Where do we go from here?

Navigating power inequalities between development NGOs in the aid system

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1. Executive summary

This research examines the extent and nature of concrete actions undertaken by Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs to tackle power asymmetries, explicitly comparing their understandings, perspectives and initiatives.

It comes as no surprise that most NGOs, whether from the Global North or South, believe that there is a significant power imbalance between NNGOs and SNGOs, with both sides reporting that their own partnerships are performing 'better' regarding power imbalances. Also on both sides, organisations see 'the bigger system' as problematic.

This research reveals a shared understanding of and frustration around a global aid system founded on colonial legacies of inequality that raise serious questions about whether it is fit for purpose. Global agendas and priorities are seen as dominated by Northern actors and interests, with funding systems maintaining this hierarchy. Across all actors, funding is considered the primary source of power imbalances and dominates the priorities of NGOs in the North and South.

This raises the question of how to progress towards more equitable relationships between SNGOs and NNGOs (and the processes and outcomes in policies, programmes and funding within these) while simultaneously balancing this with the need for deeper systemic change.

SNGOs and NNGOs report that changing power imbalances is not moving fast or far enough, whether we consider the general progress of the sector or within the confines of particular partnerships. A majority of NNGO and SNGOs reported having taken some action across a spectrum of areas that includes policy, programming, internal governance, improved funding and use of language and stereotyping. While actions towards improving language use and negative stereotyping are more prominent among Northern than Southern NGOs, programming and improvements to funding (principally in terms of building capacity for domestic resource mobilisation) are the most commonly taken actions. Actions are less frequently occurring in the areas of internal policy and governance. Crucial here is that the latter two are the more foundational areas in that they are rolled out through entire organisations and partnerships – rather than tested within or confined to particular programmes. Moreover, decision-making within several areas (e.g., in programming) takes place within the overall framework of the underlying policy framework. In effect, while SNGOs are becoming more powerful at the programmatic level, their ability to influence the overall framework in which the programmes must take place remains limited.

There is unease that NNGOs are often in the driving seat of activities seeking to address unequal power relations. Besides, the actions undertaken to address power imbalances are the first steps on the ladder – some actions can be considered a bare minimum even under the traditional international development model. That means, while some tangible actions may be taken in the right direction, we saw few imbalances being equalised. This is particularly clear in comparing actions in programming and policy. Whereas many actions in policy do not go further than consulting partners, in programming, equal decision-making is more frequent.

SNGOs are more powerful at the programmatic level, but their ability to influence the overall framework remains limited

Actors in both the North and South are aware that progress is slower than they would like, and this is exacerbated by the continuing demands across the sector (particularly those actors in the North) to move beyond rhetoric towards more significant concrete action(s). Unfortunately, there are many barriers to progress. SNGOs and NNGOs agree that time and resources (namely, where to find them) to invest in these activities, what to do and how to do it (given a lack of tangible 'best practice' emerging in the sector), and institutional resilience to change are prominent barriers. Fear is also a recognisable barrier – around what to do, how to approach it, and even fear of success and what this would ultimately imply for their power, position, and survival.

There are also important distinctions between the challenges faced by NNGOs and SNGOs. NNGOs indicate that the biggest obstacle(s) to progress within this sphere is beyond the confines of their relationship (thus excusing them from a lack of progress). However, responses from SNGOs

hold up a mirror to the limits of their willingness and ability to rebalance power inequalities. Besides, SNGOs also highlight, more frequently than NNGOs, that 'partners are not listening', that they hold different interests from their partners, and that their agenda to shift power is likely to be co-opted by their more powerful partners.

Ultimately, partnership – and how NNGOs can be 'a good partner' – should be part of any ambition to work towards a new power balance between the Global North and South. Being 'a good partner' implies being able and willing to listen, build mutual respect and understanding and trust one another and invest in dialogue (e.g., creating spaces for interpersonal engagements). For Northern organisations, this requires learning Southern NGOs' priorities and asking them which support roles they want to see from their Northern counterparts.

Such partnership ideas are certainly not new, so it is highly doubtful that a renewed ambition of working towards becoming 'good partners' will be sufficient. If that was the solution, it is reasonable to assume that things would have changed long ago. The results of this study raise the important question of whether it is ultimately enough to limit actions and activities aimed at addressing power imbalances within the organisation. In other words, is being a 'good partner' sufficient? More broadly, would the sum of all Northern individual efforts to become good partners result in a true reconfiguration of the existing North-South power relation?

NNGOs: progress is largely beyond the confines of our relationships

This does not diminish the importance of Northern efforts to change their own practices. However, to address the root causes of the prevailing power imbalances, SNGOs need to take control and not just be 'given' new powers (which can

always be taken away). This is not a call for a complete reversal of power imbalances between NNGOs and SNGOs (as that would also mean a reversal - and thus continuation - of power imbalances) but a recognition that change is required that allows Southern organisations and voices to take the lead.

This report is based on a mixed-method study employing an extensive survey, in-depth interviews, document analyses and case studies. In total, this report reflects the input of 458 respondents from across 55 countries; 53 interviews conducted across Western Europe, Uganda and Ghana; and a review of organisational publications on initiatives.

Systemic change requires changes across all actors - certainly also with institutional donors

Such fundamental changes can only occur when the broader system changes. This implies revising the broader framework in which aid actors operate. Here, it relates to questions about who sets agendas and makes key decisions, how resources are distributed, and how actors are held accountable. These systemic changes require change across a broad array of actors. As institutional donors are key architects of the international aid system, systemic change without their active involvement is simply not possible.

This is an essential lesson for SNGOs, NNGOs and institutional donors alike to not only look internally at what they are doing and what they can do better within their organisations and relationships but also to work collectively to support and advocate for efforts to push in the direction of deeper, more transformative and Southern-led change.

All development actors should ask themselves: **What dimensions of the system I am part of should be changed to address power relations, and in what way? What am I doing that promotes such system change? Who else needs to be involved and how must we cooperate in this?**

2. Introduction

How NNGOs (Northern NGOs)[1] and other stakeholders in the aid chain can shift power and resources to their partners globally is one of the biggest and most important questions dominating the aid sector globally. These debates are accompanied by clear and loud demands from SNGOs (Southern NGOs)[2] that the time for more equitable systems and relationships is now.

Many conversations and initiatives are being planned and/or taking place around these themes. There is a need for these discussions and actions to be accompanied by strong academic research to explore what actions are being taken, by whom and to what effect. What kinds of initiatives are these conversations inspiring? Do they respond to demands from civil society organisations around the world? Are they sufficient to shift the power in intrinsically unequal aid chains? This knowledge is important in itself, but also to inform future action within the sector.

This research addresses this need and has been conducted by a team of researchers based in Ghana, The Netherlands, Uganda and the United Kingdom. Although largely self-funded, it has been supported by Partos, the Dutch membership body for organisations working in international development, as one of six actions funded through its Shift the Power Lab (STP-Lab).[3] With its focus on

'learning from concrete actions aimed at balancing power in North-South relations', this research provides more 'clarity about how to achieve the envisioned shifts in power' and contribute to 'a shared sense of future direction and the upscaling of concrete actions' (Kapazoglou 2021:16).

The starting point for this research is threefold:

1. The recognition that North-South relationships in development cooperation are marred by power imbalances in which the roles of Northern NGOs 'are biased towards decision-making' and the roles of local CSOs 'are biased towards decision-taking' (Partos 2022: 7);[4]
2. The acknowledgement that these power imbalances have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the work of both NNGOs and SNGOs and overshadow the central role that strong, autonomous and empowered SNGOs must play in development processes locally. There is thus a definite need to tackle these inequalities within the development cooperation system; and
3. That empirical research is needed to feed the mutual learning process of NNGOs and SNGOs, to strengthen the process of creating a development cooperation system marked by equality.

This research examines the extent, nature and progress of concrete actions undertaken by NNGOs and SNGOs – as well as challenges faced in the process – with the aim of tackling power asymmetries in their engagements to achieve mutually rewarding relations.

Insights hold up a mirror to the development sector and provide an opportunity for other NNGOs, SNGOs and the broader development cooperation community to learn, take and scale up contextually-relevant good practices and encourage a willingness to unlearn and avoid disempowering practices.

While cognisant of geographical nuances and complexities masked by this binary terminology, we explicitly distinguish between the understandings, perspectives and initiatives of non-governmental actors across the Global North and Global South, asking the following questions:

1. What is the range of different understandings, aims and priorities, and types of initiatives aimed at addressing power imbalances between the organisations in the Global South and North? How do these differ across these geographies?
2. To what extent do different initiatives succeed in contributing to shifting power?
3. What processes, factors and dynamics explain the findings?

In answering these questions, the research combines a focus on width (mapping the range of innovations and identifying gaps) and depth (examining cases to understand processes and dynamics) through a mixed methods research design outlined briefly in the next section and elaborated in full in Appendix 1.

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1   Here defined as NGO headquartered in the Global North
2   Here defined as NGO headquartered in the Global South
3   www.partos.nl/werkgroep/shift-the-power-lab-2-0
4   For this research we define power as 'the ability to influence the outcomes of decision-making within collaborations between organizations' (Elbers and Schulpen, 2011). We identified key decision-making topics, as the ability of actors in a collaboration to influence the outcomes of decision-making differs by topic, and mapped the extent of influence that partners have on decision-making outcomes.

3. Methodology

A mixed methods research design (outlined in full in Appendix 1) was crucial to meeting our research aims and objectives. This had three core components, namely:

1. A **global survey** administered online to map the scope and breadth of shift the power initiatives being undertaken, exploring people's perspectives on shift the power and locally-led initiative, what is being done or needs to be done, and what are the (early or established) outcomes of these. This received a total of 458 analysable responses, though for some questions later in the survey we had a smaller sample to draw upon (see Appendix 2 for our respondents' background data). In analysing responses, we deliberately compare similarities and differences in responses according to geography. That is, we compared the thoughts, experiences and outcomes reported by organisations located in or headquartered in the Global North with those located in or headquartered in the Global South.

   While language is not neutral and we are aware of the hierarchical and pejorative connotations at play in this terminology of 'Northern' and 'Southern' NGOs, despite much discussion and deliberation we have not yet found an alternative language that we are happy with. We conclude with some reflections and tentative thoughts on this terminology in the conclusions.

2. A range of **key stakeholder interviews** to build an initial understanding around the knowledge and perceptions of localisation, locally-led development and shift the power initiatives, find out who is (or is not) involved in these discussions and identify what are considered the most central elements of changing power relations between Northern and Southern NGOs. A total of 33 semi-structured interviews were carried out with NGOs and NGO networks in Europe (12 across the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany), Ghana (11) and Uganda (10).

3. Three **in-depth case studies** of programmes for transforming power imbalances between Northern and Southern NGOs in Ghana (2) and Uganda (1). These were important to provide a 'deep-dive' into the processes and outcomes of three programmes in two national contexts and to build an understanding of these through diverse perspectives and experiences of them from within. Within each programme interviews were carried out at all levels: from national leadership right down to local partners.

The research has benefited from the advice and guidance of a Sounding Board constituted of 30 non-academic members representing a diverse range of organisations and countries. We are grateful for their feedback across different stages of this research, including on the research design, survey instruments, and early analysis of the findings. Of course any mistakes are our own.

4. Creating a shared understanding

Localisation, Shift the power, locally-led development and decolonisation are all buzzwords used to speak of ways to address power inequalities within the global aid system. The global aid system refers to the framework of policies, regulations, institutions, and practices, through which assistance and resources are provided to individuals, communities, and countries. This framework, which is established by the system's most powerful actors, defines widely shared policy goals and priorities, how decisions are made, resources are distributed, and actors are held accountable. A wide range of actors, including governments, international organisations and NGOs, operate within the boundaries of the aid system. Their interaction is highly structured and follows the roles, behaviours and interaction-patterns specified by the system (see Elbers, 2012).

Within the global aid system, the terms of localisation, shift the power, locally-led development and decolonisation are often used interchangeably. Yet they all have different roots and different meanings attached to these that should not be overlooked (see also Matthews, 2022). Localisation emerged within the domain of humanitarian action to refer to the objective of involving local actors more in decision-making. Localisation (like Southern leadership and local ownership) is thus a construct that problematically defines individuals and organisations in terms of their unequal relations with outsiders, rather than their own agency and perspectives on their roles (Van Wessel et al., 2023).

Locally-led development, whilst still rooted in the aid system, refers to Northern actors' aims and strategies to support recipients of aid taking more control over development agendas and actions. Locally-led development, while maintaining giv-er-recipient structures, thus expresses an aim for a more fundamental change in roles for actors in development (see e.g., Bond, 2021).

The #Shiftthepower movement started out from community philanthropy (with the Global Fund for Community Foundations in a leading role) and questions the centrality of NNGOs in development. This movement argues the need for and feasibility of local actors shaping development more independently, working with locally-raised funding that can help influence the power dynamics present within international relationships (cf. Hodgson 2020).

Decolonisation, in turn, reflects the ongoing battle for more fundamental transformation. This demand calls out the discrimination and injustice against people in and from the Global South that marginalises them and their knowledge and perspectives through, for example, assumptions about who and what knowledges and skills are more or less worthy, and practices of language and behaviour through which they are expressed and reproduced. Decolonisation is thus about reclaiming dignity and self-determination (see e.g. Baguios et al., 2021).

In this report, we explore the usage of these terms but refrain from committing to any of them. Given their often casual and simultaneous usage in practice, we prefer rather to examine the aims, priorities and actions that underpins collective movement in these directions. However, given the differences in starting point and emphasis, we will return to the question of terminology in our concluding section, in light of the findings that shed light on what matters to whom, and what is being done.

5. What's the problem?

Main findings

- NNGOs and SNGOs use phrases often heard in the debate about unequal power relations interchangeably (locally-led development, localisation,Shiftthepower and decolonisation), with none of them being dominant.
- The vast majority of NNGOs and SNGOs regard power relations between NGOs in North and South as very unequal, yet feel their own relations are an exception to this rule.
- Control over funding is the main source of hierarchy between NNGOs and SNGOs – and also the foundation for inequalities in information, access to other actors and decision-making.
- SNGOs experience colonial attitudes with NNGOs, and a lack of will to transform their relationships.

Do the terms used matter?

Respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the key terms at the heart of current discussions and debates in NGO sectors globally: localisation, locally-led development, shift the power, and decolonisation (see Figure 1). Unsurprisingly these are widely recognised: only 3.6% of respondents were unfamiliar with any of these four central terms in the debate about power imbalances between the Global North and Global South.

Across all respondents 'locally-led development' was the most commonly recognised term, being familiar to over 92.4% of respondents. Familiarity with the term 'Shift the Power', a movement coined by the Southern-based Global Fund for Community Foundations was the least familiar for NNGO respondents, though still high at 82.3%. Familiarity with all four terms is higher among respondents from NNGOs.

