theories of change and tactics.

And we were all working towards the signpost planted into the horizon of 2015 in Paris. We knew that Paris was not the end of the road; indeed, it was just a milestone to set the world on a better, yet much longer path to tackle the climate emergency.

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*We knew that Paris was not the end of the road; indeed, it was just a milestone to set the world on a better, yet much longer path to tackle the climate emergency.*

### WHAT REALLY HELPED?

It helped where there was a lot of listening through facilitated exercises. Imagine a multitude of diverse organisations, big, small, global, local, of all kinds trying to find each other. The listening exercises gave the space to everyone to be able to express how they felt about this thing, their fears, their concerns, their expectations, what they would be able to do or not do in their context or on the ground. This built empathy, trust and relationships, without which nothing else would be possible.





There was a lot of repetition of our objectives and the values which bound us together. With such diversity of organisations and agendas, and being in different places, these

objectives and values were expressed and heard in different ways by different people and could easily have become misaligned, with fatal consequences. So, a lot of repetition of those main objectives and what brought us together in terms of our principles and values helped to keep us walking on the same path.

Supported by skilled facilitation, there was space for disagreement. Sometimes there were pretty big fights in those discussions. But despite the differences of opinions and strategies there was space to hear them, and they were respected.

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*We had to learn that we could not manage what was emerging, but what we could manage was our own anxieties and controlling impulses and really learn to trust the people and the process, despite the seeming chaos.*

Nothing was prescribed. People were able to opt in or opt out and do their own activities. And even when we were developing common narratives, they were sufficiently broad so that people could take and adapt them to whatever resonated with their agendas and constituencies and the people they would want to mobilise.

We had to learn that we could not manage what was emerging, but what we could manage was our own anxieties and controlling impulses and really learn to trust the people and the process, despite the seeming chaos.

### THE “ENGINE ROOM”

Navigating all these dynamics was a handful of dedicated and patient people who helped shepherd the process along. In a way, they were a bit like an “Engine Room”, working with the energy streams in the depths of the system, making sure the communication flow was there, organising meetings, coordinating the different activities, facilitating connections, making sure we had a website, growing and managing the email lists and many other necessary tasks.

These technical tasks were obviously important, but they too had to work together in a way that flowed with the emergence of the larger coalition and that also was an action of trust. Trust is not something that magically appears. It takes work both being trusting and proving yourself trustworthy.

Interestingly, through being present and being seen in almost every meeting, the familiar faces gave some human continuity to the process. The coalition was not a structure but a living process, a breathing community of people.

The engine room also worked because the different people who were part of it had a clear mandate from their own organisations to dedicate time to do the work. And between themselves in that engine room, there was little hierarchy. Different people could say *I can dedicate one day a week to come and focus on documentation or two days a week to come and focus on communication strategies*. Obviously, those who had more time to dedicate had a bit more power by virtue of being able to be more active actors in this engine room. But because things were not very formalised and there was a common goal with very horizontal values, this did not translate into power that anyone wielded over anyone else.

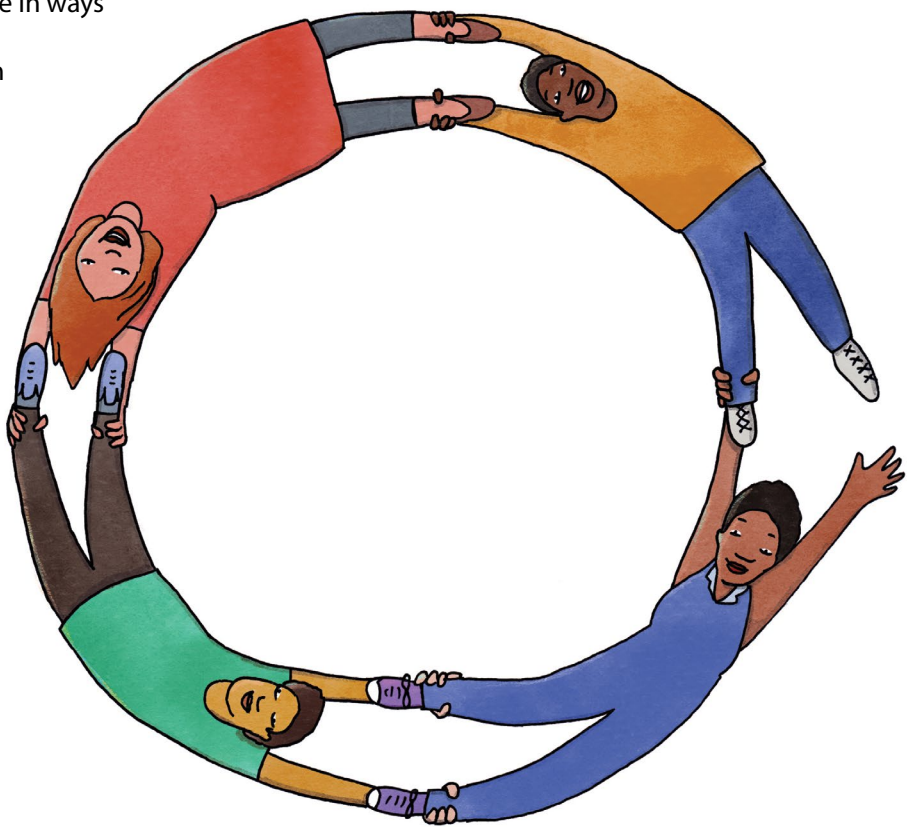
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*The coalition was not a structure but a living process, a breathing community of people.*

### **DONORS FINDING THEIR OWN TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE**

This was also a big moment for the donor community and some considerable financial resources flowed to quite a few organisations in the lead up to the Paris Agreement, without which this whole coalition work would have looked quite different.

But remember that loose governance structures are problematic for most donors, even though there is more recognition that this is how loose coalitions need to work. There are still hurdles and donors tend to identify particular organisations within the coalition, which they would rather support. But there were ways around this, and it was important that resources flowed to the right place in ways that were not easy to predetermine to enable the functioning of the coalition itself. It is not so easy to convince donors of that because loose governance is not tangible enough for many of them. But process-oriented approaches enable you to work with where the energy lies, and so when diverse people and organisations are aligned around a common objective then they can, in diverse ways, mobilise their different energies around this. I really think that this is how civil society can remain agile within itself, not getting stuck on structure which inevitably creates hierarchy and power struggles.





This is so important, because the crises that we are confronting now are coming from many different angles, and we need to be able to transmute or metamorphose into different shapes and forms to be able to respond to these complex emergences, and not to be bogged down in rigid top-down structures and plans. Being agile is about being inwardly diverse to be able to meet and respond strategically to external diversity and complexity.

Thankfully, some donors have their own transformative practice and think about how to respond to the different needs and contexts that emerge. In a way this can lead to true accountability, not only *to donors*, but by *all of us*, including donors, to the reality of the needs of the process and the time.

### POST-PARIS 2015

Even though the process and the outcome were by no means perfect, COP21 was a real achievement for everyone. What happened after the Paris Agreement was also interesting. Many people were burnt out and left the movement or took a break of a few months. And lots of people focused on family or went on maternity leave.

But even though we had tried to anticipate it, there was a lot of confusion about what would need to happen next and what would happen to this coalition. Would we all go back into our different corners? Would we need to keep this coalition alive?

The coalition did continue but obviously no longer with that strong goal to hold us together. Some discussions continued happening, but not at all as vibrant as they were before. Other organisations withdrew into their own strategic planning processes for at least half a year to figure out their own next steps. The energy that we had before was diminished. But what remained were the personal connections. And that was also interesting, because it enabled people who were in that big coalition to continue to work across the boundaries, and beyond the climate community, with for example trade unions, youth organisations and women's groups.

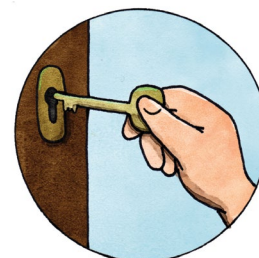


*I have a strong feeling that what happened in this story carries vital lessons for not only how civil society needs to converge, but humanity too!*

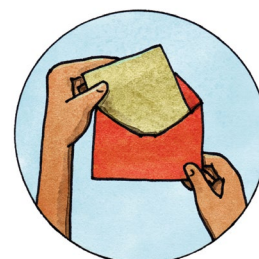
## Four Spaces of Collaboration

We need to be mindful of the nature and quality of the spaces in which participatory democracy and collaboration happen, especially between government, civil society and business. “Who is participating in whose process?” is a vital question to ask and resolve to avoid trapping participants in situations that undermine genuine participation. Let us examine the different kinds of spaces that exist:

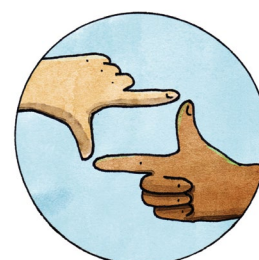
**Closed spaces:** This is where important discussions and decisions are made behind closed doors, primarily by government and business. With demands for transparent governance, it is clear that many closed spaces need to be opened up, either to public viewing or to participation in *invited spaces*.



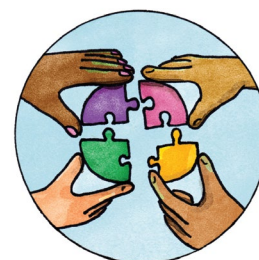
**Invited spaces:** Increasingly governments are creating official forums, especially at municipal level, inviting civil society and business to come together to negotiate, plan and to collaborate. If these have statutory power and genuine participation, they can play a powerful role in advancing real democracy. But the typical formal processes of the government-style meetings with controlled agendas can easily bias the process in favour of government and big business interests. In addition, the ability of less powerful players to participate meaningfully in invited spaces may also be shaped by the quality of their own *invented spaces*.



**Invented spaces:** These are co-created by citizens to self-organise and formulate extra-state responses to issues, e.g., *social movements, campaigns, coalitions, alliances, platforms etc.* It is essential for civil society organisations to collectively prepare themselves, to mobilise their diverse, intersectional interests and resources and unify around positions and engagement processes within the *invited spaces* of government, lest they be divided there and weakened. Yet, the bias of *invited spaces* may still undermine genuine participation and so we have seen an increasing need and call for more co-created *networked spaces*.



**Networked spaces:** This is where actors from government, business and civil society co-design their collaborative spaces to engage and learn together to find novel solutions to specific issues. The successful engagement of civil society here similarly depends on how they prepare in their *invented spaces* and on the status of the joint plans and decisions made in the *networked spaces*. Trade unions, whose successful struggles culminate in effective *networked spaces* through which they have won significant rights and benefits, are good models.



We can see a continuum from closed spaces through *invited*, *invented* and *networked spaces*. Each space makes more visible the power dynamics that exist between the various actors, and thus the chances for accountability and sustainable gains are increased. The quality and effectiveness of *invented spaces*, i.e., of social movements, campaigns, coalitions, platforms etc., provide the vital preparedness for successful engagement of government and business in both *invited* and *networked spaces*.

*Adapted from Pamela Masiko-Kambala et al. (2012)*

# Spain: Future in Common – a liquid forum for moving together

By Maite Serrano Oñate and Clarisa Giamello of Coordinadora de ONGD Spain



By early 2012 the 2008 financial crisis had already had a tremendous impact on Spanish society. At the beginning of that year hundreds of families were being evicted from their homes *each day*; hundreds of thousands of people, mostly women, lost their jobs, their houses, their savings; unemployment rose massively among young people and many children started to live below the poverty line.

## THE STREETS BURST WITH SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

So, people began to emerge and occupy the streets. Movements and young people converged into the squares of Spanish cities, giving rise to the Movimiento de los indignados (Movement of the Indignant) and the Movimiento 15-M with the aim of promoting participatory democracy against the power of the political establishment, banks and corporations. The Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH or “Mortgage Victims’ Platform”) managed to place the right to housing as a social problem. “No Somos Delito” (“We are not a crime”) an umbrella organisation formed by more than 70 civil rights associations, social movement groups and NGOs against the gag laws is still fighting against the so called “citizen security law” and others that violate fundamental civil rights such as freedom of expression, assembly and demonstrations. The “White Tide”, supported by thousands of health professionals, was formed in defence of public health; the “Green Tide” did the same to defend education as a public good; and finally, several feminist and environmental movements were emerging, acquiring an importance and social presence unknown until now.

## LIFTING THEIR HEADS FROM FUNDED PROJECTS

By the time the NGOs started to lift their heads from their funded Projects, the social movements had already occupied the streets. NGOs soon became overwhelmed by the crisis, with declining public and private funding and reductions.

What International Development NGOs had been working with in other countries for decades turned into our local reality with all its rawness. The mirage of opulence fell under its own weight and hit the majority of the population hard, while that small minority obscenely increased their wealth in their midst. For Coordinadora and its members, whose vision is “a sustainable, diverse and poverty-free world, where social justice, equitable distribution of wealth and equal opportunities prevail”, it was impossible not to look around us in shock.



The CEO of one of the largest NGOs in Spain described their situation as that of a juggler who had to spin three plates at the same time. The first plate was to assist the urgent and basic rights for those in need, the second was to handle the imbalance between diminishing NGO resources and increasing needs, and for the Development NGOs the third plate was facing the narrative that emphasised taking care of “our people” vs. those of other countries (as if there was a contradiction!).

### A TIME OF CHANGE OR A CHANGE OF THE TIMES?

This was a complex intersection of crises for which our projects were not designed. We were staring into an abyss into which we would fall if we did not change our whole way of seeing the world. How could we, in international cooperation, contribute to that change? For years we had been talking about social movements and change, but we were far away from the social movements emerging in Spain.