Among SNGO respondents the most familiar terms are 'locally-led development' (85.1% respondents) and 'localisation' (67.8%), terms that have been coined by NNGOs and donors looking to move power and resources to the Global South. More surprisingly, less than half (45.7%) of SNGO respondents are familiar with 'Shift the Power' terminology. In fact, while the numbers remain low for both categories of respondents, more NNGO than SNGO respondents primarily use the term 'shift the power'.

This is perhaps indicative of the contexts in which respondents are hearing about and taking action in these areas: within their direct operational relationships and partnerships rather than as part of the broader Southern-driven demand for power shifts in this direction that has been so influential on Northern agendas and action.

Figure 1 | Familiarity with central terms, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=445).

NNGOs (n=237) SNGOs (n=205)   *Source: Own calculations based on the survey, multiple answers were allowed.*
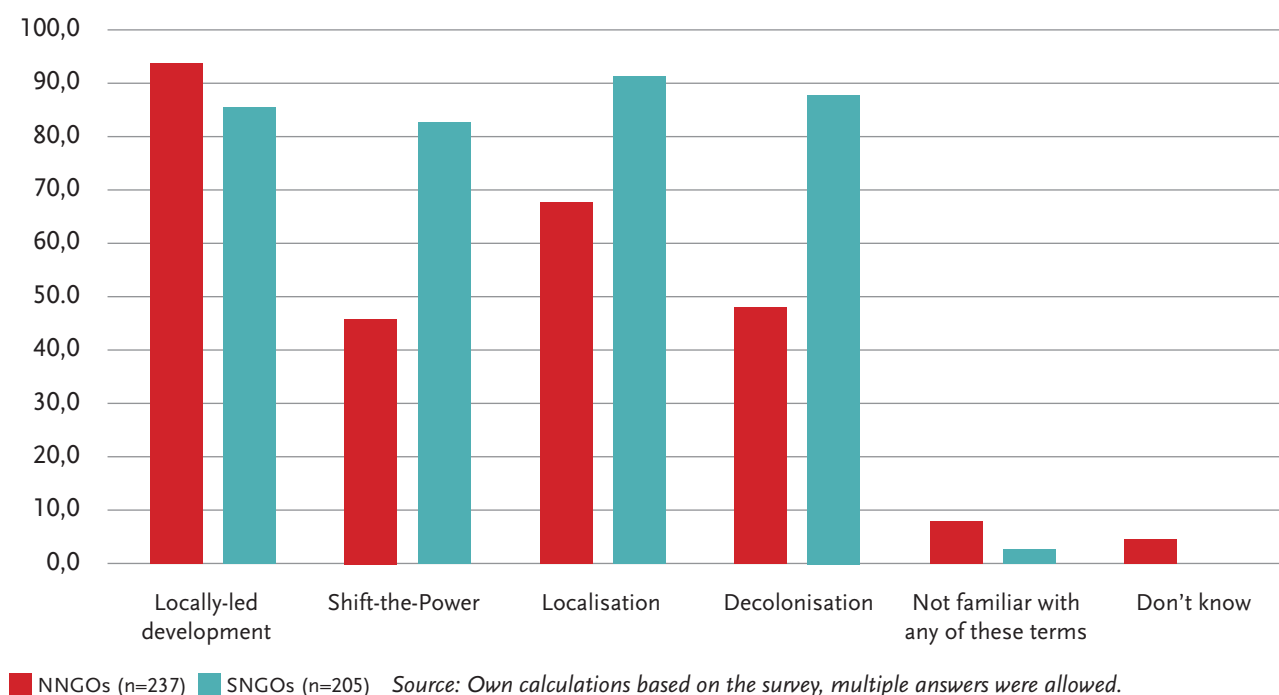
Although these four terms have much in common, as just discussed, they are not the same (Matthews, 2022). It is interesting, then, that a relatively large proportion of respondents (47.3% of NNGOs and 30.7% of SNGOs) uses a mix of these terms when talking about power relations between NNGOs and SNGOs (see Figure 2).

Among respondents using one term in preponderance, 'locally-led development' is the most popular for SNGOs, with 33.2% respondents using this term. 'Localisation' is more commonly used among NNGO respondents that prefer a singular terminology: around 17.7% of NNGOs signalled their use of this term alongside around 11.8% who use 'locally-led development'.

It is pertinent to reflect here on the directionality of these terms in light of these findings. Implicit in the term 'localisation' favoured by NNGOs is a retention of power and resources at the apex, while recognising the importance of *decentralising some of this to SNGOs.* In contrast, 'locally-led development' requires a shift that *concentrates power at the local-level.*

Interviews revealed that debates about what terms to use and what each means are very much alive in some organisations, but less so in others. Most NNGOs indicated that they are familiar with 'localisation' but prefer not to use it because of its technocratic connotation and limited attention to structural issues such as racism, colonialism and the broader aid framework that sustain power imbalances. Some NNGOs navigate terminology carefully trying to avoid misuse of terms. Others are less critical. As one NNGO interviewee explained, changing the terminology on their website from localisation to locally-led development was not the outcome of an internal reflection, but an attempt to use the appropriate buzzword of the day (interview NNGO, 25-11-2022).

Twenty-seven respondents indicated that they do not use any of these four terms in thinking and taking action around power relations. These can be divided into two groups. The first (covering 12 NNGOs and eight SNGOs) uses different terms ranging from 'critical thinking', 'autonomy' and 'Southern leadership' in juxtaposition with terms such as 'inequity', 'donor-imposed project ideas'

Figure 2 | Terminology used in thinking and action on power relations between Northen and Southern NGOs (n=442).
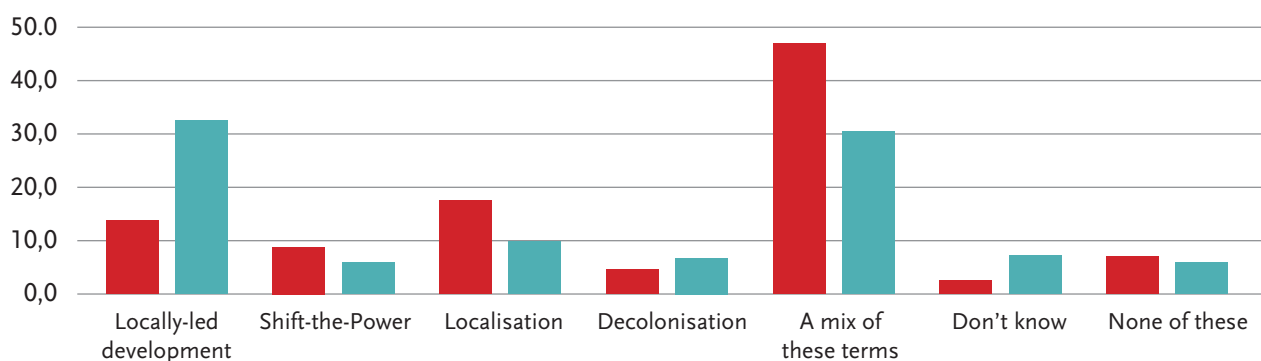
NNGOs (n=237)   SNGOs (n=205)   *Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*

and 'power dynamics'. For these actors, discussions are being held, albeit outside of the sector's dominant terminologies.

The second smaller group of seven respondents (four NNGOs and three SNGOs) revealed that they do not talk about power relations at all. That respondents might regret not talking about it, as clear from one of the surveyed NNGOs stating *'to be honest and sadly, this discussion does not occur at all'*. A similar feeling was expressed in interviews with small NNGO network organisations who ex-

pressed regret not actively discussing these terms as they are too preoccupied with day-to-day practicalities (Interviews small NNGO network, 13-10-2022; 14-10-2022).

The next section discusses whether respondents believe that there is a power problem in the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs and what respondents deem the main sources of power imbalances to be. The section that follows then links these findings to the terminology discussions described above.

Understanding power imbalances between NNGOs and SNGOs

There are power imbalances between NGOs in the Global North and South … but it's not such a problem in our own backyard

Our focus may be on the ways and extent to which NGOs around the world are taking action to reduce power imbalances across the Global North and South, but the validity of this focus is only established if we know that organisations believe there is a problem with power imbalances in the first place. Respondents were asked about their perception of the relations between NGOs in the Global North and South, both generally and within the specific confines of their own relationships.

These distinctions matter, with respondents displaying significant differences in perceptions depending on whether respondents are talking about such relations *in general or within their own relationship(s)*. Figures 3a and 3b both illustrate a 10-point scale from very unequal to very equal. In Figure 3a we see that when respondents are asked to speak from a *general* perspective, the vast majority of NNGOs (77.2%) *and* SNGOs (71.4%) see these relationships firmly on the side of unequal (we categorise scores 1 to 3 as 'very' unequal). Only 3.8% (NNGOs) and 3.4% (SNGOs) think there is significant equality to these relationships and we can see the line drops steeply in both

groups from Score 4 upwards. These lines illustrate that most SNGOs and NNGOs perceive relationships to be far from equal.

However, a marked difference is apparent when respondents are asked about the (in)equality of their *own* relationships with their counterparts in the opposite geography (Figure 3b). This shift is particularly marked for NNGOs: the number of NNGO respondents that think they operate within very unequal relationships is only 31.4% in comparison with the 77.2% who thought relationships are very unequal, on average. We see this same drop for respondents in SNGOs, but to a lesser extent: while 71.4% SNGO respondents see relationships as 'very unequal' more generally, this figure dropped to 45.6% when speaking about their own particular working relationships.

These findings reveal a mismatch in perceptions across the Global North and South: only one-third of NNGOs believe they work through 'very' unequal relationships, while nearly half of SNGO respondents report their feelings of significant inequality in their partnerships.

In both the Global North and South and looking at their own working relationships, the number of respondents perceiving these as (very) equal (scores 8 to 10) increases to 12.2% and 12.1%, respectively. So, in both groups, respondents think that their partnerships are working more equitably than most.

Perhaps in a sector where action on this front is relatively recent and sparse and where respondents are thinking, talking about and taking action upon these inequalities, they see themselves as ahead of the curve. Indeed, our case study interviews in the Global North suggested this may be the case: because organisations are often unaware of other initiatives and efforts in this area beyond the biggest NGOs it can be logical for organisations to assume that they are doing better than others if they are doing things, no matter how small (Interviews NNGOs, 13-10-2022; 25-10-2022; 18-11-2022).

Figure 3 | Perceived (in)equality of power relations between ..., with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=443 and n=337).

A. Development organisations in the Global North and Global South (n=443).
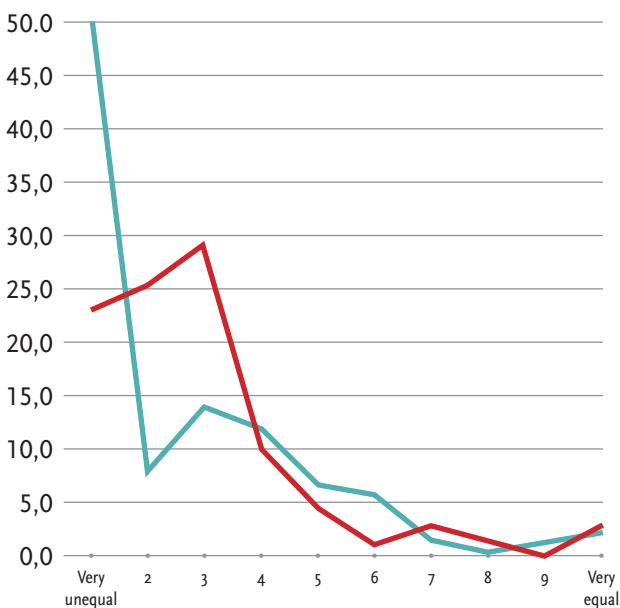
B. Own organisation and its partner(s) (n=337).
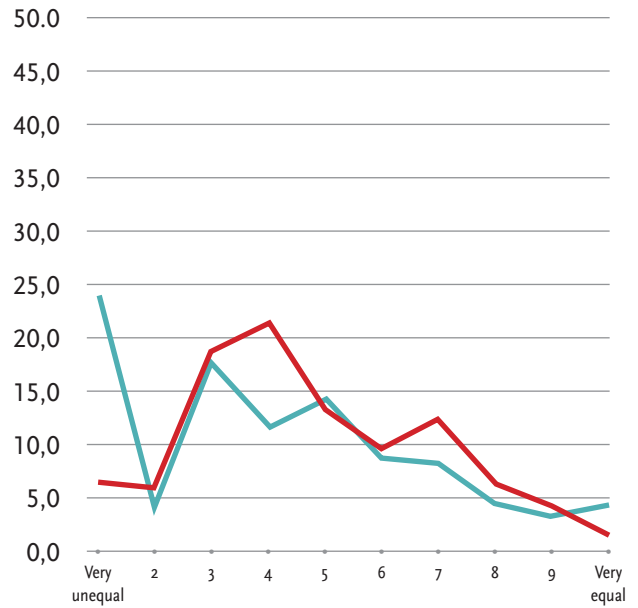
A ■ NNGOs (n=237) ■ SNGOs (n=206)   B ■ NNGOs (n=149) ■ SNGOs (n=188)   *Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*

Those who hold the money, hold the power

Before exploring actions undertaken to tackle power imbalances, we first look at what respondents identify as the 'main drivers' of inequalities across NGOs in the North and South and 'what they would like to see change' in these relationships. The survey gave respondents a chance, in their own words, to mention three primary sources of power imbalances between Global North and Global South development organisations. The research team categorised their answers into 17 themes (Figure 4).

Financial resources – money and the terms of access to it – were mentioned near universally by respondents in both North and South. Central here was the simple fact that 'most financial re-

Figure 4 | Main sources of power asymmetries between Global North and Global South development organisations, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=342).