Inside the Spanish International Development NGO national platform, Coordinadora, we started a reflection process, concluding that; we had to broaden our outlook towards an intersectional perspective, approaching NGOs from other sectors, to be more political, to reach out to ordinary citizens and local organisations. We had some fears about losing our identity as international cooperation actors in the name of the intersectional perspective. At this point, the Board leadership was key. There was a deep conviction that we could not go on doing things the same way and expecting different results. But the problem was that nobody knew what to do next.

### The anti-austerity movements in Spain

The 15-M Movement (Movimiento 15-M), the Indignados Movement and many others were a series of protests, demonstrations, and occupations against austerity policies in Spain that began around the local and regional elections of 2011 and 2012. First starting on 15 May 2011, many of the subsequent demonstrations spread through various social networks such as Real Democracy NOW (Democracia Real) and Youth Without a Future (Juventud Sin Futuro).

Many called for basic rights, of home, work, culture, health and education. The movement transferred the model of the protest camp to Europe, which had been formed in the Arab Spring, adapting it to a more countercultural framework. This would later expand until influencing the creation of Occupy Wall Street.

According to RTVE, the Spanish public broadcasting company, between 6.5 and 8 million Spaniards participated in these events. (adapted from Wikipedia)



We realised that we had to explore, to try, to fail and try again. For this we needed to have a common and open space to talk and work together with others, not only among NGOs but also with other social organisations and movements. We were being challenged by the new social movements and citizen response to the crisis. We discovered that we had lost the ability to connect the work of our organisations with citizen mobilisations and that many of these movements saw us as immobile, passive, even as too installed in the “system”.

We decided to strengthen our relations with other organisations from different sectors: environmental, human rights, feminism, social, trade unions. We started to engage them in bilateral meetings first and jointly later, building trust and collectively gathering ideas through sparking new questions and conversations.

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*We did not want to create a new structure or organisation because that would become a power hierarchy. What we needed was a simple meeting space for all the organisations, an assembly and loose working groups carried by the energy that is there.*

### THE LIQUID SHAPE OF FUTURE IN COMMON

So, this is how we created “Future in Common”, an informal platform born from a shared idea: “together we are stronger”, born from the need to share agendas, identify shared struggles and common elements but also our differences. It brings together more than 50 organisations involved in development, the environment, feminists, trade unionists, academia, childhood, social action and human rights with a common agenda to end poverty and inequality and respect the environmental limits of the planet.

We did not want to only be united by common experience of problems and crisis but by a shared ambition about the future we have in common. We saw in the SDG Agenda an opportunity to work from organised civil society on truly transformative intersectoral proposals that break work in silos and allow development problems to be addressed in their entirety. With this ambitious goal, *Futuro en Común*

prepared a parallel report to Spain’s voluntary report at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum in New York. In the same logic, in the context of the pandemic, we prepared a joint proposal of civil society for reconstruction.

We did not want to create a new structure or organisation because that would become a power hierarchy. What we needed was a simple meeting space for all the organisations, an assembly and loose working groups carried by the energy that is there.



In many ways it is very different to a movement or a platform, more fluid and self-organising. To the outsider it may seem to be too open and loose, but that is how it unlocks real energy and keeps people involved, according to the time and resources they have. For a member sometimes there is intense participation and sometimes they stand back, we keep relationships and possibility open.

### **SIMPLY NO STRUCTURES**

The meeting processes are simple though varied depending on the issues. We have a large, facilitated assembly, and small leading group that oversees the working plans. We have two patient and skilled facilitators who ensure that everyone has a fair space to speak. They are always calm and curious, creating a deep sense that we have to listen to everyone. We can be in the storm of ideas, but after that, everybody has to agree. This builds the sense that we are going together, no matter how fast or slow. Sometimes it is frustrating but at the end there is trust and inclusion.

Being diverse, we are able to bring the different perspectives to mingle and influence each other. In that way we can recognise and work with the intersectionality of the issues and the future solutions. Inequality in education is not just an education issue, but a poverty issue and that will increasingly become a climate issue. Fighting inequality in education must be brought from multiple perspectives.

For the moment, we do not need a new platform, or some structure. Every sector has structures that already work or try to. We needed a space to try to imagine the world we want, our common future and then start to connect our narratives of change to create that. That is the idea, to connect across issues; how to empower women and how to connect this with environmental issues or with inequality, because if we continue doing the things in separate ways, with separate projects, we will not produce change, just relieve a few symptoms here and there.

Even though there is not a formal structure it still requires some funding. So far, the funding was provided by an EU project, voluntary contributions from organisations and the submission of new projects. However, funding these new ways of working remains uncertain.

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*Being diverse, we are able to bring the different perspectives to mingle and influence each other. In that way we can recognise and work with the intersectionality of the issues and the future solutions.*



From time to time the assembly decides to reflect on its value, *is it still interesting, should we continue or is the moment past?* So far it has been a big Yes.

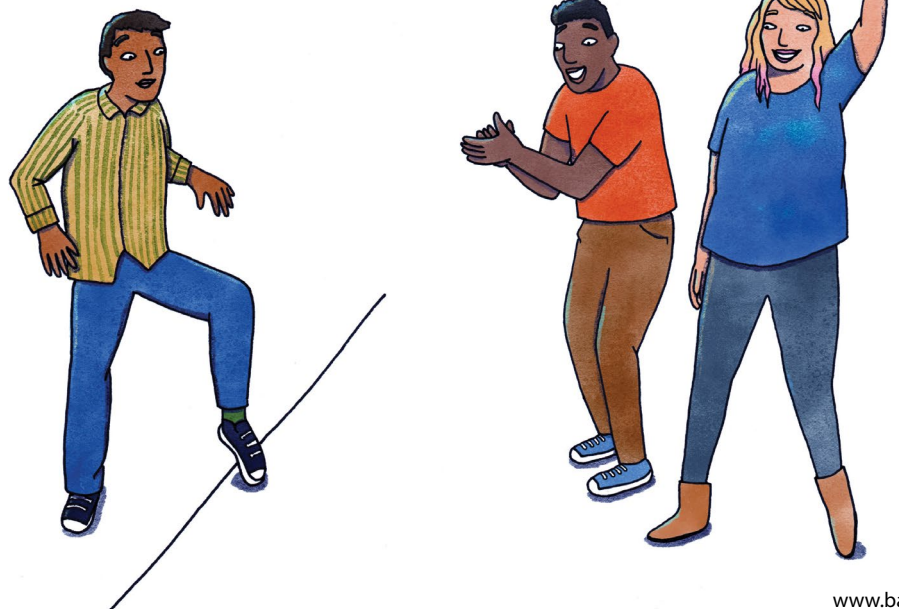
## LESSONS LEARNED, CHALLENGES REMAINING

- There is a need to find new ways of working. We need to try again and again, to risk. Maybe we don't find "the solution", maybe we do. But what is clear is that if we continue to do things as we have always done following narrow project ways of working, we are not going to succeed.
- One of the fears that initially arose when talking about intersectional working is losing one's organisational/network identity. But the experience was different because surprisingly the intersectional perspectives reinforced and enriched each contributor's perspective and, thus, each one's identity.
- Even while we try to bring different sectors to work together and develop common messages, the weight of sector driven strategies is still dominant. There is still a long way to go to achieve a true inter-sectorial approach that permeates the agendas of each one. We must continue working to move from the fair position of proposals in each sector to the development of proposals that integrate the different perspectives.
- Part of the challenge is to develop more fluid leadership and organisations internally, reducing bureaucracy and promoting deep participation and internal democratisation. This builds the internal faculties for organisations to work across their organisational boundaries, cultivating intersectoral consciousness and capacity.
- Among the pending challenges is working closely with social movements. To achieve this a cultural shift is needed to help bring a better understanding of each other: language, timetables, ways of working etc. Besides, donors need to be helped to find approaches that comply with reality to help the collective interaction and learning process. Failure is good for learning!
- There is a need to improve methodologies and facilitation skills to deepen dialogue among different actors, to be able to find what unites us, and to deal with those issues in which it is difficult to find a common position.

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*This builds the internal faculties for organisations to work across their organisational boundaries, cultivating intersectoral consciousness and capacity.*

- Governance of these flexible, open structures is also an issue to improve. A generative and collective leadership is needed, and a generosity from the participating organisations to offer both economic support and leadership support. Resources are always a problem. In these open and flexible initiatives, we have combined three different finance sources: contributions from the organisations; organisations paying directly some of the costs and grants held by one organisation that is offered to the initiative.



## How to be a Social Movement Ally

In an article “Can NGOs and social movements be authentic allies?” by Michael Silberman (2020) the author contends that campaigning organisations are moving beyond the question of “if” they should engage with movements to asking “when” and “how” - reflecting an understanding of systems change as complex, nonlinear and unpredictable in which NGOs can have little impact on their own. Many NGO staff rightly have an overwhelming fear of causing harm to movements by acting in ways that are (or appear to be) self-serving or co-opting. That said, inaction during a “movement moment” also risks an organisation’s relevance and impact. He provides a few lessons to others pondering the question:

- **Be clear on what you mean by movements.** The author speaks of a worrying trend of NGOs speaking of “movement building.” These semantics matter because getting clear on what we mean by movements enables us to have more productive conversations within our organisations and honours the time and painstaking work of true movement builders who don’t enjoy the same resources as NGOs.
- **Know when to leave your brand behind.** Most NGO colleagues harbour fears about their organisation’s brand if they engage with or support a movement. Movement support work introduces new types of risks which shouldn’t be treated in the same way as others. Factoring in the long-term value of systems change into analyses of organisational risks will pay off for everyone.
- **Share your credibility.** Most advocacy organisations have spent years developing their communications and media machines, which can be invaluable in amplifying movement messages, demonstrating solidarity, and helping to shift societal narratives and culture.
- **Move money and resources.** Movements are under-resourced. The author suggests the sharing of resources such as meeting rooms, communications, and printing etc. which, though small, can make an enormous difference.

There are many examples of the collaborative field between NGOs and social movements. Several well-known organisations see this as an important feature of their strategy towards achieving goals.



## Our work into renewal

Networks and coalitions can be powerful forces for change, especially when they mobilise the diversity of the members and voices that we have in civil society. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen how often civil society is closest to the needs of communities. And even though networks sometimes seem to be somewhat removed from the reality on the ground they help us to have a view from the balcony, to aggregate all these different needs and perspectives.

Many of the organisations participating in platforms or coalitions, do so as an add-on to their day-to-day work. It is a challenge for them to engage in the long term or consistently. We must not see this as a problem but as part of the territory. We have to unlearn mechanistic and controlling impulses and anxieties and learn a more trusting and facilitative way of mobilising whatever "pieces" of energy and capacity there are available.

So, we experience fluctuations of involvement in member organisations, except for those organisations or networks who have dedicated capacity for the network and coalition building. It takes time for members to realise the need to commit more to collaboration.

Members commit energy depending on how the agenda or the activities of the network align with their own priorities and how it adds value to what they are already doing. But the messiness of collaborative work and the difficulty of "measuring" added value makes this

challenging and requires an act of faith that the risk is worthwhile.

The issues themselves may have fluctuations and rhythms, building up to crescendos like COP21 and then waning as we take time to breathe out, reflect and build ourselves for the next wave of work.

So, one of the first challenges for networks and coalitions is to navigate those fluctuations. We need regular feedback conversations with members and allies to renew our alignment in time, space and priorities, as a continuously responsive approach.



*As the world seems to fragment, disintegrate and unravel so our countermovement is to turn to each other, to gather together, to integrate and to remake the connections between ourselves, enabling our collective energies to be mobilised, held and released coherently as a force of social change.*

# Key Practices to Nourish Collaboration



*Facilitating dialogues, working with diversity and complexity, deep listening, horizontal learning, cultivating trust... the list goes on. A whole new language is growing!*

*In a way, yes. New ways of seeing and new practices do need new language. I like the feel of the words, less mechanistic and more organic, recognising that we are working with real lives and not engineering projects! But the real question is: What is the real work here, what is the practice?*



*"We can work together for a better world with men and women of goodwill, those who radiate the intrinsic goodness of humankind."*

Wangari Maathai

## Learning to breathe together

*Doug Reeler, Forus Leadership Development Programme Facilitator and Barefoot Guide Connection*

*Conspire (v.) from Latin conspirare "to agree, unite, plot, to breathe together," from com "with, together" + spirare "to breathe". Source: Online Etymology Dictionary.*

I live in the Genadendal/Greyton Valley, 150 km east of Cape Town as part of a diverse community of about 17 000 people. Civil society organisations, municipal government and business have been trying to work together for years under the Greyton Council to jointly tackle a range of developmental issues. In August 2020, at the Greyton Council AGM, the members said that they wanted a simpler, more conversational space to think and act together. So, they did away with the post of Executive Chairperson, and I was asked to be the interim "facilitator chairperson". The Executive Committee was replaced by the Admin Team responsible for organising meetings and communication. It's an experiment to nurture a different culture and practice of collaboration. Looking for less confrontational ways of relating to each other, we

chose our motif as: "How do we bring out the best in each other?"

I shared a framework called "The Elements of Conspiring" (presented overleaf) that I had developed with a national NGO learning network a few years ago.

It sparked several productive conversations, especially around the need to work on communication and co-learning to prepare the soil for a more fruitful collaboration. I have noticed that in several following meetings members often referenced the framework to support a point. It is not a recipe or formula but a growth path for cultivating and nurturing the kind of relationships and capacities we need for deeper collaboration.

# The Elements of Conspiring

Each element develops a quality of relationship to support further working together. As these relationships mature, deeper collaboration becomes possible.

## A. COMMUNICATION



Start with improving communication. Focusing on deep listening and speaking:

- **Thinking level:** Be curious about what people are trying to say and what their assumptions and world views are.
- **Feeling level:** Listen for emotions and empathise to see what really matters to each person.
- **Willing level:** Listen for what people really want, where their energy is. If there appears to be no will, ask “what is blocking it?”

(Look for the “Listening at Three Levels” exercise In the Barefoot Guide website Resources for more details, <https://www.barefootguide.org/tools-games-and-exercises.html>)

## B. CO-LEARNING



**Foster co-learning as a foundation for co-working.** Spend time sharing and taking a deep interest in each other’s experience and local knowledge, rather than just debating opinions. When people learn from each other, horizontally, not only do they gain valuable insights and skills, but this also builds the relationships of trust and solidarity required for working together. Use the Action Learning Cycle to help people to reflect and learn more effectively.

(See page 50 for how to work with the Action Learning Cycle)

## C. COORDINATING



**Coordinate existing activities.** Before organisations jump into cooperation or collaboration, look for easy areas of complementing and coordinating (and not getting in each other’s way!) in a spirit of support for each other’s objectives. E.g., scheduling different dates for public events and sharing resources/equipment.

## D. COOPERATING



**Cooperate where it makes sense.** Pursue your own ambitions but through joint activity and synergy. E.g. A marketplace or newsletter.

## E. COLLABORATING



**Collaborate to solve common problems and move towards common visions.** Jointly analysing issues and creating common visions and then mobilising diverse talents and resources. E.g., a youth development programme with different contributions to a jointly designed and resourced set of activities.



# Surprising simulations – learning to build an NGO Platform in Jordan

By Clarisa Giamello and Maite Serrano Oñate, Coordinadora de ONGD Spain

How do we support NGOs, in emerging democracies, with no experience of collaboration to open up and move together to tackle more systemic change?

In 2019, the Spanish Cooperation office in Jordan, collaborating with the Centre for Strategic Studies University of Jordan, decided to offer a three-week course for NGOs to learn about the fundamentals of democracy, law, advocacy and also about collaboration. As Jordan transitions towards more democratisation, strengthening civil society organisations was recognised as an essential element of that process. They asked us, Coordinadora from Spain, to run a series of two-day course around the country in how to work in coalitions and platforms.

Without an active civil society, democracy is much like bread without active yeast. It stays flat and lifeless. Civil society organisations, with their passionate members and staff, are often the ones to ask different and challenging questions, mobilise communities to take responsibility, to speak up about their needs and take creative initiatives that governments and businesses simply cannot. Civil society organisations are that yeast, bringing life and lift to democracy. But if they are stuck in their little donor projects then how can they help to transform society? Collaboration is key to that!

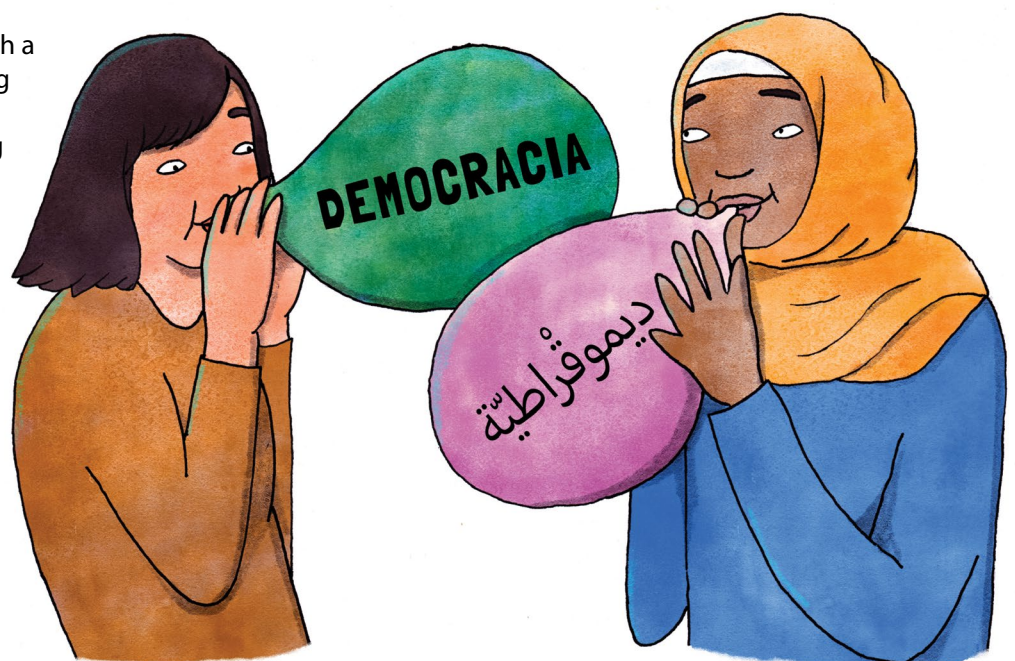
The first workshop we did was in the northern city of Irbid, with 20 people from 20 local NGOs. They work mainly with young people or women on issues like employment opportunities, education etc., but have no experience in advocacy or collaboration among themselves. Our contribution would be to help them to see the possibilities of working more collaboratively to achieve their aims.

On the first day we started just talking about social change and why we need broader coalitions to enable more systemic change, beyond little projects. We presented two case studies of different platforms to illustrate that there is more than one way to work collaboratively, to avoid recipes.

Then we guided them through a simulation exercise, imagining the process of building a platform or coalition, working in different groups. Each group had to pick the social change issue they wanted to address, find a name for the platform and to imagine who was in it.

“

*Civil society organisations are that yeast, bringing life and lift to democracy.*



They played around with funny names and acronyms and chose a mission for the platform to accomplish.

And then we asked them to produce two main activities that the platform would undertake. From the start they planned coalitions with everybody involved, even the government, political parties, and so many others. One of them was about addressing climate change. Everybody was really impressed with the big platform they were imagining.

### REALITY HITS HARD

But when they started talking about the activities, someone suggested, "Okay, let us reduce taxes to encourage people to buy low emission cars." But another said, "No, we don't want to touch the taxes that are needed for social programmes." Another added, "And the government will never agree." They were objecting and arguing and eventually the day ended in frustration. "This is not working," they said, "We are not in the same place."

During the day, privately, they were telling us; "We don't trust each other." "We don't always want to be with each other because we don't know what they really do or where their money comes from."

We realised that this process was not just about capacity-development. More than a simulation exercise, we were laying real foundations for future platform-building.

The following day, we got them to reflect on what had happened and to look for a way forward. Three main issues emerged: how to deal with diversity, building trust and what kind of leadership is needed.

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*During the day, privately, they were telling us; "We don't trust each other." "We don't always want to be with each other because we don't know what they really do or where their money comes from."*



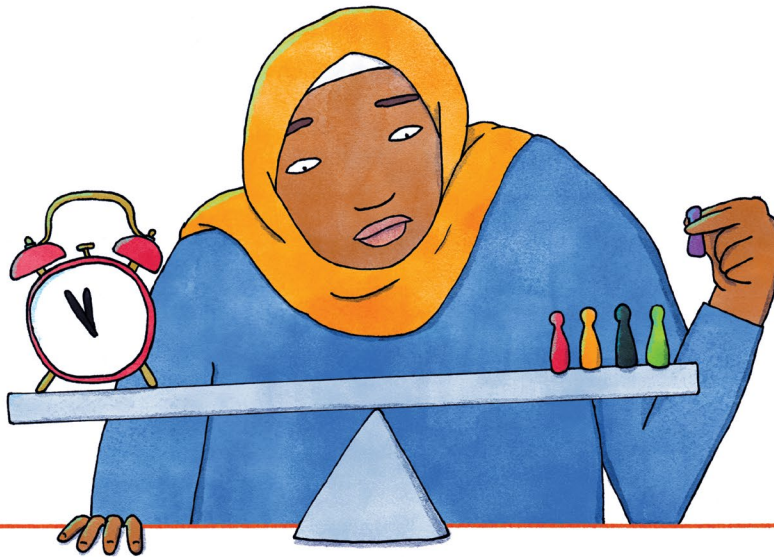
"Okay, how will we solve this problem with so many different opinions?"

"We won't!"

"What about voting?" "Yes, OK then the 60 wins and the 40 losses and what then?"

"Well, maybe we can do a debate?" "Yes!" (sometimes conflict is enjoyable!)

So, we had a debate, where all the options were presented and then they voted. We asked, "We can see that the debate is informative and lively, but how can the losing group feel that their opinions are considered, in case they become unhappy or even resist? How do we address the diversity of interests and opinions?"



### THE SECRET IS REVEALED

They became thoughtful, then one said, “Maybe we have to do different processes with different groups.” So, they decided to restart the coalition, talking about diversity, about trust, because the only way that diversity can really be an asset is to build trust.

One said, “If we talk about trust, we have to talk about people, not just opinions, or which opinion is the majority. We have to talk about people needing to work together to build trust. I can accept your opinion this time, because maybe next time mine will be accepted.” We started talking a lot about relationships.

What surprised them in repeating the exercise was that they wanted to restart with a small coalition. “First, we want to rethink the size of the coalition, not for everybody to be there, because it’s going to be too much to deal with!” They started to understand the importance of relationships. We said, “This is the secret. It’s not just what we want to do together but who we are together and how we want to relate to each other.” They asked new questions like: “What can I add to your idea?” Not just who is right and wrong. The second coalition was more focused on who were the people to be invited in, and how to invite them, and what the process was to build relationships of trust and understanding. And then discussing actions and activities became more possible.

“

*We said “This is the secret. It’s not just what we want to do together but who we are together and how we want to relate to each other”.*

### WORKING WITH TENSIONS

We discussed how we work with tensions. “The problems are so urgent that we really feel the rush to do things.” “How do we take our time when people are suffering?” “What if there is an opportunity that cannot wait?” “But if we need to do it with many people, to include them, then we need time to build trust and consensus, to build that base.” “But if we have to do it now, and if we do it fast, we will leave people behind, people who feel that they are not part of it.” “And what about decision-making? Which decision must be taken by the large group and which decisions can be delegated to smaller group?” “What is the right place for every level of decisions?”

They could see that it takes a lot of work to balance time and the meaningful participation of other members. And at the same time, to be fast, and to be there, responding to the moment or opportunity.

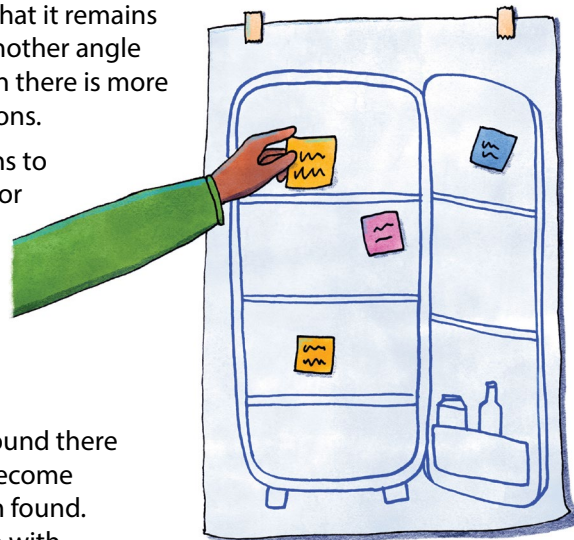
The group could really see now that the secret lies in taking the time to build trusting relationships, and so the process ended well. We had not taught them much but rather facilitated a process of discovery. Through practical simulation and experimentation, they had learned for themselves some important things that they needed to know. And we could sense that some of the mistrust that we had heard and seen was itself starting to dissolve. They had laughed and reflected and explored together. Hopefully we had planted some seeds of collaboration that they could now care for.

### THE REFRIGERATOR: A METHODOLOGY FOR STUCK DISCUSSIONS

We used this method at one point. When diverse groups are working together, different perspectives on issues can lead to stagnant discussions. These issues act as knots which can generate a paralysing effect and even invalidate the areas where progress has been made.

When we see this starting to happen, we can use “the Refrigerator”.

- 1) We draw a large fridge on a blackboard or flipchart. We explain that the refrigerator is a place to store food to keep its freshness. If we find that a subject cannot reach a consensus due to its complexity and hard opinions, we suggest putting it in the fridge, so that it remains “fresh” until we can approach it from another angle or with more information, or later when there is more trust and openness to other contributions.
- 2) As soon as we see that the group begins to get stuck in the discussion, the facilitator intervenes by making a mini summary and prompting the group to put the topic “in the fridge” to see it later. The subject is put or written into the fridge.
- 3) At the end of the session, the refrigerator is opened and the topics found there are discussed again. Some may have become less relevant, or a way has already been found. If not, the group can decide what to do with them, keep them in the fridge, or design a special process.



*What struck me is how the facilitators held a space in which people could participate and have meaningful conversations, engage in collective thinking and co-create their coalition. It was a co-creative process, a real example of building a platform in action.*

# Encouraging feedback

By Oyebisi, Babatunde Oluseyi – Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNGO)

Giving feedback and learning are important practices for our network. We understand feedback to be different from criticism. So, we encourage our members to bring their feedback to the table. As leadership we can analyse the feedback and by doing so, we can accommodate the thinking and perspectives of others. We need to assure our members that we will work on their feedback, and with time we can show how we've been able to work on issues raised. In this way we can learn as a network.