Source: Own calculations based on the survey.
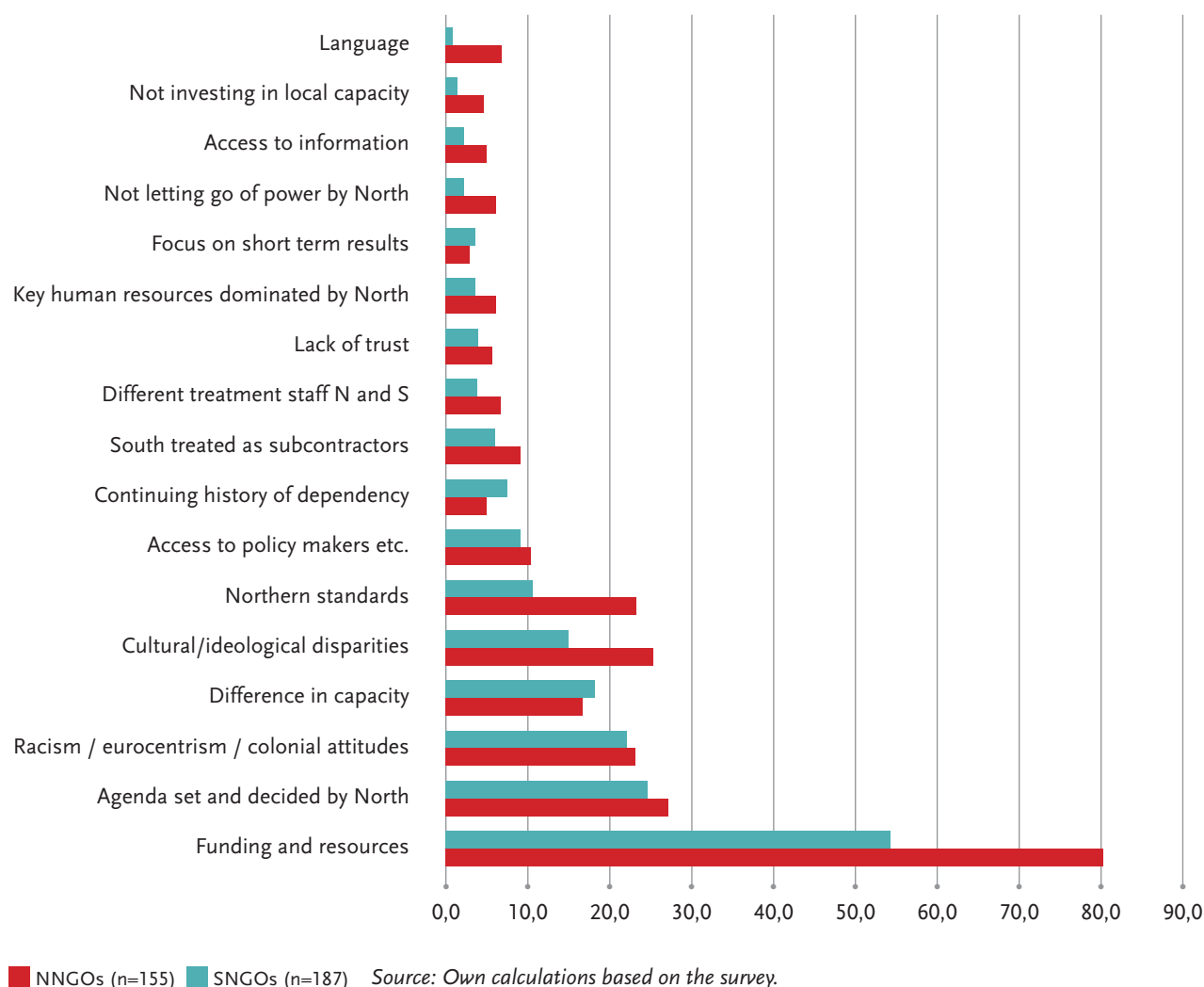
sources come from the North'. Since 'with money still comes power', this is where other forms of power are concentrated. This financial power is maintained through conditionalities on how funds are spent, a lack of direct funding for SNGOs, an unwillingness among NNGOs to share the over-head costs of Southern counterparts and the barriers to entry that SNGOs face to accessing funding on better terms.[5]

In the words of one SNGO respondent: *'Global North are donors to the Global South – they give them the money and control how and where it is spent'*. Consequently, NNGOs and SNGOs (around 26%) report that Northern NGOs control

the international development agenda by deciding priorities. 23% of NNGOs also state that setting the sector's standards by the Global North drives power imbalances, a point also mentioned by 10% of SNGOs.

These dynamics are also reflected in our broader interviews, which highlighted that financial relations are the most telling indicator of how power is distributed – 'money is power' – with donors and NNGOs allocating money to certain priorities and approaches. Consequently, for SNGOs partnerships start off on unequal terms, with their only option to express their interest in being the implementing partner of an already thought-

out project by NNGOs. One NNGO respondent pointed out that when *'money moves from your account to someone else's, you are the donor. So, it would imbalance the relationship'*. (Interview NNGO, 25-11-2022). Finance is thus central to changing power relations. *'Handing over more financial control, much more decision-making about how that money is going to be spent, that's fundamental'* according to a small NNGO network (Interview small NNGO network, 14-10-2022). WWThe control of finance and high-level decision-making also foster other forms of power to be concentrated in the Global North. For instance, access to policymakers and information are both significant sources of power imbalances. Having more information can result in a clearer understanding of the initiatives and the need to take action. Interview respondents observed that the dominance of the NNGOs in leading these agendas is partly attributed to greater access to information relating to current global trends and development paradigms as well as to campaigns around relations between development actors in the North and South.

Having this kind of information gives actors the impetus to initiate actions towards shifting power relations. Some interviewees mentioned the need to inform their Southern partners of new (Northern) developments in the sector, and Southern NGOs often noted not being aware of their existing power to amend partnerships (Interviews NNGO, 11-11-2022; 21-11-2022; Interview SNGO, 28-11-2022). Having this kind of information is a source of power in and of itself. Without the same level of access SNGOs are left to play a 'following' role, taking the lead from Northern NGOs. Findings in Figure 6 illustrate these dynamics well.

Although most SNGOs are eager to participate in decision-making, both NNGOs and SNGOs perceive an unequal capacity for SNGOs to take the lead. As limited resources are controlled by SNGOs, they struggle to take the appropriate action or to participate in the debate. It was noted during an NNGO interview that *'just the simple fact that*

the capacity of local organisations is far lower than NNGOs means they have difficulty making localisation effective'. (Interview NNGO, 2-12-2022). Others in the survey attribute power imbalances to cultural and ideological disparities and a lack of trust (Figure 4).

The continuing history of (neo)colonialism, structural racism, and eurocentrism is seen as one of the root causes of power imbalances by both NNGOs and SNGOs (both around 22%). As one NNGO respondent explained, *'The system of international cooperation has replicated colonial structures, hierarchies and mindsets'*. (Interview SNGO, 24-11-2022). The financial wealth of the Global North is a result of its (historic) extractive activities in the Global South, leading the latter to perpetually depend on the generosity of the former.

Diverse interviews made it abundantly clear that colonialism and neo-colonialism still dominate power relations. An NNGO interviewee stated that power relations in international development are *'(...) linked to international relations, they are linked to history, they are linked to politics, they are linked to lots of other things'* (Interview NNGO, 11-11-2022).

Another NNGO interviewee outed their frustration that colonial history and decolonisation do not only concern former colonial powers. Even countries that did not have colonies either profited from colonialism indirectly or were a victim of it, regardless of their status as colonisers (Interview NNGO, 25-11-2022).

Another NNGO respondent noted that the international development sector suffers from a *'colonial hangover in terms of views around decision-making and capacity to deliver'*. (Interview NNGO, 11-11-2022). Similarly, an interviewee pointed out that there is still a tendency to view SNGOs as *'really incapable of everything'*. (Interview small NNGO network, 13-10-2022).

Similarly, SNGOs report that they remain treated as 'lesser' by their Northern colleagues, often taking the role of subcontractor following instructions by Northern partners and colleagues who hold key positions within the sector and within organisations. An SNGO interviewee explained NNGOs think *'they need to explain things to us. But this is not true'.* (Interview SNGO, 28-11-2022). One SNGO went as far as saying that:

> *'The INGO industrial complex is facing a little bit of a crisis itself because a number of NGOs in the Global South are starting to ask different questions. What is the role of the international NGO? Is the international NGO a middleman? Could we have resources flow from the North to the South without a certain INGO? Many have even felt that no, the INGO is a mirror of colonialism...[M]any would argue that the international NGO is the remaining rope tying us to the colonial ship'.*
>
> Interview SNGO, 20-06-2022

Lastly, the reluctance of Northern actors – including donors and NNGOs – to share power is also highlighted as prolonging power imbalances. For instance, there is still low investment in local capacity and a high fixation on short-term results in the Global South. Interviewees from SNGOs decried some of the conditionalities tied to aid especially relating to certain levels of human resources. Some bilateral donors insist on having project team leads of the Chief of Party to be particular individuals of their choice, in most cases from the donor countries (Interview SNGO, 3-10-2022).

This can be interpreted as 'colonial hangover' and constrains efforts at reducing power differentials. Other respondents suggested that caution must be taken by SNGOs to ensure that they don't suddenly sever relations with NNGOs before they are able to sustain themselves financially and technically. Thus, radical and confrontation tactics preferred by some SNGOs were discouraged by those holding this view:

> *'We still need the resources that are coming from the west and in some cases, we still need some level of expertise that comes from them... I feel that if we are too confrontational, then we are likely to threaten the resources'.*
>
> Interview SNGO, 19-10-2022

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5   Such conditionalities and practices have severe impact upon SNGOs, illustrated vividly by Humentum (2022) in revealing the 'starvation cycle' that is imposed upon them as a result.

6. What actions are being undertaken to close the gap?

Main findings

- Discussions about unequal power relations are prevalent, yet mostly initiated by NNGOs.
- Most NNGOs (75%) and SNGOs (58%) have taken action to address power inequalities.
- Actions in the programming area consist principally of partner-involvement and co-creation in programme design and accountability requirements. Partner-led programming is also mentioned by both SNGOs and NNGOs - although substantially less often.
- In contrast, partners taking the lead in policy decision-making is only mentioned by a handful of NNGOs and not at all by SNGOs. In this policy area, most actions remain limited to discussions or consultations.
- In governance, actions regarding staff diversity are most prominent. Changes that decentralise power within the organisation or revolve around creating new decision-making bodies are less common.
- Actions regarding funding involve primarily support and capacity building for (local) fundraising. Changes in the funding structure or funding conditionalities are rare.
- In the area of language, actions are limited to awareness raising/dialogue and refraining from using certain phrases and NNGOs indicate to have decolonised their (external) communication.
- While both NNGOs and SNGOs mention many forms of future actions needed, SNGOs call for direct access to institutional donors (direct funding) while NNGOs emphasise a variety of changes within their individual relations with Southern organisations.

Mapping actions to redistribute power

Our survey asked respondents whether they had discussed actions to tackle inequalities internally within their own organisations and externally with their counterparts in the North or South. As Figure 5 shows, the majority of respondents in both groups have indeed done both. This is particularly the case for NNGOs, for whom over 80% and 75% of respondents highlighted that they had carried out such discussions internally and with their partners, respectively. In contrast, nearly one-third of SNGOs have not discussed any such actions internally or with their partners.

NNGOs saw themselves as the more likely actor that started these discussions within the partnership (see Figure 6). Nearly 70% of NNGOs reported that they had initiated discussions about such actions with their SNGO partners. For NNGOs there were very few examples in which their Southern counterpart started the discussion. In con-

Figure 5 | Have actions aimed at tackling power imbalances been discussed internally and with NGO partners?, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=343 and n=336).

Source: own calculations based on the survey
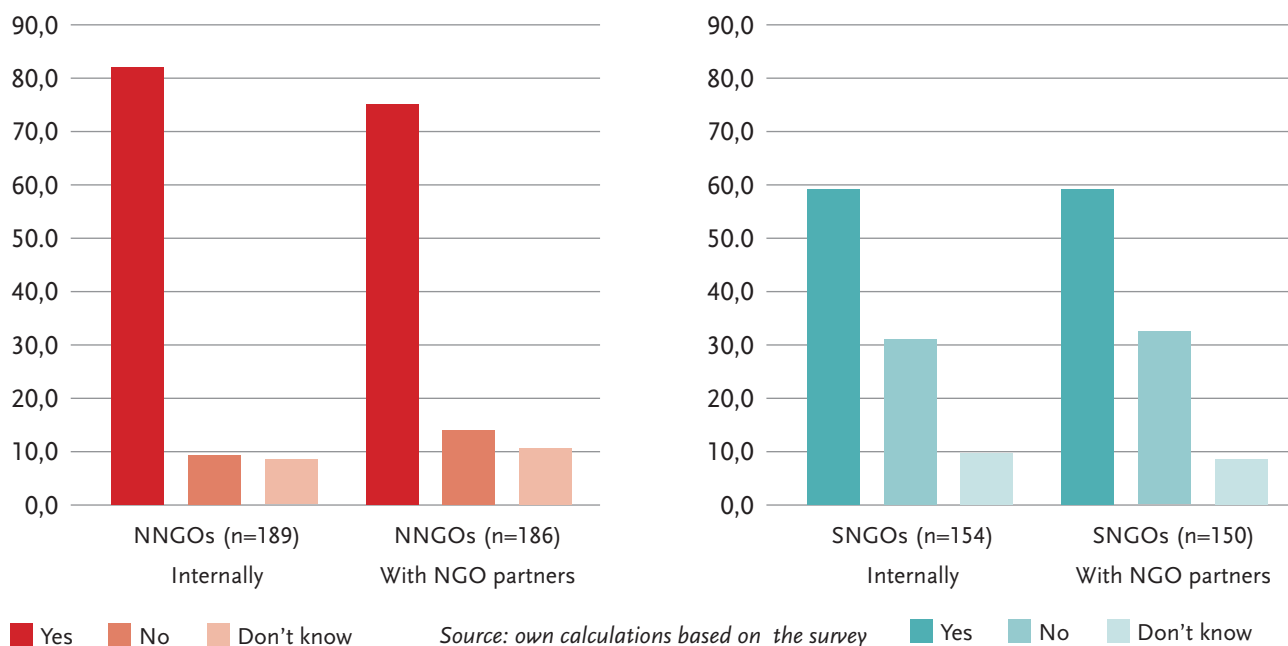
trast, over one-third of SNGOs reported that they had been the initiator of these discussions and nearly 45% that it had been a mutual initiative. Just under 20% (18.4%) highlighted their Northern counterpart had started the discussion. One important finding that emerged from our interviews was the need for a critical mass of supporters of actions to tackle power imbalances within organisations. NGOs are not homogenous organisations. Within each organisation there are those who advocate for change – the 'activists within' – and those who do not. Boards are powerful decision-making bodies but are often brought late into discussions. Moreover, boards tend to be risk adverse, meaning that those with power to make change are reluctant to be early adopters. As a consequence, many NNGOs are waiting for others to lead the change (Interview NNGO network, 9-11-2022; Interview NNGO, 11-11-2022).

Interviews highlighted another influence: that demand for change not only originates from within organisations but comes from all sides. Government ministries, through political pressure, come up with new policies that demand change within

NNGOs and their relationship with SNGOs. One Ugandan key informant illustrated this claim suggesting that:

> *'Trump's government under USAID started what we call a journey to self-reliance and they started prioritising local development. For Obama's they put numbers down and said at least 30% of Aid going to the country must go to local organisations'.*
> Interview SNGO, 26-10-2022

NNGOs encourage each other to talk about power and address the issue. Finally, Southern NGOs also demand change. As one interviewee stated: partners in the Global South are '*ringing the alarm bell that things have to change'.* (Interview NNGO network, 10-11-2022). Within the humanitarian sector in Uganda, some of the critical questions being asked by SNGOs include: What is it that international organisations are doing that the local ones cannot do? why are you giving money to an international organisation to do something the local organisation can do better? (Interview SNGO, 26-10-2022).

NGOs undertake actions

Following on from *discussions* about actions to redistribute power in relationships spanning the Global North and South is to *undertake specific actions* in this direction. For both NNGOs and SNGOs the majority of respondents report having undertaken such actions (Figure 7).