So, being open to and encouraging feedback is important for strengthening the network.

That's how we process and gain insight. That's how we support our members. There are times we don't actually want to hear from the feedback, but we have learned to accommodate, to accept it, think it through and draw learning from it. In the last two years the feedback received from members has helped us to improve our events, our programmes and those we have lobbied. It has also helped us to improve our events in different regions of the country.

Feedback is not an easy practice to institutionalise. When giving feedback, it is important to give honest feedback, but this can only happen under certain conditions.

Firstly, there must be trust in the relationship otherwise I will be suspicious of any difficult-to-hear feedback. Secondly, the person receiving feedback must want it or be ready for it. If you receive unsolicited feedback a natural first response is "Who asked you to give me feedback!". Thirdly, there must be a sufficient level of emotional intelligence. This means that we must be conscious in ourselves of how different emotions are triggered by critical feedback and in using or hearing certain words. Lastly, it is good to learn a few techniques for giving feedback (see below).

As a network we use the feedback sessions for reflection, learning and collective sense-making. These sessions have given me the opportunity to see and understand how I lead and also to see how the sector is being led. In these situations, we try very hard to use the wisdom of the experience, of the real situation, not just the airing of opinions. We take direction from the situations around us, what does the situation need, our ability to read situations, listen and intuit what needs to happen next.

See "How to Give and Receive Helpful Feedback" in the Barefoot Guide website Resources, <https://www.barefootguide.org/tools-games-and-exercises.html>



# How to Have a Conversation

“What is more valuable than gold? Light. What is more precious than light? Conversation.”

J.W. von Goethe

Good conversations promote collaboration and bad conversations undermine it. Simple. We have all had good conversations, so we do have the capacity, but somehow things get in the way. One of the problems is that we don't realise that there are different ways of conversing for different needs, each requiring a certain approach and skills.

We describe four distinct kinds of conversations to understand and work with. Each has a role to play in supporting collaboration and represent a developmental path from simple communication to the kind of deeper engagement that can make fruitful collaboration inevitable.

## DOWNLOADING

In *Downloading*, we share what we know as a one-way information flow, simply to inform. It is not about generating new insights or challenging whether it is true or not. We download (like from a computer file) our information, thoughts, ideas and feelings onto the world.

The strength of *Downloading* is that it can bring clarity, supplying the appropriate answer without hesitation or uncertainty. However, it can also reinforce the status quo and stuckness or crisis. When this happens, when people are frustrated and want to challenge it, then this can often pave the way for *Debating*.

## DEBATING

We move from *Downloading* to *Debating* when we stop saying what we think we have to say and start to say what we are really thinking. In *Debating* we speak our minds openly, even at the risk of causing discomfort or conflict. We debate and make judgments, like in a courtroom. We test our ideas against each other, as in an argument.

Moving from *Downloading* to *Debating* is a momentous step outward towards an active search for truth, different perspectives and options, for more honesty and towards the embrace of free speech and open argument. *Debating*

can liberate and stimulate change, but it can also create another kind of stuckness or crisis of being trapped in conflicts between differing viewpoints, of “either/ or” thinking, of winning or losing the argument.

When people tire of this mode and realise that it is not always helpful, they become more open to others and the need to listen, paving the way for more *Reflective Dialogue*.

## REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE

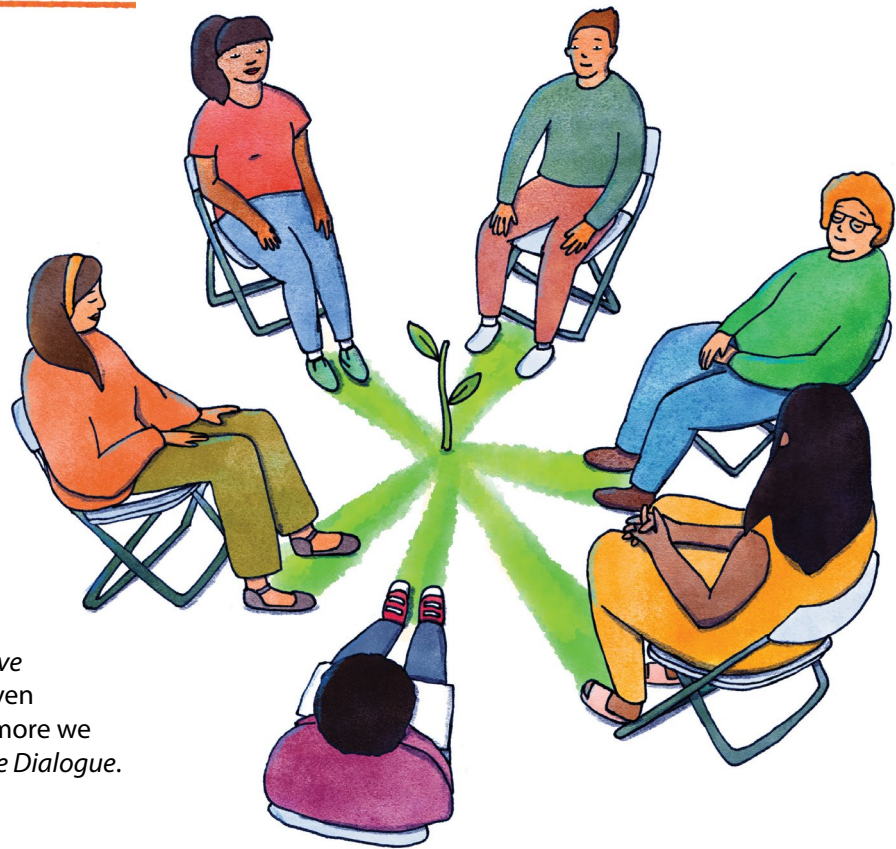
In *Reflective Dialogue*, we move towards each other, not against each other. We become curious to see what we can learn from others and to see through their eyes. We listen self-reflectively to ourselves and hear ourselves through the ears of others.



As we listen in this way, the critical quality and experience of *empathy* starts to arise and trust can grow. We become interested to build new knowledge and initiatives together. But it requires a determination to move beyond *Debating* and to find trust and courage within and between ourselves.

*This is where collaboration starts to become possible.*

The more we engage in *Reflective Dialogue*, trust, empathy and even affection can develop and the more we lay the conditions for *Generative Dialogue*.



## GENERATIVE DIALOGUE

In *Generative Dialogue*, we are fully present to what is emerging in the whole system. We may speak one after another, but it is as if we are completing each other's thoughts. The normal sense of separation between people seems lessened, from appreciating each other's different perspectives (as in *Reflective Dialogue*) to being, for a while, a whole collective "I".

In a *Generative Dialogue*, it is as if meaning emerges not from any one person but from the centre of the circle. We are not only of one mind, but we begin to speak from the same deep intentions, from what really matters to us as human beings. The sacred book of the Mayan Q'iche people is called the Popol Vuh. It contains the following text: "We did not put our ideas together. We put our purposes together. And we agreed, and then we decided."

*This is where collaboration starts to become inevitable.*

## LEADING THROUGH TALKING AND LISTENING

As leaders, we ultimately have only one instrument: how we enable fruitful sharing and listening. Each of the four modes of conversation is useful, but if we want to create new social realities, to deeply collaborate, our ability to lead conversations must include *Reflective Dialogue* and *Generative Dialogue*.

*Reflective Dialogue* calls on us to be empathetic—to see the world through the eyes of others—and to be self-reflective—to understand how we influence the world around us. This mode is rare in organisational life, but it is essential for deep change. Unlike *Downloading* and *Debating*, *Reflective Dialogue* allows us to participate in the future that is emerging. As we deepen our relationships *Generative Dialogue* becomes possible, allowing a group to discover its larger and deeper shared purpose, generatively unlocking creativity in each participant as a collective process.

*Generative Dialogue* is vital for the success of deep change initiatives where we become tuned into the potential of the system and what is being born between and through us.

*Adapted from Adam Kahane (2002)*

# Unlocking the DNA of collaboration: Horizontal Action Learning

*What lies in the DNA of collaborative social change?* There are two human processes that are part of the answer: *Action Learning* and *Horizontal Learning*, each powerful, inborn and natural human processes that we have seen at work in almost every worthwhile initiative of social and individual change.

Action Learning and Horizontal Learning are core to working with complexity and emergence and very often they work together, as one social process.

## INCLUSIVE ACTION LEARNING: MEETING COMPLEXITY AND EMERGENCE

We know that we must recognise the diversity and complexity in situations or contexts and find ways to work with this. Working collaboratively is one way to approach complexity by working systemically or “bringing the system into the room”. But at the same time collaboration also adds to the complexity. So how do we deal with this? Let’s take a step back.

The more complexity there is the less you can see or understand what is happening which *makes things unpredictable*. If the context is complex, unpredictable and evolving, we may be wasting our time doing too much planning up front because reality will soon shift and our plans will be outdated and irrelevant. Even worse, because of things like donor compliance, we may stick to unworkable plans and make things worse. In complex situations unexpected new dynamics, or people or forces will emerge

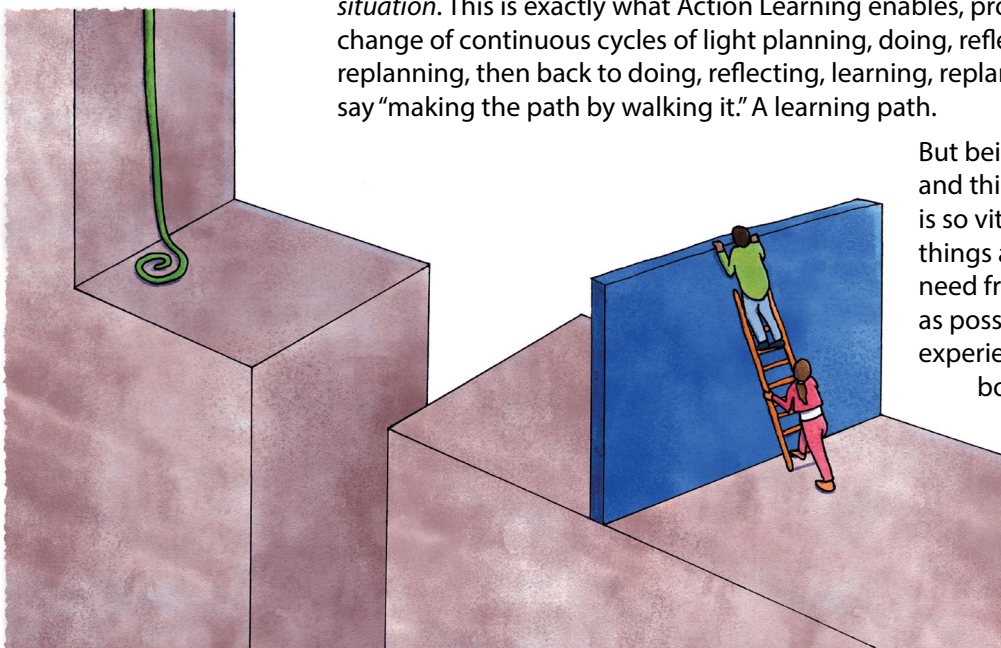
that we have to take into account. For this we need an approach that is also dynamic, that meets emergence with an agile and adaptable approach, able to meet ever-changing realities.

But what does this mean practically? This is where an inclusive Action Learning approach is key. Simply put, *if the situation is too complex to plan everything up front then we have no choice but to continuously reflect and learn our way through the situation*. This is exactly what Action Learning enables, providing an approach to change of continuous cycles of light planning, doing, reflecting, learning and then replanning, then back to doing, reflecting, learning, replanning and so on... As they say “making the path by walking it.” A learning path.

But being inclusive is also key and this is why collaboration is so vital. The more complex things are the more *input* you need from as many people as possible, whether facts, experiences, opinions or ideas, both to understand what is happening AND to come up with ideas to make them happen.

“

*For this we need an approach that is also dynamic, that meets emergence with an agile and adaptable approach, able to meet ever-changing realities.*





## LEARNING IS CHANGE

Action Learning is not just a method of change – it is a fundamental kind of change. When we learn we change. When we stop learning we stop changing. We learn from our own experiences and we learn from the experience of others. And when we learn together, we can create change together. Can you think of any kind of change that does not involve learning? Or unlearning? This is what Action Learning is in essence.

There are many kinds of Action Learning. We learn unconsciously, simply by doing, like a toddler who learns to walk, by walking. Sometimes we learn by trial and error, without much thought, trying different things out until something works. However, when we start to think about things more consciously then our powers of learning take a huge leap forward and this opens up more avenues for social or collective learning and change. When, through Action Learning conversations, we consciously reflect together on what has happened then we start the process of learning together, of understanding each other, of collectively analysing the situation and thus making possible deep learning of what is really happening and possible. This enables ideas for joint action or collaboration and collective commitment. (Indeed, the processes of Reflective and Generative Dialogue we described earlier in this chapter can be richly enhanced by an Action Learning approach.)

This may lead to new action, to new experiences to again be reflected on and learned from in a continuous cycle of learning. We call this the Action Learning Cycle. Some may call this a framework, a method or a tool. But for us it is more than that. It is making conscious a natural process of change, indeed a life force of individual and social evolution.

*The question is how do we actually use the Action Learning Cycle effectively? More consciously and collectively.*

Many worthy collaborative social change initiatives fail when actors are unable to agree, even when they are of good will and good heart, wanting the same outcomes. Their conversations are chaotic, without clear process and so they spiral down into misunderstanding and fruitless debate or conflict. This is where the Action Learning Cycle, as a natural and disciplined conversational process can be of great help.

The more they learn about each other and the more they can see the need to learn together along the way, the more likely they are to agree.

“

*Action Learning is not just a method of change – it is a fundamental kind of change. When we learn we change. When we stop learning we stop changing.*



## THE DISCIPLINE OF THE ACTION LEARNING CYCLE: A COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK TO TACKLE COMPLEXITY AND EMERGENCE

There are four steps to the Action Learning conversational process, each with a distinctive quality and contribution:

(You can start with any of the four elements as they are in continuous motion)

**ACTION.** Sharing experience. Describing to each other what happened or what is happening, telling the story so far, gathering information. In this step all the actors are invited to share their experience and observations, what they remembered, what they know. *Not their opinions or judgements or ideas, not yet.*

There are two layers of story that should be surfaced: a) the Outside Story which is a simple telling of what happened or what the situation is and then b) the Inside Story of what is happening beneath the surface, like the feelings that lift and weigh down the people, the assumptions that different people have, what they really want, their hidden agendas, their hopes and fears, what they love and what they hate. The Inside Story surfaces the real drama of the story or situation and paves the way for *Reflection*.

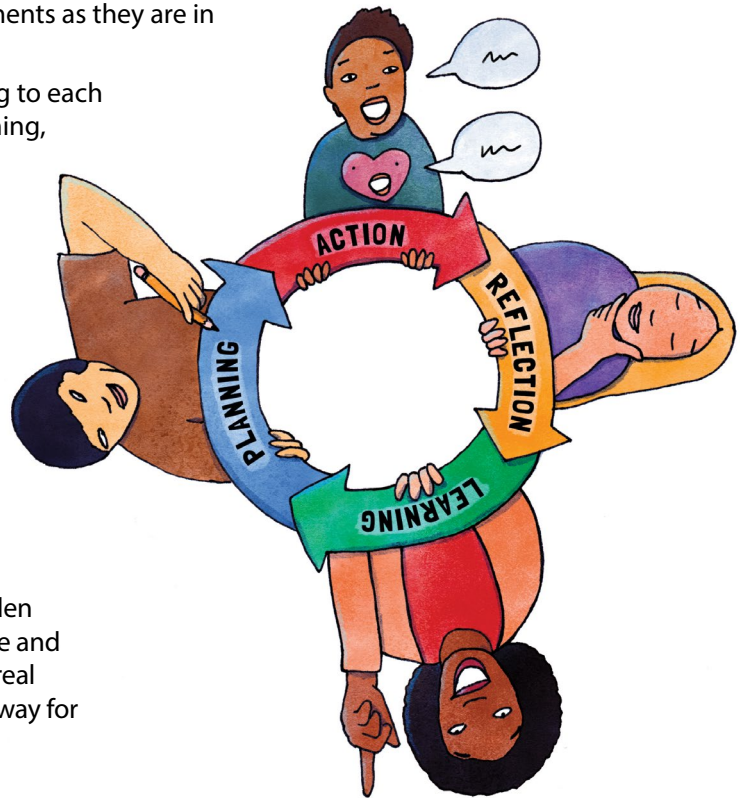
**REFLECTION.** With the information from the previous Action step, a collective reflective or analytical conversation is now possible. Through reflective questions the answer to why things are like they are become more apparent. For example, what helped or hindered the situation? What role did the assumptions of people play in the situation and how did these change, or not? How did relationships develop? What was the impact of the hidden agendas? Reflecting on relationships is particularly important because *power lives in relationships* and if we can better understand how relationships change, we can better see how power can be shifted.

**LEARNING.** Once there is sufficient reflection and good understanding of the story or situation then deep learning, even wisdom, becomes possible. Without good reflection, learning will be superficial and misleading, even dangerous. The deeper the reflection the more chance that wisdom may appear. What have we really learned?

You can ask: knowing what we know now, what would we have done differently and what do we learn from that? How will it inform future plans? Again, the more complex the situation and the more actors involved in the conversation the more likely that wisdom may emerge.

**(RE)PLANNING.** Based on what we have collectively learned what should we plan to do next? What have we learned that changes our practice, and how? What ideas do we have? What do we see as our role going forward, with whom and how? Depending on the context there are different kinds of forward-looking questions to discuss, collaboratively.

**Back to Action... to Reflection... to Learning... to Planning and so on** in continuous cycles of action and learning.



## HORIZONTAL LEARNING: FROM DISCIPLINED LEARNING TO COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

Everyone reading this is familiar with the power of peer learning, whether informally in our friendship or collegial circles or in the workshops we run or attend. Using peer groups with Action Learning processes not only enhances the learning for everyone but enables deeper and more cohesive team practices to grow and for mutual understanding and trust to be cultivated. Everyone becomes a learner in a community of practice.

But Horizontal Learning can be much more significant than group peer learning. Indeed, it can underpin whole approaches and strategies to social change.

*Molly Letela, a wise old school principal from Lesotho described how the parents and pupils at her primary school had developed permaculture gardens to feed their children, back in the 1990s.*

*Within a few years, through a cascading process of horizontal learning, essentially exchange visits from community to community, permaculture gardens spread to almost 250 schools in the small country. Only one agroecology NGO was involved at the very beginning and a part-time resource person with a fax machine provided useful growing information through school fax machines along the process. It involved almost no funding, because it was about unlocking the resourcefulness of resourceful people not providing external resources for "poor people".*



Social movements like Via Campesina and Shack Dwellers International use horizontal exchanges to spread valuable knowledge from farmer-to-farmer groups and shack dweller savings group-to-savings group, sometimes with the next community or across the country or even internationally.

Horizontal exchanges can easily and quickly foster deep trust, creating strong possibilities for solidarity across communities, districts, provinces and countries. This is how many social movements are carried, riding on a deep and authentic wave of solidarity forged in learning exchanges. And of course, these exchanges do not happen in classrooms but are intrinsically Action Learning processes, out in the field or the street where the action and the learning are.

This is one way that change and development catches fire, spilling from community to community, horizontally and collaboratively with the knowledge and wisdom gained from real experience. It is a fairly simple equation: that learning together lays the foundations we need for working together, helping us to understand each other and in the process cultivate the human trust that makes so much possible.

# Working Together

*A poem by David Whyte*

*We shape our self  
to fit this world*

*and by the world  
are shaped again.*

*The visible  
and the invisible*

*working together  
in common cause,*

*to produce  
the miraculous.*

*I am thinking of the way  
the intangible air*

*passed at speed  
round a shaped wing*

*easily  
holds our weight.*

*So may we, in this life  
trust*

*to those elements  
we have yet to see*

*or imagine,  
and look for the true*

*shape of our own self,  
by forming it well*

*to the great  
intangibles about us.*

From *The House of Belonging* by David Whyte. Copyright © 1997, 2004 by David Whyte.  
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# How Donors Can Nurture Collaboration



*Let me ask it straight. What are some of the more liberating donor approaches that can understand and meet the complexities of collaboration?*

*A well posed question, Sani. I would like to add that it is not just about donors but about everyone seeing resourcing in a different way.*



## Peering into the resourcing paradigms of business, government and civil society

Businesses are owned, financed and managed in ways that suit their needs, including their investment approaches, their risk management strategies and core work processes. Their products and services are visible and countable. Measuring the impact of funding or investments, as profit margins, is straightforward.

To some extent the same is true for many government agencies and programmes. Infrastructure and basic services like health, education, social security etc., are mostly visible and measurable and the funding and financing of their work processes, serving a fixed and known “market”, may be complicated but is not complex.

The donors of civil society, whose leaders and staff often have government or business backgrounds, too often treat civil society organisations as non-profit businesses or bureaucratic projects. The way they fund the work of CSOs often misses the complexity, the unpredictability and long-term nature of social change work. They love to talk about “measuring impact” as if it were a simple matter of counting. Albert Einstein had this say:

*“Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.”*

It is true that many civil society organisations undertake funded service delivery projects, operating effectively as non-profit businesses rather than agents of social change and perhaps the impact of their work can be more easily gauged. But those who tackle human rights violations, including the social, economic, political and cultural transformation have highly complex practices tackling multifaceted issues, requiring a different paradigm of resourcing that takes account of this. Even within civil society there is a diversity that requires nuanced resourcing, for example between formal and informal organisational forms or between long-term capacity development programmes or shorter-term campaigns.

And then the collaborative work of networks, coalitions and platforms adds yet another layer of complexity to the kind of resourcing support needed. But only a few donors understand or are able to provide this.





How do we help donors to see themselves as partners tasked with supporting civil society resilience and resourcefulness in developmental ways, rather than the hard-nosed bankers of the sector? How do we value, make visible, and care for the invisible contributions and resources that allow organisations, networks and platforms to thrive?

## Current trends in resourcing civil society

In 2019 Forus published “Funding civil society organisations & networks: Promising approaches to financing Development in the 21st century” (Forus (2019)).

The report highlights the following trends:

**Lack of diversity in funding modalities for networks:** for the majority of networks there is a lack of diversity in funding for the work of networks, especially for those in the Global South, resulting in networks depending on a small number of donors and few able to find resources to support their core costs.

**Shrinking traditional funding streams:** traditional funding streams have been shrinking over the last while and this has resulted in uncertainty for civil society networks. This has been accompanied by donor requirements for demonstrating impact becoming more stringent.

**Emergence of new funding mechanisms (crowdfunding and online lending platforms):** new mechanisms that move civil society networks beyond traditional funders and connect them to lenders and entrepreneurs.

**The difficulty that networks have to demonstrate direct impact:** the background bridging work of networks is removed from direct contact with people on the ground, and so they often struggle to demonstrate or articulate their impact or contributions.

**Unrestricted income sources (impact investments, social enterprise or income generation):** These new mechanisms are beginning to provide opportunities for unrestricted, reliable funding for networks, coalitions and platforms.

**Shrinking space for civil society:** This is affecting the sustainability of many networks diminishing their ability to attract the requisite funding resources and support.

**Sharing and learning from peers:** Although some civil society networks are having success with some resourcing approaches, there is not yet extensive sharing and learning from peers. This is an aspect that needs to be encouraged and supported.

**Slow in looking ahead and preparing for funding challenges:** Although there might be signals from the context, civil society networks and organisations are slow in preparing for upcoming funding challenges. Because of this, they are often negatively impacted by changes in funding climates.

# How to restrict the work of civil society and collaboration

Here we will look at various ways in which current resourcing practices restrict, limit and or undermine the complex work of CSOs:

## LACK OF UNRESTRICTED, FLEXIBLE FUNDING

The private sector, government agencies and private foundations enjoy the opportunity for long term planning. But, due to restricted funding and lack of reserves, most civil society organisations don't, leaving them less able to take risks, innovate, and learn.

Critically, the lack of a flexible funding limits and hinders meaningful collaboration across various strands of civil society work. Donor funding, despite the donor-speak that promotes collaboration, too often promotes competition and kills trust between CSOs.

## FUNDING NETWORKS IN COMPETITION WITH THEIR MEMBERS

In some contexts, it has become common practice for donors to fund civil society networks to take on projects normally undertaken by members, creating conflict and division. The need for resources then pushes these networks to act as intermediary delivery agents of donors and project implementors, taking away from their primary role as facilitators and convenors. This leads to destructive tensions between networks and member organisations and compromises their social change initiatives.

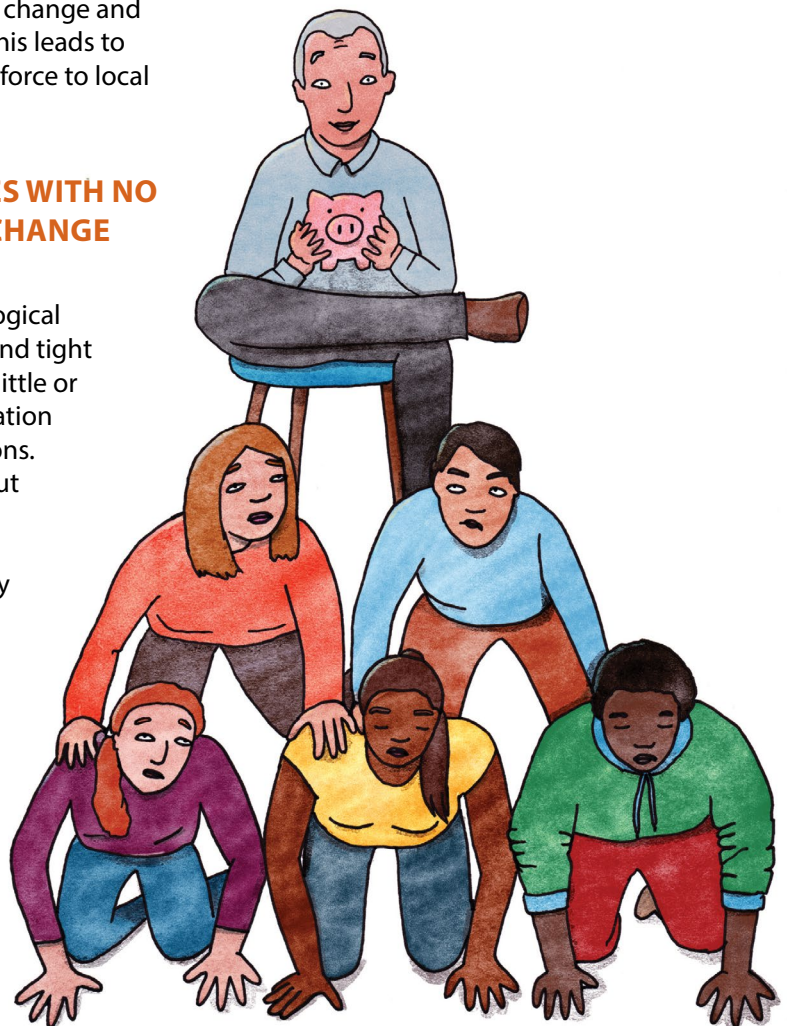
## AGENDA-SETTING BY DONOR COUNTRIES

Agendas for aid often serve the national economic or political interests of the donor country, rather than social change and poverty reduction objectives identified locally. This leads to unsustainable initiatives that are often a counterforce to local social change efforts.