Building from Figure 7 the picture emerges that most organisations who engage in discussion also undertake some form of action. Of the 82% of Northern NGOs that have discussed changing power relations with their partners, 75% have un-

Figure 6 | Who initiated the discussion about actions with NGO partners?, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=226).

NNGOs (n=139)   SNGOs (n=87)
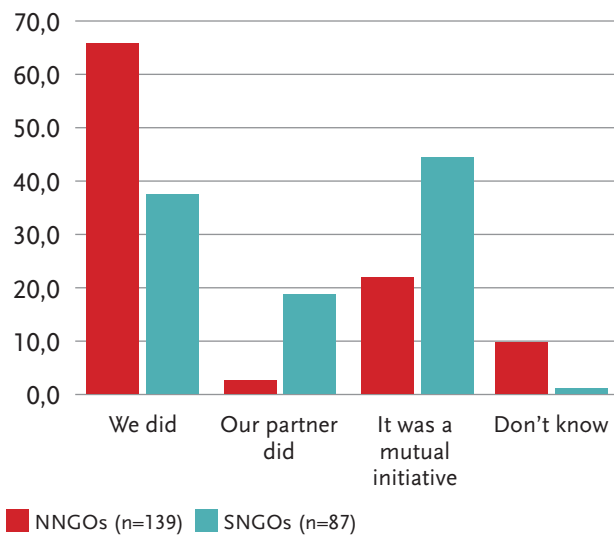
Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

Figure 7 | Undertaken any actions to change power relations, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=348).

NNGOs (n=197)   SNGOs (n=151)
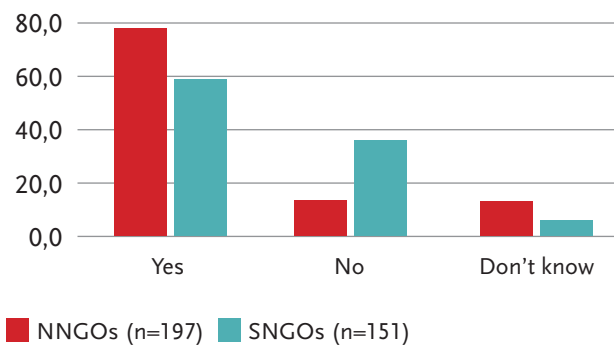
Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

dertaken actions to do this. The same percentage of Southern NGOs that reported talking about power imbalances internally (58.4%, n=154) and with their NGO partners (58.7%, n=150) also report taking action against them (58.3%, n=151).

But Figure 7 also highlights that the number of organisations taking action to change power relations is (substantially) lower among SNGOs. Around one-third of SNGOs report that they have not undertaken actions to change power relations, in comparison with just over 10% of NNGOs. The survey also explores what types of activities are undertaken by SNGOs and NNGOs. Respondents were asked about activities to address power imbalances across five core areas in which these power imbalances occur (see Table 1).

All five of these areas are important sites of action for NGOs in both the Global North and South (Figure 8). Within most of these areas, (well) over half of SNGOs and NNGOs in the survey are acting to tackle power imbalances. The only real exception to this rule concerns the actions of SN-GOs in the area of 'colonial language and stereotyping'. This is a strong action area for NNGOs, but less so for SNGOs, among whom only 26% of respondents reported taking action here. This is perhaps unsurprising because while SNGOs might see the need to 'demand' action from their Northern counterparts in terms of how NNGOs represent their Southern counterparts to Northern audiences, it is likely that they have less 'work' to do in this realm themselves. According to a Northern interviewee, small NNGOs also think they have less 'work' to do to in the area of *'colonial language and stereotyping' as their relationship with SNGOs is often built on trust and friendship'.* (Interview small NNGO network, 13-10-2022).

What, then, are the specific actions in these five areas that NNGOs and SNGOs take? The survey dug below these five categories by asking respondents to specify the activities they were undertaking in each area. Across each of these we analysed the open-ended answers to arrive at a categorisation.

Figure 8 | Areas which actions touch upon, divided between NNGOs and SNGOs, in %.
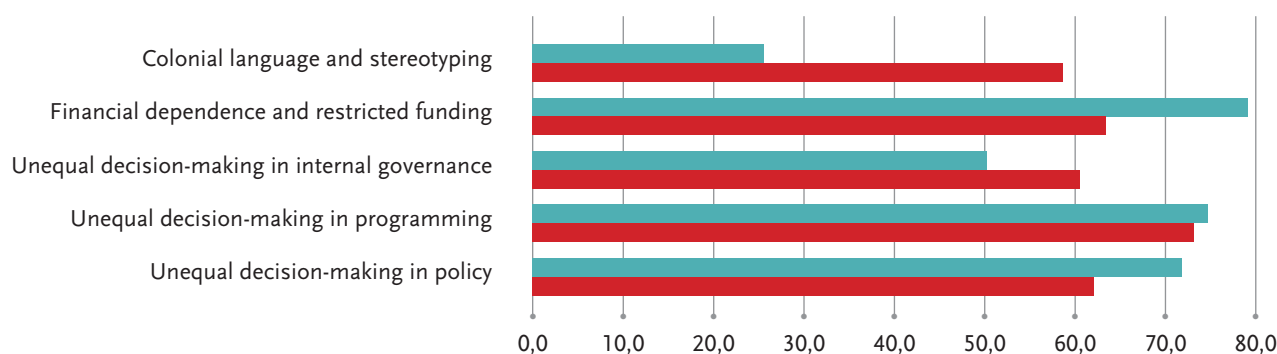
NNGOs   SNGOs   *Source: Own calculations based on the survey, multiple answers were allowed.*

Note: Total n for each area for SNGOs and NNGOs are as follows: 1. Policy – NNGOs (n=135); SNGO (n=86); 2. Programme – NNGOs (n=128); SNGO (n=76); 3. Governance – NNGOs (n=124); SNGO (n=73); 4. Funding – NNGOs (n=124); SNGO (n=73); and 5. Language – NNGOs (n=124); SNGO (n=70).

Table 1 | Core areas of power imbalance.

	Area	Explanation
1	Unequal decision-making in *policy*	The *policy* area refers to actions targeting the guiding principles as a standard for shaping decisions and actions about all recurring activities. Hence, the policy area has a broader scope than the programme level, where activities are specific and time-bound. The policy level, for example, deals with how NGOs are supposed to interact (partnership policy) and report (accountability policy).
2	Unequal decision-making in *programming*	The *programme* level refers to actions targeting decisions related to specific interventions. Hence, the scope of programme area actions is more limited than those targeting the policy area. The programme level, for example, deals with the design of interventions or who is involved.
3	Unequal decision-making in *internal governance*	The *governance* level refers to actions targeting the organisational structure that shapes how decisions are made and who is involved in making them. In addition, it includes actions aimed at ensuring and safeguarding staff diversity. Examples include board composition and hiring policies.
4	Financial dependence and restricted *funding*	The *funding* level refers to actions shaping the sources and nature of funding and the conditions under which it is provided. These are primarily actions seeking to influence one-sided funding dependency. Examples relate to the diversification of income and strengthening of fundraising capacity.
5	Colonial *language* and stereotyping	The *language* level refers to actions promoting the intentional use of a vocabulary and images that reflect valuing partners and strengthening partner equality, internally and externally. In doing so, communication that depicts partners in an unequal light is addressed. Examples relate to awareness raising about the impact of language and imagery and using different ways of communication.

Box 1 | What areas of action do our case studies focus upon?

As Appendix 3 and 4 detail, we carried out in-depth case studies in Ghana and Uganda to give a 'deep-dive' into some of these areas of action, to explore in more detail what is being done to address some of these power imbalances, why these actions have been designed as such, and what the tentative outcomes or implications of these actions have been. A detailed write up of these case studies can be found in Appendices 3 and 4.

In **Ghana** we explored two programmes, across a total of 12 Key Informant Interviews and a review of programme documentation, progress and performance reviews and evaluations.

The first programme in Ghana is the **Giving for Change programme** led by STAR Ghana Foundation and West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI) which seeks to strengthen the *domestic resource mobilisation capacity* of Ghanaian NGOs through community philanthropy to enhance *local ownership* and strengthening the ability of communities to *claim entitlements*. The programme also seeks to create the enabling environment for local philanthropy and to overcome the inherent power dynamics in the international development ecosystem by promoting a more equitable relationship between organisations in the Global North and South.

As part of a broader alliance across eight countries (i.e., Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Palestine and Uganda) (funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), we can identify that this programme seeks to tackle power imbalances across *funding, policy* and *programming,* through the promotion of community philanthropy, a growing international movement led by the Global Fund for Community Foundations.

The second programme in Ghana is the **Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL)** programme, funded by Global Affairs Canada and led by Plan International (Canada and Ghana) and two Ghanaian NGOs, NETRIGHT and WiLDAF supporting other local NGOs and WROs. This focuses on supporting the capacity and activities of Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) and movements in Ghana through three core objectives, namely: 1) improving the management, sustainability, performance and innovation of local WROs, 2) enhancing the delivery of quality services and advocacy by WROs and 3) enhancing collaboration and collective action of local WROs. Thus, we can see efforts seeking to address policy imbalances in *policy, programming,* and *governance* with capacity-building viewed as a key mechanism for achieving these.

In **Uganda** we explored the **Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA)** programme led by Oxfam, which sought to give local humanitarian partners a lead role in humanitarian response. ELNHA was designed to test whether local and national organisations could be frontline responders in humanitarian contexts in place of the usual international humanitarian responders. It had three core components, namely 1) *capacity strengthening* of local actors, 2) *amplifying the voice of local actors* in decision-making spaces and 3) creating space for them to act, including through *better forms and terms of funding*. Taking place within the context of their Charter for Change pledge, this programme sought to tackle power imbalances across multiple dimensions: in *policy*, *programming* and *funding*.

Figure 9 | Actions undertaken in the area of policy, divided between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=122).

NNGOs (n=75)　　SNGOs (n=47)　　*Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*
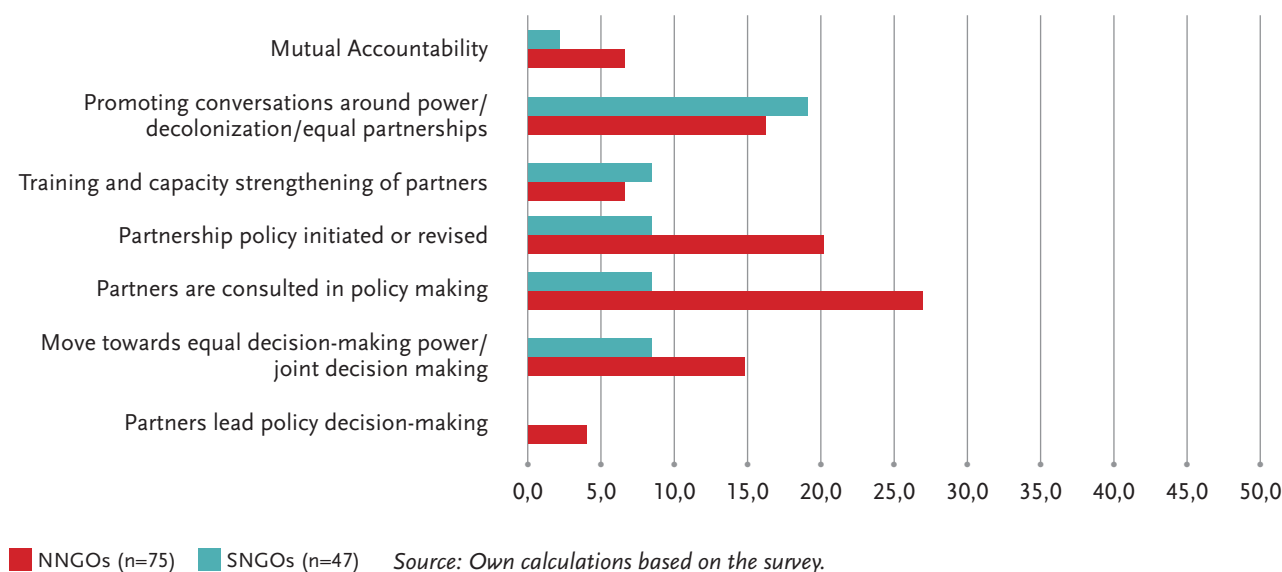
From consultation to co-creation for SNGOs…but less so for policies

In the area of **policy** seven types of actions emerged from these responses (see Figure 9). For NNGOs, consulting Southern partners in their policy-making (27%) is the most common action. Fewer (15%) went one step further to move towards equal decision-making. An even smaller group of NNGOs (4%) states that partners lead in policy decision-making.

A few SNGOs (8.5%) also reported some progress in greater consultation or equal decision-making power in policy, but none reported being able to take the lead in these areas. For them the promotion of policy-level conversations around power and (equal) partnerships is the most frequently engaged with action (19%).

Roughly 20% of NNGOs and 9% of SNGOs have developed a new partnership policy, which according to a respondent from an NNGO, is essential because *'[it] helps to re-define the added value of the organisation, what should it do in a more decolonised way of working, what should it let of go off, and how to support partner organisations to realise the change'*.

Just under 10% of SNGOs report activities in training and capacity strengthening, which was one of the core foci of the ELNHA case study in Uganda and the WVL case study in Ghana. The ELNHA case study reveals the linkages between capacity strengthening and the professionalisation of humanitarian response (See Box 2).

Actions in the area of p**rogrammes and programming** were the most prominent across all those initiatives mentioned by respondents (Figure 10). From open-ended responses, we distinguish between six types of actions in this area. Of these, consultation in programming and (one step further) co-creation are mentioned most frequently. For example, a respondent from an NNGO said:

> *'In individual projects there is experimentation with different ways of co-creation, trying to consistently improve how programming is developed and how the involvement, initiative and needs from [Southern] partners can shape the programming fundamentally'.*

Figure 10 | Actions in the programme area, distinguishing between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=129).

Source: Own calculations based on the survey.
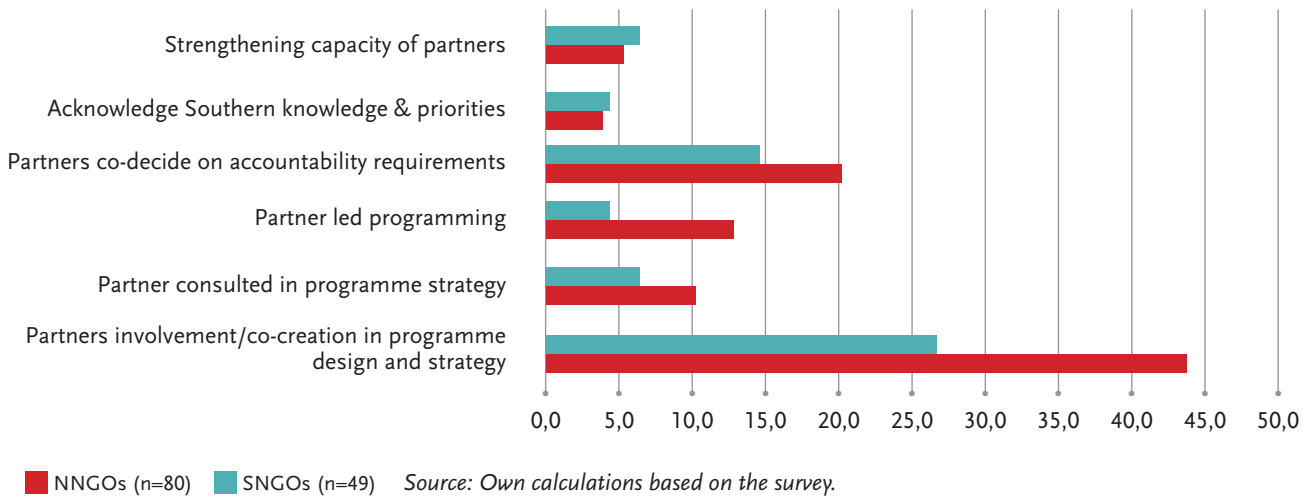
Figure 11 | Actions undertaken in the area of governance, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=101).

Source: Own calculations based on the survey.
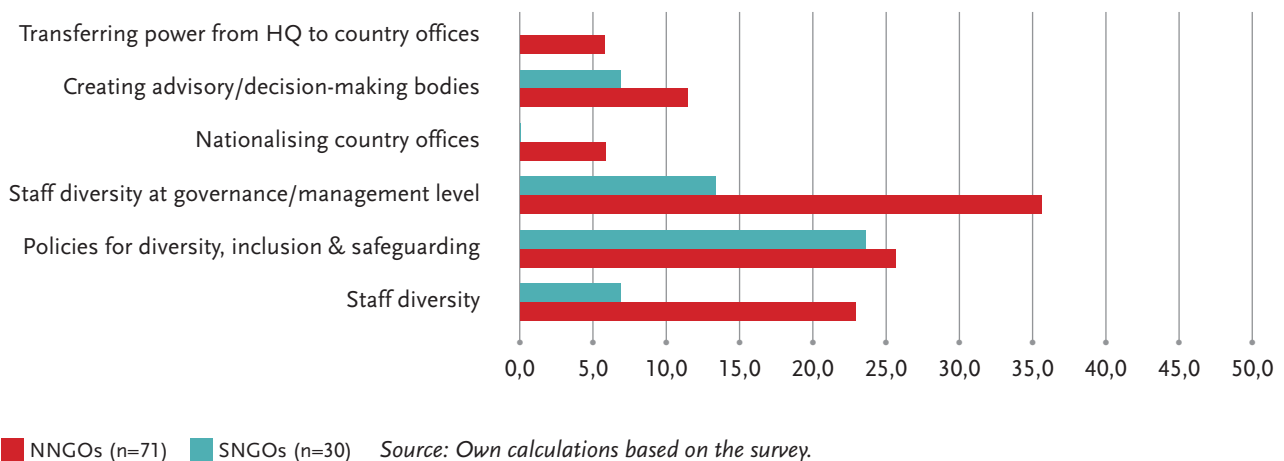
Programming is one area in which NNGOs have moved away from 'partner consultation' towards deeper engagement from Southern counterparts in these areas. Only 10% NNGOs report that they 'consulted' their Southern counterparts, in comparison with 44% of NNGOs reporting that they co-created programme strategy and design. The deepest form of action here is moving towards partner-led strategy and design. An SNGO respondent noted, *'[we started] setting the agenda based on our context; aligning monitoring and reporting to our strategy'*. However, actions taken in this category are lower, at 12.5% of NNGOs and 4.1% of SNGOs. Interestingly, the NNGOs in the sample mentioned partner-led programming more often than consultation.

The survey found that for 20% of NNGOs and 14% of SNGOs, co-deciding on the nature of programmatic accountability requirements is crucial. For example, a Global North respondent noted, *'Partners from the Global South often determine when monitoring and evaluation are conducted. Some retain the money and only invite us to join them in the evaluation on dates conducive to them. They also determine the reporting templates and the kind of information to report on'*.

Box 2 | Capacity strengthening and the NGO-isation of local responders in Uganda

In Uganda, capacity strengthening of local actors was a central element of the ELNHA project. The context in which this took place was the need for local organisations to become *credible* organisations at the frontline of the humanitarian response in Northern Uganda that would be accepted by international organisations as viable partners.

Prior to the project perceptions were that local organisations had limited capacities around core humanitarian standards, governance and management structures, organisational policies, strategic plans, and weak controls, all of which undermined their ability to take a leading role in the design and implementation of humanitarian responses.

Oxfam and ELNHA did not come with predetermined intervention activities for partners; instead Humanitarian Country Capacity Assessments were utilised to identify the 'capacity gaps' of each organisation, then providing partners with training in different aspects such as governance and management, resource mobilisation, book-keeping and improved accounting systems. These aspects were critical in allaying the fears that International NGOs and funders had with regards to providing direct funding to Southern organisations due to weak accounting systems and practices.

This was an intensive process with significant and long-term investment from Oxfam and their training partners and consultants. As one local partner explained, *'Oxfam had to bring two of their staff to sit [with us] for like 2 years as a way of mentoring to make sure we implement projects similar to how Oxfam was doing'.* In one of the refugee camps, Oxfam handed its area of jurisdiction to three local actors to show the doubting NNGOs that these had capacity to expertly execute projects. Following this, UNHCR recognised these SNGOs by giving them responsibility for specific issues including handling gender-based violence in the refugee settlement.

Those interviewed highlighted that this shift towards localisation was not just seen as the 'right' thing to do, but also fit into global neoliberal agendas of cost-effectiveness: 'it is cheaper to deal with the Ugandan organisations than an organisation that is going to employ seven expatriates into the country while maintaining the headquarters in Washington DC' (Interview SNGO, 26-10-2022). The range of capacity-strengthening initiatives carried out had clear implications on the professionalisation of organisations.

Training provided did not just build 'capacity' (which was not always lacking in the first place) but made sure that local organisations could 'fit' in form and function into – and was acceptable to – the global humanitarian system. Systems of accounting, risk and monitoring were central to building trust here. Partners reported favourably on outcomes in terms of increased recognition by donors and INGOs, including this enabling them to secure direct funding. We must also note, in this context, the ways in which localisation processes also lead to the NGO-isation of humanitarian response. Local organisations formalised, expanded in size (staff) and scope (area of operation) during ELNHA. This had implications for sustainability especially after the expiry of ELNHA funding.

Box 3 | Inclusion of local CSOs in governance structure of WVL in Ghana

The WVL Project in Ghana has contributed to some changes at the governance level (with WROs being involved in all levels of the governance structure of the project, including grant selection and approval panel). Those interviewed highlighted that as part of the governance structure of the project, the WROs are involved in the decision-making process. For instance, at the Project Steering Committee, which is the highest decision-making level, two national NGOs and networks – NETRIGHT and WiLDAF – have representatives who serve as the Chair and Co-Chair of the Project Steering Committee. They lead the entire process of the implementation of the WVL among the partners in Ghana.

In terms of grant-making processes, interviewees with respondents including representatives of Plan International Ghana and the WVL partners indicate that the composition of the grant selection and approval panel include the WROs' representatives together with some expertise with the requisite knowledge on gender transformation. The panel that includes the representatives of the WROs reviews and approves all funding applications.

Again the interview data indicates that the Project Management Team reviews and approves all the work plans of the implementing partners subject to the final approval by Global Affairs Canada which is the funding institution of the project. Notwithstanding this, in essence the main decision-making powers of the WVL are in the hands of the Project Management Team and two national NGOs – NETRIGHT and WiLDAF. A key informant interviewed shared his/her experience on the involvement of the WROs in the governance structure of the WVL project by stating that 'the WROs have seats in every level of the decision-making table. Even with the capacity building process in terms of specific capacity building training they were all self-defined by them' (Interview with NNGO, 21-04-2023).

Notable is that although the WROs input feeds into policy discussions at the donor level through the reports they share with Global Affairs Canada, and the WROs being involved in the governance structure of the WVL project, involvement almost exclusively happens at the programmatic level rather than the policy level with Global Affairs Canada.

While representing progress in an important area, it is notable that progress in bringing Southern counterparts into decisions around accountability is much lower than in their deeper participation in programme strategy and design.

Improving staff diversity, equity and inclusion

In the area of **governance** (Figure 11), we identified six main actions. Actions aimed at improving staff diversity within governance structures and at the programme level were most frequently mentioned, especially by NNGOs. In most cases, respondents indicated their respective organisations had initiated policies to ensure they em-

ployed more staff from the Global South. Another set of actions that stands out concerns adopting internal policies to promote a culture of diversity and inclusion in the organisation, including specific policies for safeguarding. Many respondents noted that their respective organisations had installed specific working groups (anti-racism-groups, diversity and inclusion groups etc.) for this purpose. Roughly 12% of the activities mentioned by NNGOs (7% by SNGOs) were about installing advisory and/or decision-making bodies to promote Southern perspectives and priorities. A Global North respondent explained:

'We have had a diversity-equity-inclusion working group and this has been a focus area for a couple of years now. Due to that and the reflection on the composition of our team, we have gotten a more diverse team over the years, and more diverse staff has been hired in terms of religious and/or ethnic background [...] We have an advisory board and people from the so-called 'Global South' have been added to that board'.

Nationalising country offices and/or transferring headquarters from the North to Southern countries was mentioned by NNGO respondents in the survey. It was also singled out by a few SNGO key informants. For example, one interviewee explained that:

'The country office model has also been criticised recently as a colonial outpost of some sort. You are an INGO, you are based in Netherlands [or] in Britain and you have country offices in Uganda, Mali, Malawi, these are like your colonial outposts and that itself has been put under a microscope. So a

number of these INGOs are starting to think deeply, some of them have decided to now move from headquarters from London to South Africa, that is the case of Action Aid. From wherever to Nairobi, that is the case of Oxfam'.

<div align="right">Interview SNGO, 20-06-2022</div>

However, SNGO key informants were sceptical of the transformative potential of this strategy especially if not accompanied by other actions to shift power:

'...Moving your headquarters doesn't necessarily mean you done anything to address the whole program... You definitely need to think through the software as opposed to just the hardware of moving offices'.

<div align="right">Interview SNGO, 20-06-2022</div>

It was mentioned that a number of these NNGOs are now looking into 'Africanising' their human resources through appointing Africans to Country Director and other senior management positions that used to be a preserve of expatriates. Others

Figure 12 | Actions undertaken in the area of funding, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=122).
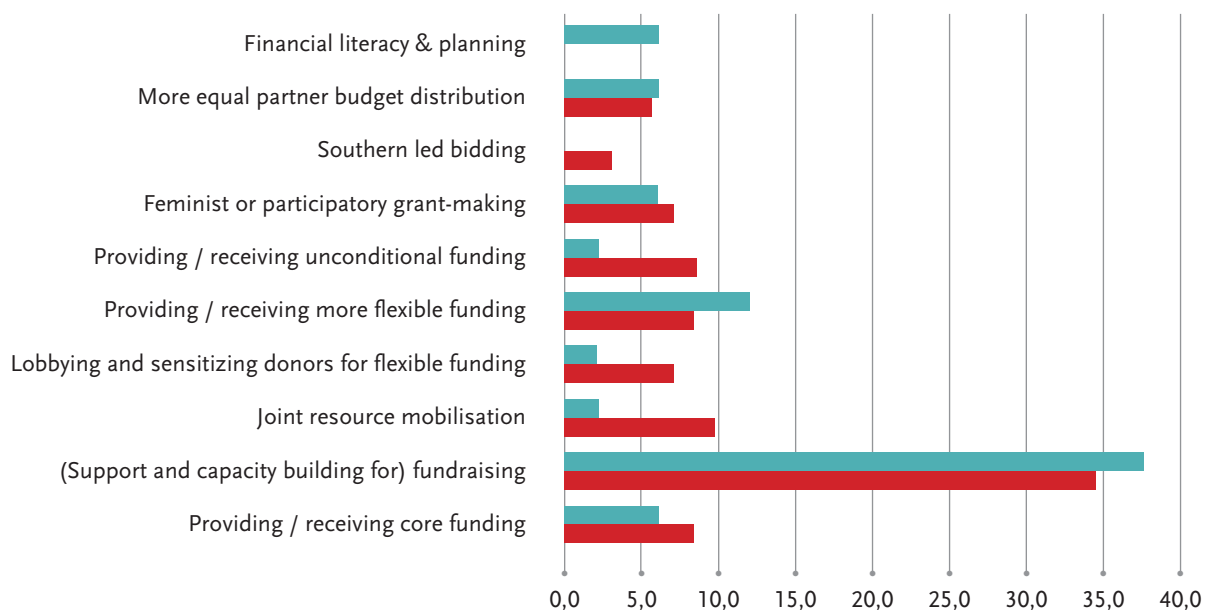
NNGOs (n=72) SNGOs (n=50) *Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*

have moved a step further to consider the country offices as federal entities that have an equal say with their counterparts based in the global north when it comes to making decisions. In the words of one respondent, in this way, some NNGOs are challenging the 'governance apartheid'.

Building local fundraising capacity…. rather than increasing the volume or improving the terms of funding flows

Initiatives to tackle power inequalities were also heavily concentrated in the area of **funding** (Figure 12). Yet while the survey yielded ten specific activities to tackle power imbalances, there was less diversity of action across these.

One, in particular, stands out for SNGOs (35%) and NNGOs (38%): support and capacity building for fundraising. Principally this relates to SNGOs taking action to diversify funding sources and NNGOs offering support in this process (mainly through training). A Global South respondent noted, *'We believe that at least 40% of our budget should come from our own resourced contribution to shift power imbalances and bring dignity and respect by [Northern] partners'*.

Interviews show that capacity building for domestic resource mobilisation is viewed as a key action by SNGOs. This is seen as one way to respond to restricted access to donor funding, to promote autonomy and independence and to enhance the financial health of local SNGOs. This is how one Ghanaian interviewee puts it:

'So, you will notice that in Ghana now, for the past five years, there has been more emphasis on resource mobilisation but especially looking at alternative financing. There is a recognition that no, you cannot just be waiting for donors to give you money. Maybe we need to look at how we can mobilise from individuals domestically, is that possible? Can we create a profitable module, a social enterprise module? What about social investment, endowment funds or community philanthropy? It is now that a lot of Ghanaians are talking about these things […] We are having these conversations because we feel it would change the power dynamics because it would give us more unrestricted funding, which [gives us] more independence in specific decisions that are important to us'.

interview SNGO, 03-10-2022

Capacity building for domestic resource mobilisation also emerged as an important action by SNGOs to shift power. The Giving for Change case study from Ghana highlights how STAR Ghana Foundation builds the capacity of local CSOs through the Communities of Practice (CoPs) to undertake domestic resource mobilisation (See Box 4).