## DOMINANCE OF PROJECT APPROACHES WITH NO FUNDING SUPPORT FOR LONG-TERM CHANGE PROCESSES

Current resourcing practices are dominated by logical frameworks with simplistic project approaches and tight timeframes and outcomes, which often provide little or no support for long-term change and transformation processes and certainly avoid messy collaborations. Several of the "soft" elements that we spoke about in Chapter 4, such as trust, listening spaces and reflection are invisible in project applications, results frameworks and budgets. Therefore, many of the contributions made by social activists and organisations, especially at local level, go unseen and unrecognised.

Most problematic is that donors' mechanistic, chronological time paradigms of project deadlines disrespect the more fluid and organic time paradigms of the struggles and development of marginalised communities. This often forces the intermediary NGOs into bullying behaviours with local communities that disempower and undermine the goals of the initiatives.



## Alternative resourcing approaches and practices

Over the last while there has been a move by some donor agencies, private foundations and civil society coalitions, networks and movements to actively explore and experiment with alternative, innovative resourcing approaches and practices.

### ECOSYSTEM APPROACH TO FUNDING

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is a global, feminist, membership, movement support organisation. It supports feminist, women's rights and gender justice movements to thrive, be a driving force in challenging systems of oppression and to co-create new feminist realities.

AWID is one of the movements that has been at the forefront of this recent wave of experimental visioning around how resourcing of civil society movements and networks can better respond to the social change challenges and the crises humanity is facing. They developed their "ecosystem approach" based on a feminist analysis of funding initiatives. The ecosystem approach involves all the

social actors who operate within a broad social change context of political, economic, environmental, and social realities that determine the distribution of resources, who holds the power over and has access to them and who does not.

#### Key principles

The ecosystem is underpinned by and follows four principles:

1. **Dynamic:** the approach takes a holistic and systemic approach recognising the interplay between different actors of social change
2. **Complex:** it recognises the complexity of the system and pays attention to the expansion or contraction of one part affecting all parts of the system
3. **Interconnected:** it gives attention to the web of diverse sources that bring money (financial resources) to the movements
4. **Reflective:** it must be reflective of the environment and the overall system surrounding it.

#### How the approach benefits the feminist movement

- **Flow of resources:** the flow of resources, including valuing the movements' own resources of money, time and other assets that are often invisible or unrecognised contributions, is surfaced and made conscious. Making this visible helps funders and other actors to see where they fit into the whole system of resourcing and resourcefulness.
- **Placing shared priorities at the centre of dialogue:** this opens space for active collaboration between funders and movements, networks, and coalitions.
- **Power:** shining the light on power within the system, pinpointing the places where decision-making power is concentrated and where inequalities are compounded. It balances the power between the different actors within the system by affording activists the power to define funding priorities.





- **Diversity of needs:** linked to feminist concepts relating to resistance, care, survival and building new realities, the system ensures that different revenue-generating options are matched to the diversity of needs necessary for social change to happen.
- **Organising and mobilising:** it supports the full richness of feminist organising and mobilising characteristic of vibrant, robust, and resilient movements, elements that are not usually seen as “real work” by funders, and therefore resourced through the invisible contributions of movements.
- **Transform systems that oppress:** this approach seeks to achieve feminist change which aims to dismantle the patriarchal beliefs, values, systems, and institutions that oppress, exclude and deny women, girls, trans, intersex and gender non-binary people access to political, economic and social processes.
- **Making visible areas that funding does not reach:** helping movements, networks and their allies to see not only how much funding is reaching them, from whom and from where, but they are also able to name and call those areas where funding can reach and support movements but does not.
- **Creating a responsive framework for resourcing:** it contributes towards more abundant and relevant resources for feminist social change. Funders and feminist movements have better insight of how funding actors, sectors and resources interact to create a more responsive framework for resourcing the diverse needs of social change.
- **Supports the full complexity of civil society initiatives:** envisioning a feminist funding ecosystem can lay the foundation and pathway toward a funding ecosystem that supports the full complexity and richness of civil society, the organising and building of vibrant, robust, resilient civil society movements, networks and platforms.

## FORD FOUNDATION BUILD PROGRAMME

The Ford Foundation’s (FF) programme of building institutions and networks is an investment in the long-term capacity and sustainability of social justice organisations around the world.

The BUILD grants are a commitment that sees CSOs and networks receiving funding support over a five-year period. There are three key elements:

- A significant portion of this commitment comes in the form of **general operating support**, the kind of core funding that is very difficult to raise.
- Secondly, it provides **flexible programme funding** – organisations and networks have autonomy to use the resources to support their own social missions and social justice agendas.
- Thirdly, the funding is accompanied by **institutional strengthening support** – organisations are allowed the freedom to develop their own plans for the type of institutional strengthening they wish to pursue with these funds.

The grantee CSOs and networks are in the driver’s seat – with the trust, flexibility, and support they need to do their best work.



## PEOPLE'S POSTCODE LOTTERY

The People's Postcode Lottery (PPL) is a subscription-based lottery that operates as a private charity donor whose income is generated from players who support charities and good causes across Great Britain and internationally while they also have a chance to win prizes. On a monthly basis player income generated is apportioned to charity contributions, running/marketing costs, and prizes (Wallace, F. and Saxton, J. (2018)).

### Key aspects of the approach

- 1) **Unrestricted, flexible funding:** PPLs unrestricted, flexible funding lies at the core of the funding relationship cultivated with organisations it supports.
- 2) **Long-term funding:** the long-term nature of the commitment allows organisations to plan ahead and to invest in services and support systems.
- 3) **Scale of funding:** PPL provides a consistent or increasing level of funding.
- 4) **Going beyond grants:** PPL does not only provide grants. A considerable amount of support is given in areas such as communication, impact measurement, financial management, organisational and leadership development.
- 5) **Close relationship of equals:** PPL works closely with organisations, this has created a family of organisations that are able to learn from each other, collaborate and benefit from each other's knowledge without the usual power imbalances.

Organisations are able to cover their core operational costs, respond to social causes and have the flexibility to adapt to any changes in the external environment, invest in new initiatives and collaborate with others.



*By now you will have realised that there are no quick and easy recipes or formulas for how to resource civil society organisations, collaborations, and initiatives. Certainly, any approach to resourcing CSOs needs to take into account the following considerations:*

1. *The resourcing needs and realities of CSOs are diverse; one-size-fits-all does not apply.*
2. *Civil Society contexts and initiatives are complex and require approaches and practices, including resourcing that are adaptable, flexible, and long-term;*
3. *To nurture resilience, the resourcing of CSOs has to move beyond simply supporting the visible activities and also focus on the invisible processes that empower, transform and contribute to positive social change.*
4. *Some donors have their own transformative practices and they do think about how to respond to the different needs and contexts that emerge - when this happens, it leads to true accountability, not only to donors, but to the reality of social change and the real needs of people.*

**See the Forus Toolkit: *Exploring new funding approaches for civil society.***

<https://forus-international.org/en/resources/196>

# Leadership for Collaboration: liberating possibility



Welcome to the final chapter! We have looked into so many dynamics of collaboration but now, let us stand back to explore some more what this means for leadership.

Many of you reading this are probably in leadership positions or will be one day. Or you are supporting leaders in some way. Everything we have presented so far depends on people like you and how you approach your particular leadership practice.



## The letter I wish I had received from my predecessor

By Adela Rusu, ex-director of The Federation of NGOs (FOND), Romania

Dear Adela

You are about to embark on a challenging, exciting and highly rewarding adventure leading a national network or platform. Here are some reflections and ideas from my experience, to help you on your leadership journey.

Get to know and really listen to the members to understand who they are, what their expectations, struggles, aspirations, and abilities are and what they will be able to bring into the process.

Contact them and visit each one of them to learn more about their organisations. Try to understand the challenges and issues they face, their plans and priorities and their work environments as well as their personal doubts and fears. This will also afford them an opportunity to get to know you and slowly build trust. Do this first.

Allow for all voices to be heard, all views to be expressed and all ideas to be shared. Listen for the voices of those people who struggle to express themselves and remember these are often the voices of those who can see the difficult issues better than anyone but may lack the confidence to raise them. Diverse contributions are essential for collaboration, so treasure those above all else.

Do not judge or let the bigger, more resourced members dominate. Engage even the weak and struggling member organisations. Pay attention to what they can contribute, looking beyond the content input or financial resources, drawing on the range of useful assets in an organisation. This may be in their competence in communication, event organising, facilitation or financial management. Members are not only motivated by what the platform can offer them but by what they can offer the platform.



At times you will doubt your leadership. Share your hardships and difficult situations with people you trust and take time with them to accurately reflect on and learn from these.

Identify core resource persons and allies from across the network or platform, as people you can rely on to take more responsibility, to ensure that things get done.

Always remember to celebrate successes – you and your team deserve it!

Constantly monitor and reflect on the platform's work to assess progress – you cannot manage what you don't have a good overview of. Taking time out, alone or with others, to really think about what you are

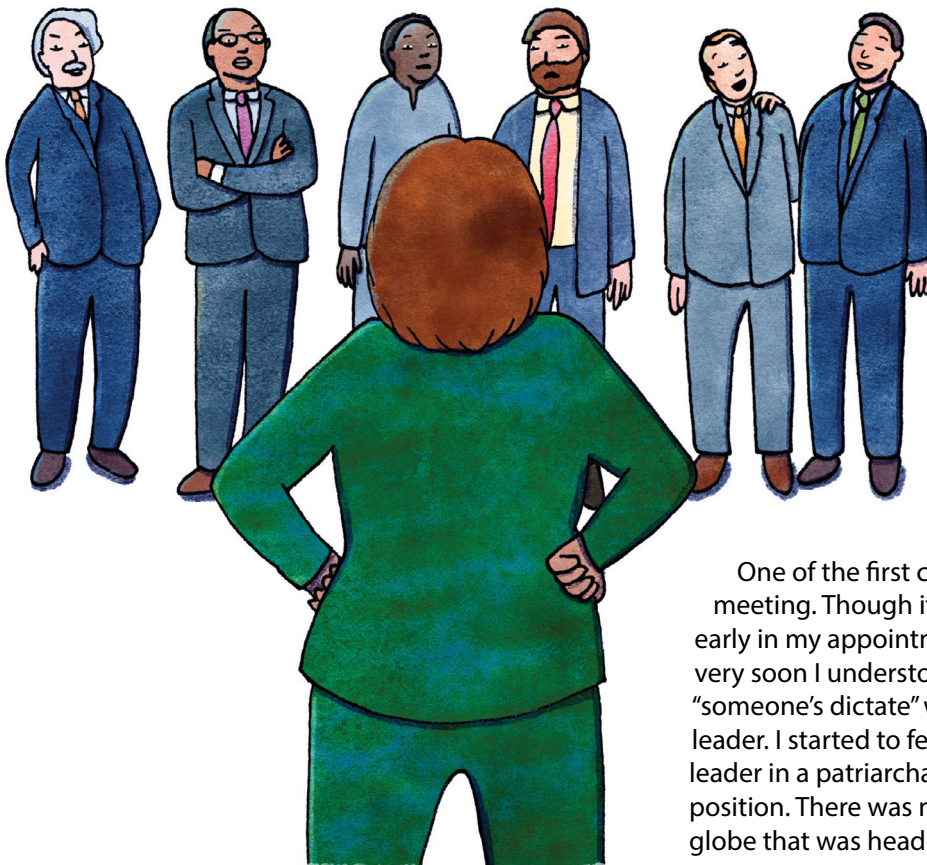
doing is not a waste and may save you much more time through wise choices and actions.

You are of no use to the world if you are burning out. Make time to step away from work, disconnect and don't put too much pressure on yourself. Our organisations have become too busy, always too much to do and new responsibilities to take on. Think about what matters before you act.

When you reach a point where your passion, motivation and drive wanes, accept that perhaps it is time to move on.

The best of luck and health to you!

Your friend and colleague



## The challenge of leading in a patriarchal system

*Anonymous*

Leading a regional alliance was a dream job for me. It started off very well, as I began connecting with the member organisations, governance board, and other national, regional and global coalition members.

One of the first challenges was organising a regional meeting. Though it was something unexpected so early in my appointment, I found it exciting. However, very soon I understood that I was expected to just follow "someone's dictate" without using my own initiative as leader. I started to feel the pressure of being a woman leader in a patriarchal system. I was the first in this position. There was no other regional coalition across the globe that was headed by a woman.

I was surprised to find such a dominant patriarchy in my new setting. The pressure continued for another two years, but then, with some support from a few colleagues, I decided to fight back, and started to assert my leadership. As anticipated, I faced a concerted pushback. I had to endure public and private humiliations which included scrutiny of my social media accounts, name calling and co-opting others against me (including some women I trusted).

This was extremely disturbing for me, but miraculously I found support and comfort in conversations with colleagues, leaders from member organisations and friends. In the process I found some amazing people who serve as my support system. From that support I have been able to take initiatives to challenge the patriarchy. For example, the regional network is expanding the diversity of its governing board, bringing more powerful women onto the board and we are shifting our social media policy and manual to reflect this change.