Figure 13 | Actions undertaken in the area of language, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=81).
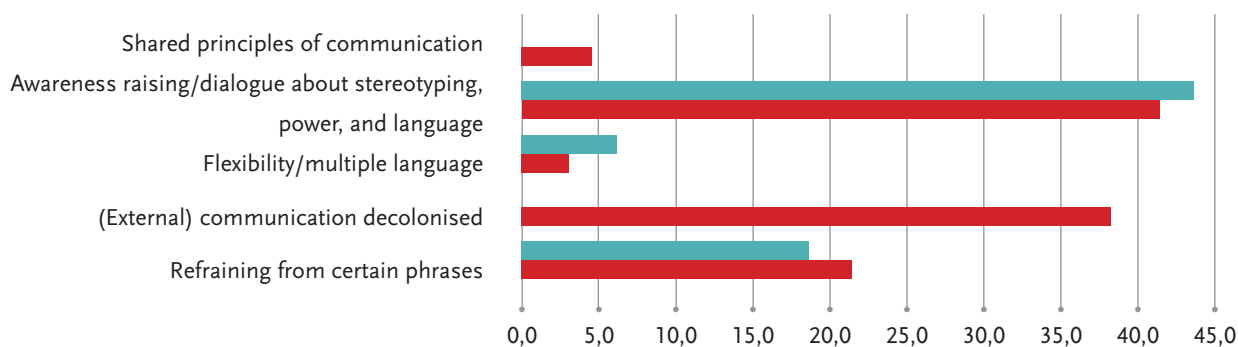
NNGOs (n=65) SNGOs (n=16) *Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*

Box 4 | Giving for Change (GfC) Project and Capacity Building for Domestic Resource Mobilisation

As part of efforts by the GfC project to promote the mobilisation of domestic resources for local CSOs, three Communities of Practice (CoPs) (i.e., a network of local CSOs) were formed with the aim of helping the CSOs share their experiences, knowledge and lessons learnt on domestic resource mobilisation particularly community philanthropy. The CoPs comprise of different local CSOs that operate at the national, sub-national and local levels and play significant roles in building the capacity of their members on domestic resources mobilisation through community philanthropy. In doing so, the CoPs provide training on, for example, mobilising communities to lead in promoting their development, relationship building and domestic resource mobilisation strategies (e.g. local fundraising etc.). As part of the capacity building training provided by the CoPs, some local CSOs mentioned that they had established community fundraising volunteers who mobilise local resources (i.e. in-cash and in-kind from community members) to support their work.

Those interviewed further mentioned that the capacity building on resource mobilisation has helped their organisations to reduce their dependency on external donor funding and has created an opportunity for promoting their downward accountability to their beneficiaries. This has also enhanced their organisational autonomy because of their reduced external donor dependency. However, the concern among many interviewees was that they have been unable to raise the much-needed domestic resources compared to external donor funding to support their operations, for example, because of a lack of transparency and accountability on the part of local CSOs.

Another example in Uganda is the Community Development Resource Network (CDRN), which has embarked on investing in assets, such as real estate, where part of the space on the organisational premises is rented on a commercial basis (interview SNGO, 11-10-2022). Profits from this are ploughed back into organisational operations. Additionally, CDRN also offers consultancy services for the government of Uganda, donor agencies and other development agencies as a source of revenue for the organisation; this reduces its reliance on foreign funding. Locally-raised revenues are collected on a 'reserve account' to meet administrative costs, which are rarely funded by donors.

Taken together, providing or receiving more flexible, unconditional and/or core funding is the second most frequent initiative in this area. Nearly 30% of NNGOs mention such actions and 20%

of SNGOs. To this, we might add participatory grant-making (a further 7% and 6% of NNGOs and SSNGOs, respectively), as this also offers recipients a bigger say in funding decisions. Several respondents, especially from Southern organisations, indicated they made conscious efforts to sensitise donors towards more flexible funding. One respondent explained that:

> 'We seek to inform the strategies of [Northern] funder partners to expand their framing of gender, power and intersectionality. [Our aim is to] deepen their understanding of structural violence and other barriers that Global South organisations and movements might face when trying to access resources, particularly from the Global North'.

Although mentioned substantially fewer times, joint resource mobilisation (10% of NNGOs

and 2% of SNGOs) and (certainly) Southern-led bidding (3% of SNGOs) are ways of balancing power between Northern and Southern development organisations and building the autonomy of SNGOs over all aspects of operations in the case of the latter. Encouraging SNGOs to work in consortia is another strategy that comes from the Ugandan case study material. It reportedly helped to minimise competition among NGOs, allowed smaller NGOs opportunity to access grants, and bolstered their collective bargaining and resource mobilisation potential. A respondent at Oxfam who was central in the implementation of the EL-NHA project explained:

> *'We advised local organisations that in order to win the grants, organisations needed to form consortia to bring different skills and ideas together to be able to shoot with one strong proposal that brings out complementarity among them'.*
>
> Interview NNGO, 12-04-2023

Several organisations had been working towards a more equal distribution of resources in the partnership. One NNGO respondent explained, *'We identify and apply for opportunities in the UK that partners wouldn't be eligible for, but make sure roughly 75% of the budget goes to them'.*

Decolonising internal and external language and communications

Finally, in the arena of language, Figure 13 shows that many organisations from the Global South (44%) and North (42%) have taken actions aimed at awareness raising and dialoguing about North-South stereotyping, power relations and language. Refraining from not using specific terms and phrases (e.g., beneficiaries, underdeveloped, field office, capacity building) is important in addressing power imbalances for organisations in both geographies. One SNGO respondent explained that:

> *'Language sets the relation on terms of engagement... the type of language you use can actually be derogatory, can be pejorative in nature. I once worked for [INGO name withheld] and our white expatriate colleagues considered us 'locals'...The way that sounds feels like you have a local cow and you have an exotic cow so sometimes you think of local as being of low quality'.*
>
> Interview SNGO, 20-06-2022

Some NNGOs are cognisant of these concerns:

> *'[We've made] efforts not to adopt language that might have negative connotations. And we do not use the term 'in the field' anymore, as our [Southern] partner has made us understand that this is offensive to them'.*

A relatively large number of NNGOs (39%) go further by stating that they have decolonised their (external) communication. For example, a survey respondent explained that:

> *'In all respects of our work, we are aware not to reproduce stigma, just as we do not exclusively represent others as their marginalization. We try to tell nuanced stories and let the people we cooperate with, define themselves. And we are careful not to contribute to a narrative about the Global South as civilizationally inferior or culturally backward'.*

Priorities for action: addressing inequalities in funding, policy and programming

Alongside identifying initiatives they partook in across these five areas, respondents were also asked to identify their top three priorities for addressing power imbalances across these categories.

As Figure 14 illustrates, there is strong alignment between perceptions of SNGOs and NNGOs in this ranking. For SNGOs, a clear preference for addressing inequalities in the arena of funding is evident (with a score = 1.01), followed by policy (score = 0.86) and programming (score = 0.83) in almost joint equal second place. This ranking was the same for NNGOs, too. (with scores of 0.9, 0.79 and 0.78 respectively). This is no surprise if we return to Figure 9's magnanimous identification of funding and resources as by far the core driver of power imbalances between SNGOs and NNGOs.

The only clear area in which NNGOs placed greater priority than SNGOs is in the arena of language; perhaps no surprise here given the work that needs to be done in representing global development efforts and the different actors involved to Northern audiences. This work remains important, but clear too from Figure 14 is that these efforts should run alongside and not independent of more direct action to transfers power and control to SNGOs in funding, policy and programming. In-depth interviews revealed a similar reasoning, stressing that discussions about language should not slow down other actions.

Figure 14 | Ranking areas of actions to combat power imbalances, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in %.
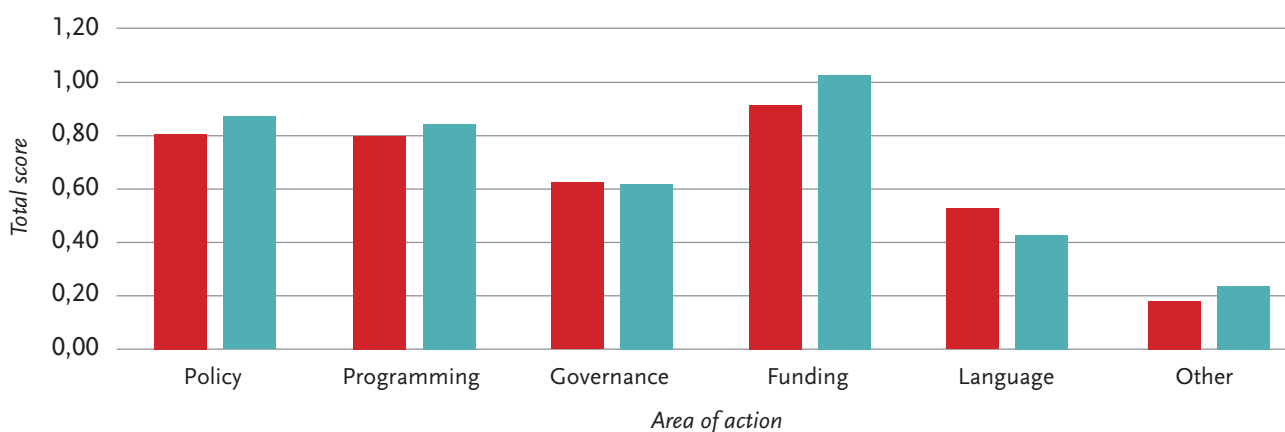
Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

Note 1: The total n for each rank differs (and runs between n=152 for rank 1 to n=65 for rank 6) as respondents do not necessarily score actions on all areas. Note 2: Areas ranked as top priority (= rank 1) are multiplied by 6 to express their weight, those in rank 2 by 5, in rank 3 by 4, in rank 4 by 3, in rank 5 by 2 and in rank 6 by 1 to reach an overall score per area. As there are substantially more NNGOs than SNGOs that answered this specific question, the total score per group is then divided by the total number of votes casted in the groups to reach a comparable figure.

Northern and Southern priorities in focusing future efforts

The survey also gave respondents a chance to highlight three future priorities for shifting the power balance towards Southern organisations. Respondents were asked in their own words to describe briefly what changes they want to see with regards to changing power imbalances between NNGOs and SNGOs. Responses to this question were rich, detailed and enlightening, and the research team categorised these into 13 overarching themes (Figure 15).

With only one NNGO respondent explicitly stating that there is no need for change, widespread recognition of the need for change is clear. But the sheer number of types of preferred priorities indicates there is no broad agreement on actions for the future. This gives the impression that searching for the best ways to address power imbalances is still ongoing.

In some places there is some level of convergence in future priorities. Comparable numbers of Northern and Southern organisations (around 15% of both), for example, call for being good partners by providing broad-based support based on listening, understanding and appreciating local knowledge. Likewise, 14.5% of SNGOs and 15% of NNGOs see the local determination of development as a future priority. The latter, in turn, is strongly linked to the importance of decolonising partnerships and narratives (e.g. highlighting partner voices and perspectives) - a point which (in contrast) is substantially more often mentioned by NNGOs.

Yet Figure 15 also highlights some clustering towards specific types of actions and some important divergence in the priorities of Northern and Southern organisations when it comes to prioritising the partnership level or the broader, systemic foundations of the sector that underpin these inequalities. A clear distinction between partnership and systemic levels can be witnessed in two areas, in greater priority and participation of SNGOs and in funding.

Thirty percent of Northern NGOs prioritise the greater involvement of Southern NGOs in decision-making, strategy and programming, a priority that plays out within the scope of existing partnerships and activities. In comparison, this was seen as a priority by a smaller 25% of Southern NGOs. Southern NGOs were more likely to prioritise a more foundational rebalancing of power and influence, with 20% highlighting the need for a 'transnational mind and practice shift that centres Southern NGOs'. This refers to the need for a systemic change at the global level, including Southern leadership, South-South exchanges and horizontal collaborations. Just under 17% of Northern NGOs prioritised this systemic level.

The second area in which a clear distinction can be made between a partnership and systemic level is funding. Northern organisations (28%) stress the importance of improving their own funding practices within existing partnerships emphasising unrestricted funding, alongside fewer conditions, less bureaucracy, more flexibility and more long-term funding.

In contrast, Southern organisations prioritised a much deeper reconfiguration of funding processes at the systemic level. With 36% Southern respondents emphasising the need for better access to funding and information for Southern NGOs, this priority received stronger backing than any other among one group. This includes the need to channel a much greater volume of funds directly to SNGOs rather than have funds intermediated through NNGOs. As one respondent remarked, we need

> '[m]ore focus on funding attention to development organisations in the South, particularly small and medium-sized organisations; including more context-specific donor conditionalities and processes which promotes local driven development'.

Figure 15 | Preferred priorities for tackling power imbalances between NGOs in the Global North and South, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=343).

NNGOs (n=182)　SNGOs (n=161)　*Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*
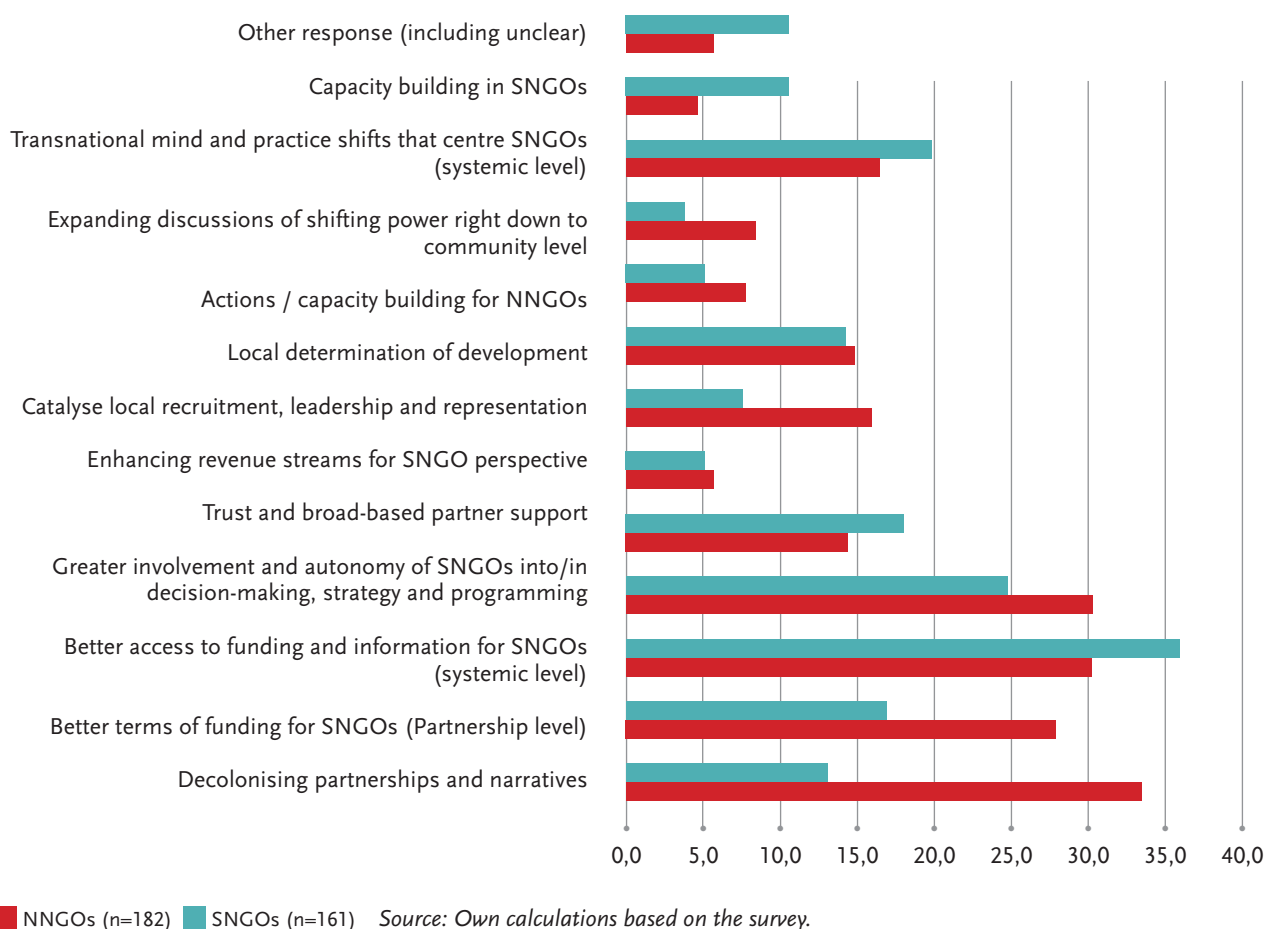
A further 30% of Northern NGOs also spoke to this systemic priority, highlighting their recognition that change within their own partnerships must be accompanied by broader structural change.