If unsupported, leaders can become isolated and lonely. We see how society continues to oppress women, even those who are in positions of leadership and even in so-called progressive organisations. Leaders can become totally focused on the problems and are exposed to burn-out. Draw on the collective around you, shift responsibilities and make leadership a shared responsibility. Indeed, it should be the mandate of networks to facilitate these support networks among leaders from member organisations.

## In search of facilitative leadership

Civil society networks and platforms exist in a world that is complex, uncertain, polarised, chaotic, intricately connected and evolving at a rapid pace. For them to respond to the critical issues and challenges faced by civil society, they need to be agile and adapt accordingly. This means that their leaders and leadership processes must also be agile and adaptive.

Are leaders and leadership the same thing? Leaders are one form of leadership, individuals in positions of authority and power, normally elected or appointed to such positions, or those who work informally through “soft power”. In some organisations regular collective reflections provide leadership as a process leading to decisions that might conventionally be taken by an individual. In networks and platforms, joint planning and reviews are leadership processes, initiating and driving social change initiatives. A strategic planning workshop, involving stakeholders, is a collective leadership process.

For too long we have relied on one kind of leadership: hierarchical, heroic leadership focused on one leader and premised on centralised power, authority, and control. We have adopted the taken-for-granted hierarchical leadership thinking, beliefs and ideas. In some instances, we cling onto this, even when it no longer serves our needs and purpose.

Civil society networks and platforms, characterised by multi-actor, multi-sector spaces and a constellation of practices, charged with the responsibility of unlocking energies, mobilising people, and facilitating collaborative co-creation across the system, in a complex and unpredictable world, have different leadership needs.

Most importantly, we need facilitative leaders to ensure that collective leadership processes are well designed and facilitated.

“

*Most importantly, we need facilitative leaders to ensure that collective leadership processes are well designed and facilitated.*



# The Four Principles of Network Entrepreneurship

This framework from Jane Wei-Skillern et al. (2015) identifies common characteristics of the leadership of platforms and innovative networks. It identifies four principles that enable leadership of networks and platforms as multi-actor, multi-sector spaces. For each there is a reflection from participants of the Forus Leadership Development Programme.

## TRUST NOT CONTROL

*Strong relationships among network partners and a culture in which actors routinely invest resources into building long-term, trust-based relationships—without the expectation of control or even recognition—is critical to collaborative success.*

### Reflection

When platforms or networks are opened to other sectors of organisations and even more when they try to incorporate less formalised movements or groups, the question of building trust becomes key. Many elements allow us to build trust, but the most powerful element is to ensure that ALL voices of people and organisations are respected and listened to.

In democratic processes, members agreements are generally made by consensus or the majority. However, despite the logic in this, discordant opinions must still have some place or record. It remains one of our voices. Recording minority voices is as important when building a network, reminding us that we do not agree on everything, that we are building a vision, a “common” project, to establish a network of trust. Minority voices so often bring arguments that show unexpected angles, new paths to explore as well as fears, or barriers that need to be overcome. Yes, we flow with what comes together, but keep in mind what does not converge.



## HUMILITY NOT BRAND

*Unlike social entrepreneurs who are so often held up as hero-like figures, network entrepreneurs are largely anonymous by design. Early in a network's development, these leaders are important visionaries and stewards who help foster a healthy network culture and develop a sustainable structure. But they are deliberate about ceding their power to the collective leadership of the network and developing leadership capacity throughout the network.*

### Reflection

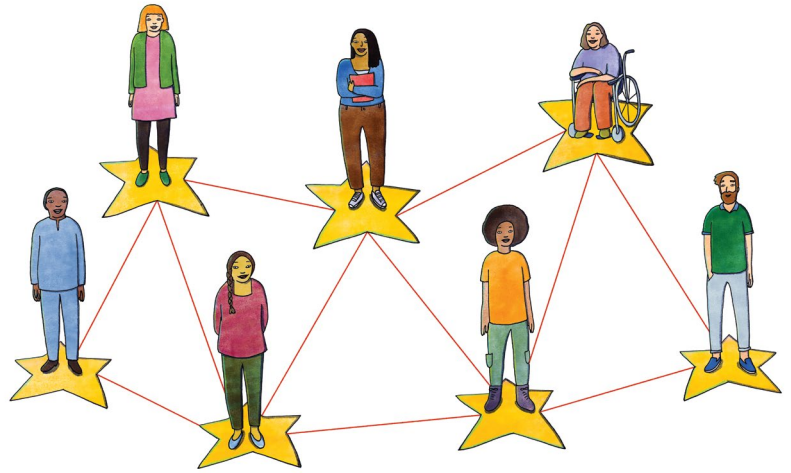
We need good leaders not great leaders. They must work behind the scenes enabling a diverse spectrum to lead and to publicly take the credit, particularly through collective leadership processes.

The leadership of the networks requires motivated people who are able to quietly resolve conflict as it appears. But, in their quiet way they may not be seen and can become stressed and burnt-out without others noticing. Members should keep a lookout for this and also beware of an over-reliance on a single person or actor.



## NODE NOT HUB

Network entrepreneurs are keenly aware that they are a small part of a much larger system. They connect to the larger system around them by bringing strategic thinking and fostering generative conversations. They also deliberately catalyse and lead action-oriented networks that are aligned around a defined shared purpose and built on the foundation of deeper relationships. They develop a culture where no individual or organisation seeks to be the brightest star.



### Reflection

When we think about multi-actor, multisector networks, then the question of the power of initiative-making becomes critical. Collaborations can be perceived as open but at the same time constrained within the terms of whoever is the “owner of the project”. It’s important to be able to promote the idea but remain flexible and let it take shape. In this way the project becomes more aligned and enriched. We must also openly raise issues of governance, agree on ways of working, our decision-making spaces, and balancing responsibility and power.

We must tolerate the frustration of no control. Keep pushing even when we have no power over the final form or products. The network itself will be configured, from the diverse, from the uniqueness of all its participants.

## COLLECTIVE MISSION OVER INDIVIDUAL OR ORGANISATION

Network entrepreneurs are far more motivated to achieve maximum impact than to advance themselves or their organisations. The network entrepreneur acts as a participant, eschewing personal or organisational status in service to the mission. They often put the interests of their peers ahead of their own, as “supporting all boats to rise” and this in fact serves the mission best.

### Reflection

Recognise progress, instead of just focussing on what might be unrealistic objectives. Put the focus on the mission but celebrate the learning and the encounters along the way.



Trying to change the world, ending inequality, poverty, transforming the system of production and consumption, are the great, long-term struggles of our age that move us, and that give meaning to our work together. But all we can show at any moment are small achievements that make it difficult for us to ever feel satisfied.

The mere fact of being around the same table with others, other sectors and actors, learning to communicate and build together, is already a breakthrough. It makes us different as people and as a collective.



## The Shapes and Powers of Collective Leadership

### COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR DIFFERENT SHAPES AND SIZES

There are different kinds of collective leadership to be used for different needs at different times. These should be discussed and commonly understood, and then when required, the right form chosen for the need at the time.

- A. **Democratic process leadership.** This is where the collective process is the leadership, where each person has an equal voice, where a free and open approach embraces all inputs before decisions are made, whether by consensus or majority vote, e.g. strategic planning workshops;
- B. **Distributed leadership.** Leadership responsibilities and authority can be shared out, with different members of the collective taking on different responsibilities according to their capabilities or their need to learn or their closeness to the issue;
- C. **Rotating leadership.** Members of the collective can take turns to lead, bringing variety and building leadership capacity;
- D. **Intuitive team leadership.** You can see this in teams where there is a strong history of collaboration, trust and understanding of the purpose. Fewer formal meetings are required, and no-one is needed to direct or control as the people intuitively know what others would agree to, what to communicate and where to go for support. If mistakes are made, helpful feedback is given and reflected on in a spirit of learning for all, leading to continual improvement.

### THE POWERS OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

We all know about hierarchical leadership, yet a self-doubting part of us often wants to let someone else take responsibility and decide for us. But there is also a side to us that wants to step up, not to be in charge but to participate in joint leadership, to be part of that expansive feeling of being part of a community of people taking initiative and responsibility and making a difference together.

Perhaps the strongest arguments for collective leadership are:

- Collective leadership can motivate a wider range of people to bring their own energy and creativity to the table, unlocking individual “power within” to become collective “power with” rather than being driven by controlling leaders focussing on “power over”;
- Collective leadership breaks down silos, enabling unusual connections to be made between people and issues;
- Collective leadership spreads the risk, not depending only on a one person to have all the answers;
- Although collective processes may take more time up-front, much more time can be saved down the line because the inclusiveness often reduces conflict and resistance;
- Collective leadership builds continuity and sustainability by empowering younger leaders earlier in their leadership journeys.



During the Covid-19 Pandemic, the relative success of countries in keeping infections and deaths low had much to do with the inclusive, participative style of their leadership processes, overseen by their leaders, often women.

Collective leadership processes may appear to take more time in the short-term, but often save time later with wiser decisions, with support and energy and reduced conflict. Sometimes directive leaders are needed - when there is a fire you cannot sit around debating which way to leave – but as our challenges become more complex, we can meet that complexity with everyone's resourcefulness rather than the limited capacities of one leader.

## Cultivating collective leadership

A clear understanding of common purpose to focus and motivate collective energies is required. Developing a common agenda should be guided by values and principles that are jointly identified and agreed to. Remember, that when the collaboration enters difficult waters, the collective returns to the shared values, principles and common purpose to find its bearing.

### UNLEARNING HIERARCHY

But cultivating collective leadership in individuals is not straightforward. Hierarchical approaches, mindsets and methods are deeply entrenched in most of us and need to be unlearned. Many good-hearted activists who have been brought up in privilege, and to whom controlling leadership comes so easily, may need to unlearn the parts of their identity that serve to insulate them from different systems of oppression and discrimination, sometimes causing blindness, over-confidence, subtle arrogance and even fragile defensiveness. People who have been marginalised or oppressed in any way often have to unlearn their own self-doubts and fears about their leadership potential. But when their voices are liberated to lead, with their direct experience of the issues, they frequently bring a quality of leadership that has unusual wisdom, depth and power.

Though not always easy, networks, alliances, coalitions and platforms should strive to be more horizontal. Like water flowing around and re-circulating horizontally, organisations should strive and rely on processes that allow for free flow of information, resources, knowledge, ideas and generative energies. This will help to encourage, nourish and spread a wider sense of leadership.

We all thirst for more equality, freedom and mutuality. And the qualities we need to gain these, through mature, collective leadership, are innate to our common humanity. It is time to collectively unlearn what is holding these captive so that we may make full use of them.



## A story of collective leadership at work

*By Iara Pietricovsky, Co-director, Abong, Brazil*

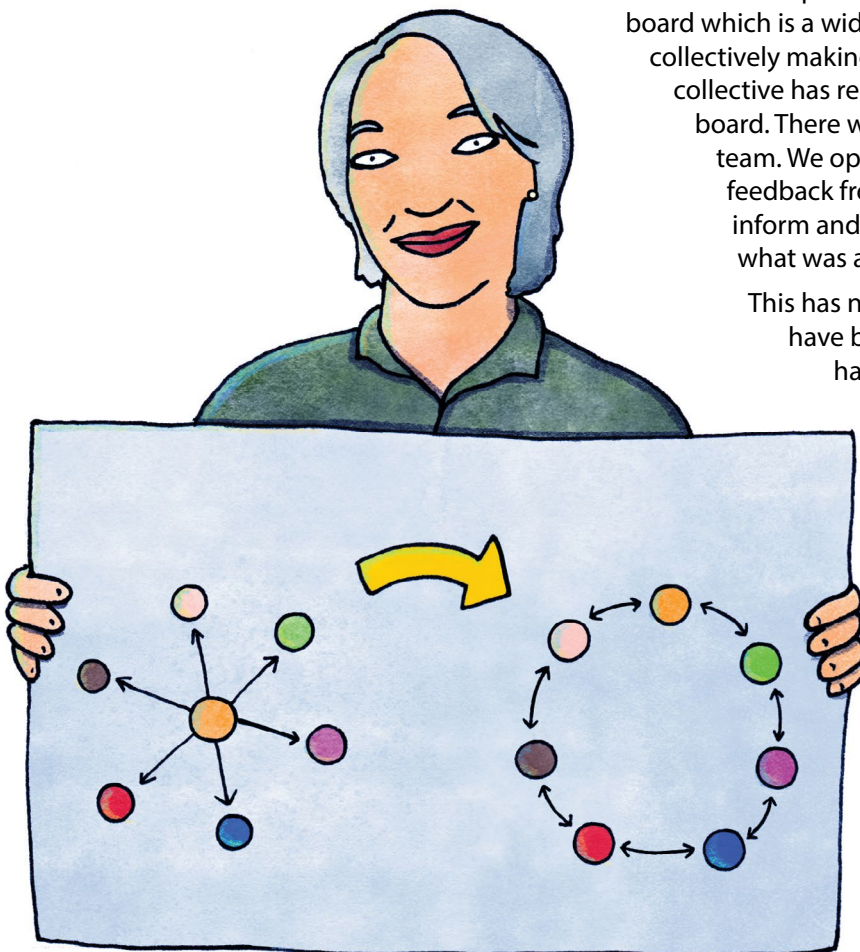
In Abong I'm one of seven directors. I'm responsible for relationships with external partners focusing on international debates and global issues. For Abong the political dimension is an important priority, so we pay particular attention to this aspect of our work. Together with another director, we form part of the regional articulation. Working closely together we share information and collectively make decisions.