We can see from these distinctions that the scale of change is as important a question as what is changing. Do we want to see change at the organisational and partnership-level or at the systemic level? Do these things go hand-in-hand, in a mutually-reinforcing cycle, and if not, what do we need to do simultaneously to ensure that the sum of the programmatic and policy changes influences change within the broader system? Can 'real' transformation occur without a broader system change in which Southern voices and organisations are no longer dependent on whether power

is 'given' to them (but can, also, ultimately be taken away)? We return to these questions in our concluding reflections.

7. Evaluating the pace and (barriers to) success of actions

Main findings

- NNGOs and SNGOs rarely provide reports on actions that share details on actions or evaluations.
- Reported actions concern changes within programming rather than more systemic-level actions.
- Most reports consists of general discussions, providing little concrete guidance to organisations seeking to address power relations.
- NNGOs explain the limited changes thus far by often referring to constraints in their own relations with donors, stating that big change is beyond the confines of their relations with SNGOs.
- SNGOs are limited in bringing about transformation because of their dependency and everyday struggle to survive.
- Both NNGOs and SNGOs also mention a wide range of other barriers, mostly related to power, interest, knowledge (e.g. lack of best practices to learn from), and time/resource constraints.
- SNGOs also highlight issues of trust in NNGOs and civic space constraints as barriers. For NNGOs, risks and fear form important barriers.
- Both NNGOs and SNGOs emphasise systemic inequalities as barriers to change, emphasizing Northern power keeping the process slow and limited.
- The Ugandan ELNHA case provides an inspiring example that change is possible.

Survey responses indicate that SNGOs are much more likely to have evaluated (formally or informally) the actual effects of actions that they undertook to change power relations. More than 50% SNGOs says to have done so, almost twice the percentage of NNGOs (27%). Another 27% of SNGOs and 39% of NNGOs are keen to, but have not done so yet.

When asked about the effects of actions to change power relations, NNGO respondents see these effects in increasing consultation and (in some cases) participation of SNGOs by increasing dialogue with partners and giving more room to SNGOs

to give input. Some NNGOs point out having increased their support for local capacity strengthening of SNGOs in response to these evaluations. SNGO respondents, on their part, mention being firmer with their demands for change and vocalising their needs. Some also reported gaining more decision-making power regarding choosing priorities.

However, clear indicators of the actual effects of these actions are hard to come by. The survey also requested respondents to add links to online resources indicating the actual effects of such actions. This resulted in 50 links to documents dis-

cussing various types of actions (for an in-depth analysis of these documents, see Appendix 5).

Most documents discuss the need for change, the principles underlying such change and the strategies implemented to achieve change. Actions are discussed, for example, related to staff diversity, mutual capacity strengthening, adjustment training to the local context, and creating space for Southern NGOs to influence decision-making. Yet very few documents move beyond more general discussions whilst evidence about the effects of reported actions is largely absent. Where more tangible actions are outlined they tend to be limited to the programmatic space rather than at the organisational policy level. While the overall picture is that NNGOs are actively engaging with the issue, it is not clear how they are concretely changing their practices and how this is impacting upon power relations. Overall, transformative and encouraging exemplars are scarce.

Things are moving... but not quickly enough

When it comes to respondents' perceptions of the pace of change within their organisation, around 60% of respondents in both NNGOs and SNGOs feel that their organisation should be moving more quickly in these areas (Figure 16). Very few respondents (1.5% of SNGOs and 4.2% of NNGOs) think that their organisations are moving too fast.

In-depth interviews confirmed these sentiments. While Northern interviews highlighted the diversity of stages in which organisations are at, the overall consensus is that NNGOs are not active enough and that the action taken is marginal. One NNGO network reflected on the actions of its members:

> '*I think since for about two years now, these discussions have been going on and it's only now that we are stepping away from just discussing and actually coming with concrete initiatives, steps, and actions*'.
>
> Interview NNGO network, 10-11-2022

Most organisations are in the beginning stages of change and while a few organisations are boosting ahead, the rest are lagging behind. Clear then, is that the profile achieved by those organisations further ahead in this journey are not representative of the sector's progress as a whole.

Figure 16 | Pace of change within the own organisation, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=181).

NNGOs (n=118) SNGOs (n=67)
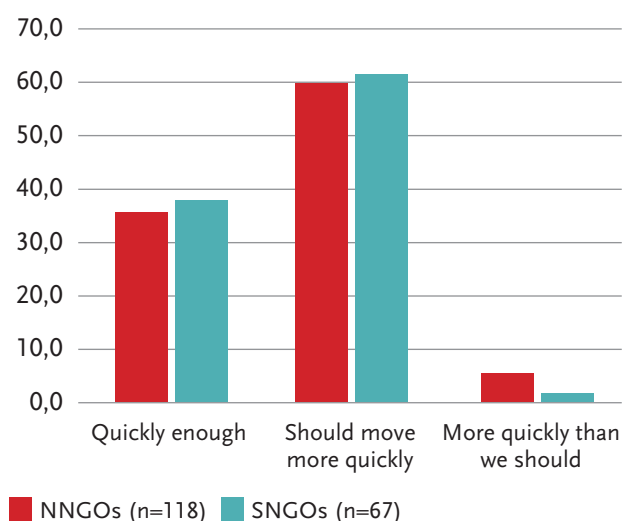
Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

In reflecting on their 'pace of change' perceptions, NNGOs emphasise that change takes time and is a process. Rushing this process, respondents highlighted, will run the risk of imposing the actions undertaken to shift power on SNGOs – doing the opposite of letting go of power.

NNGOs also expressed the constraints that they face within the confines of their own donor relationships. They are also in dependent relationships and thus cannot move at their own pace. 'He who pays the piper, calls the tune' as the say-

ing goes, and this is as applicable for the relationship between institutional donors and NNGOs as it is between NNGOs and SNGOs.

Lastly, NNGOs stress that the pace of change depends on where in the organisation you look. Younger staff are more eager to push for changing power relations than older staff, highlighted respondents, alongside differences across departments. Financial departments, in particular, were highlighted as more risk-averse.

Interviews confirmed that people are eager to learn from best practices that are slowly coming to the surface. This cross-sectoral learning and growing networks aimed at shifting power in the development sector were widely acknowledged as important for inspiration and learning. That these networks are often still siloed into 'development', 'humanitarian', and 'peace' sectors was acknowledged alongside the need for more sharing across them.

Northern interviewees also recognised that gaining international profile and influence is not as easy for all organisations. According to them, initiatives from the Global South are not as visible as those from NNGOs and likewise small NGOs have less capacity to communicate their initiatives to the wider sector. Interviewees agreed the debate can be made more inclusive, bringing in a larger number of good practices from the Global South and small innovative NGOs. As noted by an NNGO interviewee:

> 'The sector right now is at a tipping point, or close to a tipping point, and I genuinely think we are edging towards a point in which the sector will change for the good, permanently, because there will be a critical mass of people talking about it'.
>
> Interview NNGO, 11-11-2022

There were conflicting feelings evident amongst SNGOs in the interviews. While voicing their eagerness to do more in this direction, they also emphasised the fact that they are already doing a lot alongside their partners, especially considering their capacity. Talking about localisation, a respondent observed:

> 'And right now, if you go to any of our sector players, you will actually find that an NNGO has local partners that they are either working with or partnering with, some of them reluctantly, some of them willingly. The relationships are different, we have some that have transformative relationships, we have some that have very transactional relationship, the driving transactional relationships are those who are still holding onto power and they don't want to let go. But those that are driving transformative relationships in other wards they are saying look, we want to partner with you but we as an INGO don't want to just look at you as someone to implement our programs, we want to see your agency transforming in a positive way. So, we want to transfer the knowledge, the capacity to your people and we also want you to transfer the skills you have so that we learn from you. So, we have agencies that are doing this and others are stilling clinging onto power'.
>
> Interview SNGO, 19-10-2022

There was a clear sense among respondents of their recognition that there remains much more to be done, evident in the ways in which SNGOs highlighted that they continue to demand change from NNGOs and institutional donors, regardless of there being little response to these efforts.

When exploring this conundrum from their partners' perspectives, Northern interviewees highlighted the dilemma that while SNGOs feel a stronger urge to do something about power imbalances, they have little means through which to do so. Coming from a starting position with comparatively little power gives them a disadvantageous starting point and this is exacerbated by the fact that some SNGOs are stuck in the status quo, waiting for funding to come around again and again, rather than pursuing change.

Figure 17 | Pace of change of partners compared to own organisation, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=181).
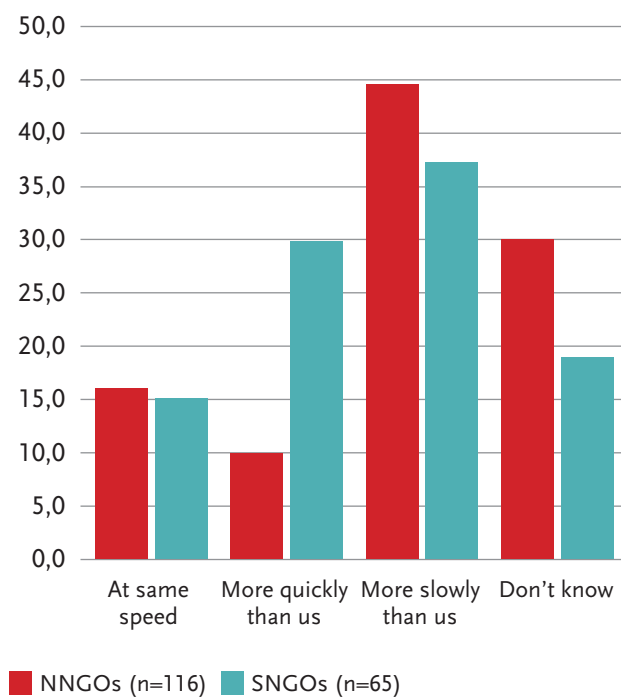
Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

The survey also asked respondents about their counterparts' speed in taking action to reduce power imbalances (see Figure 17). The results here are indicative of the lead role taken by Northern NGOs in these processes.

Nearly 45% of NNGOs reported that their Southern counterparts were moving more slowly than them and nearly 30% of SNGOs highlighted that their Northern counterparts were moving more quickly than them. Only 9.5% of NNGOs reported their Southern counterparts as moving more quickly.

This is not universal, however. In noticeable contrast, the most common answer for over 35% of SNGO respondents was that their Northern counterparts were working at a slower pace than themselves.

Perhaps this is not contradictory but instead speaks to the profiles of those choosing to fill out our survey: trailblazers from both Southern and Northern NGOs who see themselves as leading change in their organisations and working relationships. It is important to highlight, at the same time, the high proportion of respondents in both groups answering this question with 'I don't know', suggesting that we can interpret this with some caution.

Interests, resources and restrictions: barriers to change

Changing deep-rooted power relations is no easy task. The survey also explored the barriers NGOs face in taking actions to redistribute power, leading one NNGO respondent to attack explicitly the *'naïve idea among academics (yes, you) and some peer agencies that localisation is simple'*.

The multiple challenges and barriers to addressing power imbalances that NGOs experience was clearly evident. Across a list of 11 different barriers, the vast majority of respondents – 76% of SNGOs and 81% of NNGOs – identified between two and six obstacles. Only five in each geography suggested that they faced only one barrier. One organisation in each group ticked all 11 different barriers! This multitude of barriers was also illustrated in interviews, where interviewees highlight a variety of barriers ranging from personal beliefs, organisational and partnership-barriers to system-wide barriers.

Figure 18 illustrates the barriers identified by survey respondents. This clearly illustrates that all organisations perceive the limited room for manoeuvre that donors offer to them as their biggest barrier to progress in this journey. More than 80% of SNGOs feels this to be a barrier, against 65% of NNGOs.

The question, of course, is who are the donors that each group of respondents are referring to? Given that NNGOs often receive substantial

parts of their funding from governments (Banks & Brockington, 2020; Schulpen & Van Kempen, 2020) and SNGOs from Northern private organisations, it is logical to assume that NNGOs principally talk about bilateral and multilateral donors and SNGOs about NNGOs. WACSI (2021) also highlights that SNGOs often equate NNGOs with bilateral donors when it comes to the practices and conditionalities associated with funding, policies and programmes.

Limited financial resources is the second most frequently highlighted barrier by 73% of SNGOs. It was also a common response for NNGOs, of whom 55% also reported this. In a context in which funding remains predominantly – and tightly – project-based, it is likely that there is little (financial) room for either NNGOs and SNGOs to invest in out-of-project activities, regardless of how big a priority they are for them internally or within their partnerships.

Time is another prerequisite for investing in processes of change. NNGOs (54%) highlighted limited available time for these processes almost as frequently as a lack of financial resources. In contrast, substantially fewer SNGOs (30%) identified time as a major barrier. Perhaps a lack of time also feeds into another notable finding, that 22% of SNGOs report their partners 'not listening' as a barrier to changing power relations.