Since the 2000s Abong started a leadership collective. We recognised the need to think differently about the kind of leadership that is essential for NGO networks, platforms and other collaborative forms. Over the years we have come to realise that hierarchical leadership does not work and so we have moved away from a central person taking decisions on behalf of the collective. It became evident that we needed different thinking and orientations from what we had become used to. We needed a paradigm shift. We could no longer rely on leadership premised on control over others because the situations in which we worked and the issues that we addressed had become extraordinarily complex. For this reason, we needed to think differently about leadership.

This was the beginning of an important process, with debates and discussions around how to organise and reorganise, and how to re-imagine organisations for the future to respond creatively, collectively and effectively with the movements, with the people. These discussions and explorations about organisational and leadership forms, to break from the traditional and hierarchical, were topical and vital. After all, building a new future society is also about building new organisations.

This collective impulse has even applied to our governing board which is a wider group of people intervening and collectively making decisions. The executive leadership collective has regular meetings with the governing board. There we table the decisions as the executive team. We operate in working groups, bringing feedback from the state and regions in order to inform and organise our agenda, connected with what was approved at our national assembly.

This has not been a smooth process and there have been challenges. However, these have been addressed as a collective and together we have found a way of making things work. Our experimenting with new leadership forms has become our daily practice.



# For a Leader

*A poem by John O'Donohue*

*May you have the grace and wisdom  
To act kindly, learning  
To distinguish between what is  
Personal and what is not.*

*May you be hospitable to criticism.  
May you never put yourself at the centre of things.  
May you act not from arrogance but out of service.  
May you work on yourself,  
Building and refining the ways of the mind.*

*May you learn to cultivate the art of presence  
In order to engage with those who meet you.  
When someone fails or disappoints you,  
May the graciousness with which you engage  
Be their stairway to renewal and refinement.*

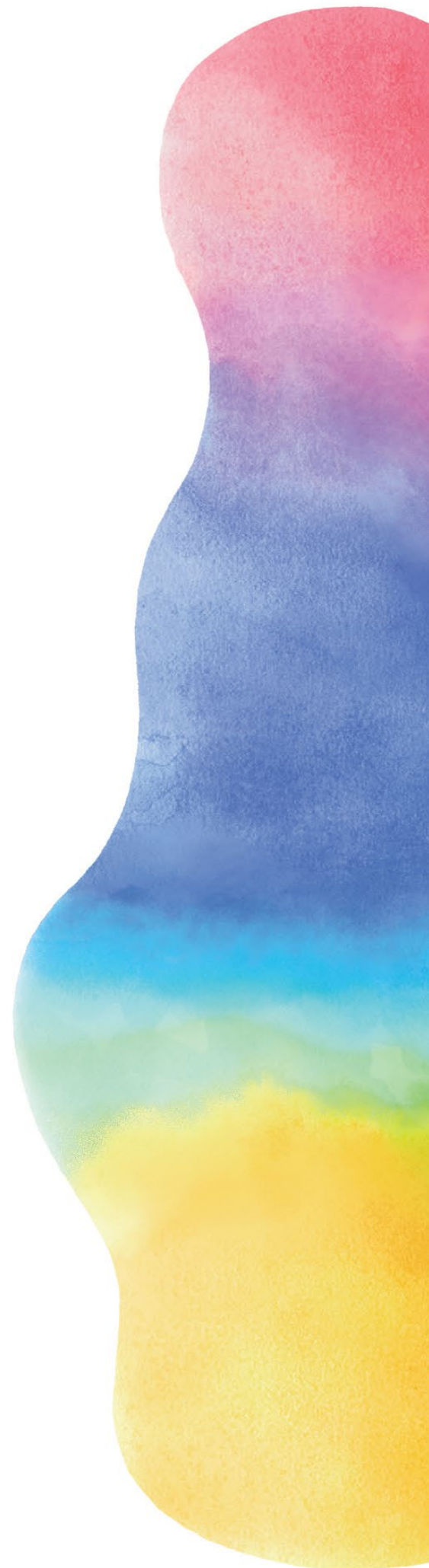
*May you treasure the gifts of the mind  
Through reading and creative thinking  
So that you continue as a servant of the frontier  
Where the new will draw its enrichment of the old,  
And you never become a functionary.*

*May you know the wisdom of deep listening  
The healing of wholesome words,  
The encouragement of the appreciative gaze,  
The decorum of held dignity,  
The springtime edge of the bleak question.*

*May you have a mind that loves frontiers  
So that you can evoke the bright fields  
That lie beyond the view of the regular eye.*

*May you have good friends  
To mirror your blind spots.  
May leadership be for you  
A true adventure of growth.*

From *To Bless the Space Between Us* by John O'Donohue (2008).



## Where does this leave us?

*What has struck me, especially from the stories of the Paris COP 21, Future in Common and Abong is that key to moving through the confusion, complexity and diversity of change processes is to actively, respectfully and continuously listen to each other, especially the communities at the heart of change. We need to listen for both the real needs and our common purpose, and in that process the possibilities to create common agendas of work will appear. I sense that there has been a remarkable cultural maturing within many organisations of civil society that takes deep listening seriously. Remember the shift from “ego to eco” that Teresa spoke about in Chapter 2. This is key to unlocking the powers of civil society to both globalise local struggles and localise global struggles. I feel hopeful. Morgan?*

*I was fascinated by the tensions and dynamics between the less formalised energy of social movements and the more formal professional quality of NGOs and their different contributions to common struggles. Like you, Manu, I also sense a maturing and deep listening on all sides, that can make the tension between them a creative one. And part of the challenge is not to get thrown by the sometimes slow, unpredictable and messy processes of collaboration. We have to think of time in a different way, less about clocks and deadlines and more about wise timing and patience.*



*But how patient can we be as we watch our world burn down? Of course, there is a time for patience, but we must match it with an urgency and a passion to keep moving and working. I liked the Action Learning Cycle in Chapter 4 because out of reflection and learning you get back to replanning and action, even if it is just about agreeing on the next step. Keeping momentum is vital, learning along the way. I wish more donors could get that and I cannot wait for those who have a more developmental practice to help other donors to do the same. Sani, what about you?*

*I like the balance you are striking between patience and momentum. I was also struck by the idea of fluid networking or liquid forms of organisation! The different kinds of collective leadership really grabbed me and how controlling power gets dissolved by good facilitation to unlock trust and real cooperation. I see now that the good qualities we need to collaborate are already in us as human beings – they just need to be liberated! I can see that when diverse peoples and organisations, with different agendas and cultures, converge to collaborate around the big questions of our day then these facilitative approaches are the right approach. They hold us together, in our diversity, help us to mobilise and combine our different energies to reimagine the future and then make it happen! It is amazing how far civil society has come in the last few years!*

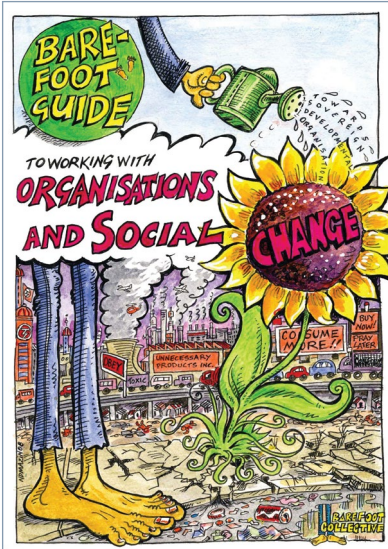
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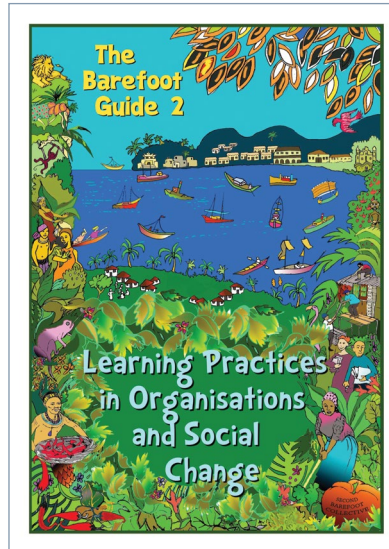
“Going barefoot is the gentlest way of walking and can symbolise a way of living - being authentic, vulnerable, sensitive to our surroundings. It’s the feeling of enjoying warm sand beneath our toes, or carefully making our way over sharp rocks in the darkness. It’s a way of living that has the lightest impact, removing the barrier between us and nature.”

Adele Coombs, “Barefoot Dreaming”

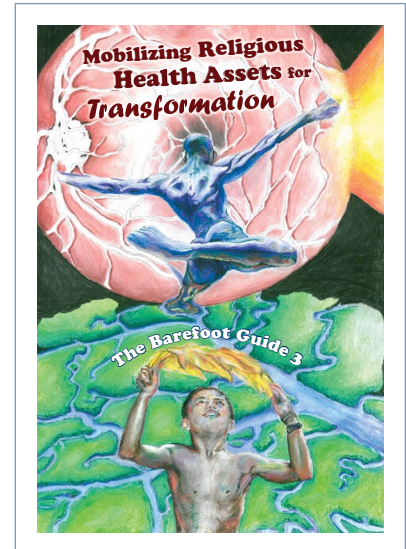
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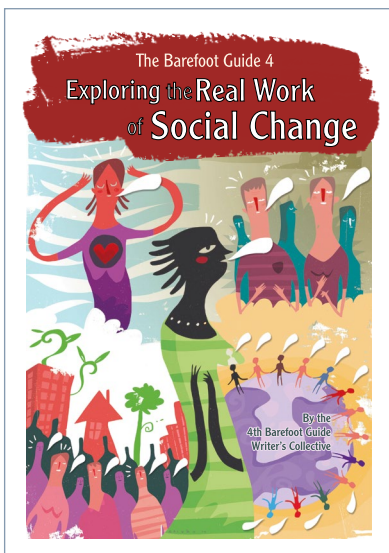
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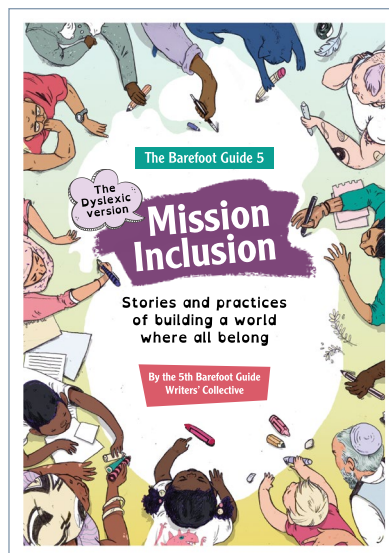
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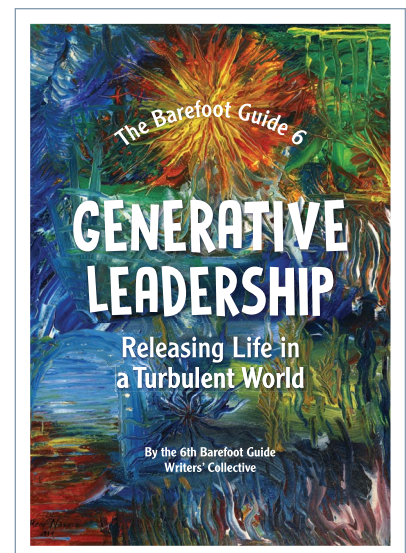
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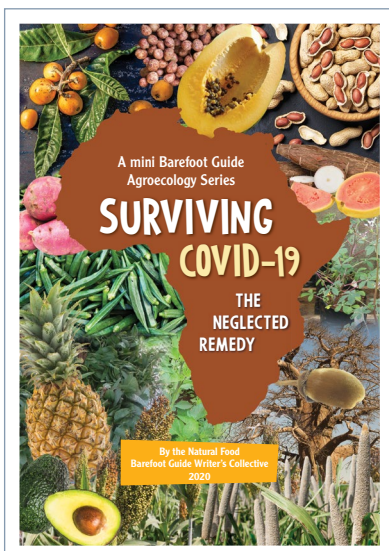
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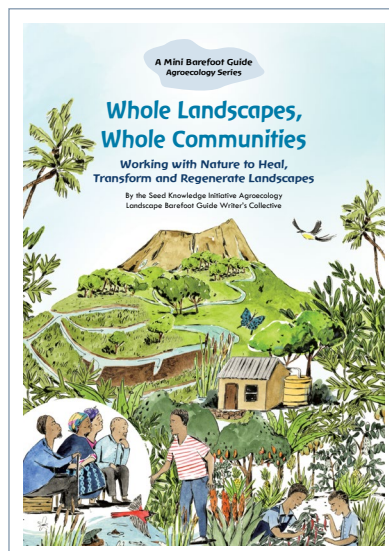
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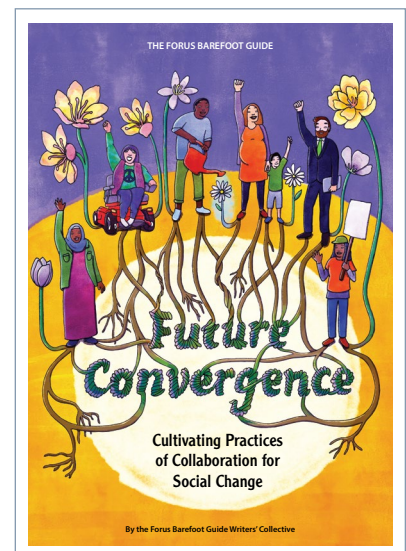
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