Important barriers for both groups are also different interests between partners (46% and 56% of NNGOs and SNGOs, respectively) and institutional resistance, the latter which was particularly prominent among NNGOs. Nearly half of NNGOs reported institutional resistance to change, in comparison with 30% of SNGOs.

Interviews revealed one interesting area in which NNGOs may be resistant to change. One respondent highlighted that some small NNGOs may not see the need for changing power relations given that they often pride themselves on their relationship being built on solidarity and friendship. Calls for change, against this background, may be

perceived as 'a kick in the gut' (Interviews small NNGO network, 13-10-2022; 14-10-2022). Institutional resistance may also simply be based on fear (of change). Fear was particularly prominent among NNGOs, among whom nearly 50% of NNGOs reported fear as a barrier to action and progress. In contrast, just under one-third of SNGOs reported similarly.

Interviews with Southern NGOs revealed that amongst the broader category of 'fear', concerns about survival, sustainability and self-preservation are paramount. This may prevent them from speaking out, but also influences their own drive in this direction as their main focus remains on how to mobilise resources to support their organisational activities rather than engaging in discussions about shifting the power. As one interviewee highlighted:

> 'They [Local CSOs] are focused on what they are doing [i.e. their projects] so when some of these issues [shift the power and changing power dynamics] come up, they understand and can appreciate it, but it is not their priority'.
>
> Interview SNGO, 03-10-2022

Around one-third of NNGOs and SNGOs highlight a lack of knowledge of what to do or how to get started as playing a key role in preventing greater or deeper action. This is a barrier which might be closely linked to a lack of sharing of best practices or collective spaces for discussing and brainstorming ideas for change.

Interviews and case studies with Southern organisations identified another important barrier not captured in the survey, namely restricted civic space. As civil society actors SNGOs must operate within a tightly regulated and political environment. What they can or cannot do also depends on what the government allows them to do and these constraints impinge upon efforts to shift the power. In Uganda, for example, the state monitors resources coming into the country through Northern NGOs to ensure that they are not used to sup-

Figure 18 | Preferred priorities for tackling power imbalances between NGOs in the Global North and South, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=343).
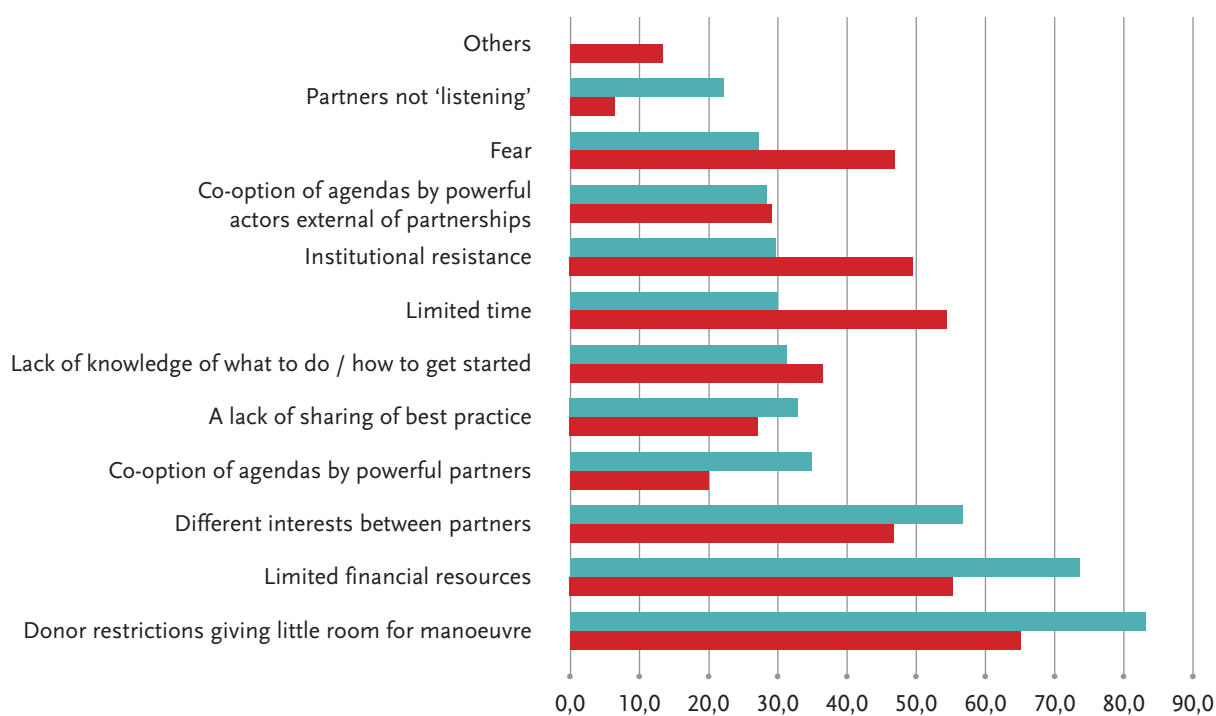
NNGOs (n=182) ■ SNGOs (n=161)   *Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*

port the opposition. CSOs in Uganda were said to be operating on tenterhooks and more interested in securing their physical safety vis-à-vis the state:

'We are constantly looking behind our backs not because we are doing something wrong, but because people that witch-hunt CSOs are all around you... that kind of environment is not one that can allow Ugandan organisations to get interested in decolonising development or have the luxury to engage in depth conversations about shift the power ...'
Interview SNGO, 26-10-2022

This makes it hard for NGOs there to establish meaningful partnerships with international actors. Even when SNGOs have all the capabilities or the prerequisites to participate in partnerships on an equal basis, the uncertainty of the political environment creates a level of risk. In Uganda it is reported that now activities relating to shift the power happen in sectors considered by the national government as less politically threatening

to it, such as the humanitarian sector. Otherwise, attempts in the much politically-charged areas of governance, as was the case with the now defunct Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), are suspected by politicians 'to finance activities and organisations designed to subvert Government under the guise of improving governance' (President Museveni cited in Akankwatsa, 2021). Unfortunately, during a 2021 clampdown on such NGOs the activities of our case study programme, ELNHA, suffered because some of the affected organisations were part of the agencies selected to build the capacity of local agencies.

Finally, the interviews point towards the barrier of mutual suspicion. Some Southern actors are treading cautiously as they doubt the willingness of NNGOs to actually transfer more power. It is also clear that some NNGOs mistrust the capacity, integrity, transparency and accountability of their Southern partners, with the former feeling a strong obligation to account for taxpayers' money.

What is the biggest barrier to change?

Figure 19 reports on the issues that SNGOs and NNGOs reported as their primary concern or barrier experienced when it comes to shifting power. This was an open-ended question giving space for detailed answers that shed more light on the issues raised in the previous section. Immediately visible looking at this is the divergence of opinions between Southern and Northern organisations in this.

The systemic inequalities underpinning these power imbalances was by far the most commonly identified primary barrier. 55% of SNGOs and 28% of NNGOs highlighted the Northern dominance of funding, agenda and compliance as the biggest barrier, reflecting the colonial roots of the aid system that was introduced in the very start of this analysis.

For NNGOs, this in turn creates a large internal barrier in generating a mindset that change isn't possible given factors outside their control. Nearly one-third of NNGOs emphasised the fact that 'big change is beyond the confines of their own relationship' as a core obstacle, in comparison with only 2 percent of SNGOs. Our case study in Uganda is illustrative of the fact that this is not necessarily the case, with the ELNHA being a unique example of a programme that reaches far beyond Oxfam's own partnerships to also tackle power imbalances in the broader humanitarian sector at the regional, national and global level (See Box 5). the humanitarian response.

Figure 19 | Primary concern or barrier experienced, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=121).

NNGOs (n=74)   SNGOs (n=47)   *Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*
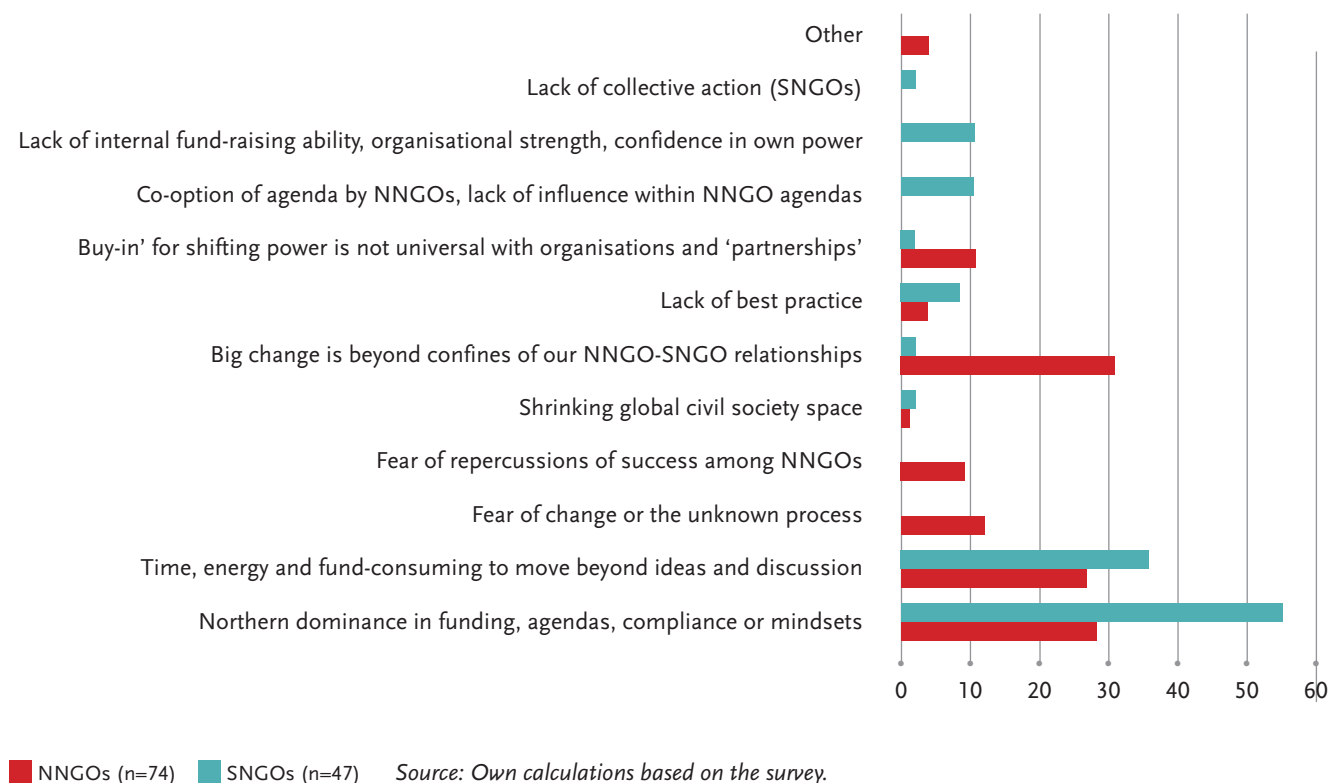
Box 5 | Uganda's ELNHA: Building collective space and voice of local humanitarian actors

In a humanitarian context in which local actors were largely excluded from coordination and inter-agency meetings, Oxfam's ELNHA programme in Uganda prioritised giving partners a stronger voice as one of its key pillars. Prior to the project, one respondent highlighted that the humanitarian space had been so restrictive that speaking was a preserve of international organisations.

Central to these efforts was the mobilisation of local actors and building a collective space in which they come together to magnify their voices and access a greater share of, and say over, local humanitarian response resources. Coordination platforms were established to enable them to access national and international spaces, including Interagency Steering Committees and Grand Bargain discussions. These civil society platforms were mobilised at the regional (e.g. West Nile, Acholi, Karamoja and Western Uganda), national and global levels to build their influence in humanitarian spaces and reduce the risk of being isolated as individual organisations.

These platforms coordinated diverse partners from those regions; civil society organisations and also including local governments, media and local universities. They enabled them to share experiences, build capacities and, in the words of one respondent, to *'advocate collectively so that we have strength in numbers in whatever we do'*. With this space and strength in numbers, local organisations learnt to negotiate, engage or disagree with the international partners 'donors' about what can work for them and could not work.

The inclusion of local government helped to create an enabling environment, with government structures supporting the idea of having local actors respond to humanitarian crises in these regions against the backdrop of the dominance of the sector by International NGOs.

This platform enabledlocal actors to voice their concerns nationally in order to transform the balance of power in their favour. Oxfam also used its global convening power to ensure that its place in some key international humanitarian spaces were utilised by local actors.

Alongside building strength in confidence and collective bargaining power of Ugandan civil society organisations, there was also a gradual attitudinal change by International NGOs with regards to the abilities of local actors. In some cases, this had been met by an ability of some local NGOs to obtain direct funding from them, rather than be awarded funding through intermediaries like Oxfam. While there was still significant progress to make, one respondent highlight, 'We have largely moved away from that fear that local actors are risky and they have gradually increased their ability to support them'. Respondents reported that progress in including local organisations in coordination mechanism in the humanitarian sector were attributed to the ELHNA project that began the conversation about letting local actors lead the humanitarian response.

Many of the obstacles to shifting power that the survey revealed (see Section 7) also emerged from our interviews. Not all members of Oxfam staff had the same commitment to genuinely empowering local actors, with some fearing them as competitors that could take their jobs. Some felt that insufficient time and resources had been committed to what was a long-term change process, with the consortia feeling rushed rather than focusing on the solid working relationships that would enable progress made to be sustainable. This was most notable following the closure of the project, after

which the new spaces that were created did not remain as active. They remained in name, but with minimal activity.

Ultimately, respondents explained that power imbalances persisted in development and humanitarian responses within Uganda and that new in-country imbalances had emerged. 'The playing ground is not 100% levelled for everyone', reported one respondent. The lead actors in consortia are the relatively well-resourced agencies with a bigger say and a greater share of resources compared to the small agencies. The role of Oxfam itself in the ELNHA project was paternalistic, with local actors uncritical in following whatever it proposed and going in whatever forums (local and international) it took them. Indeed, it is difficult to trace the outcomes of participating in many of these forums, save for a few instances where Ugandan NGOs obtained membership to international movements e.g. the Charter 4 Change.

While the ELNHA highlights the strong and transformational impact that can be had when organisations focus beyond their own policies, programmes and relationships to also focus on transforming power imbalances in the broader system, it also highlights that the long-recognised limitations of funding for humanitarian and development still impede these efforts, including and especially the dominance of short-term and project-based funding that limits the sustainability of progress and still places international actors in the lead.

For NNGOs, several of the broad categories represented in Figure 19 can be couched under the broader category of 'fear'. 12% of NGOs highlighted a fear of change, especially in unknown and uncharted waters. As one NNGO explained, *'I feel like there is an innate fear of disrupting the historical ways of doing things - fear of losing donors or board participation, [a] fear of change generally'*.

One respondent highlighted that these underpinning systemic inequalities was even feeding into the approach of NNGOs when it comes even to shifting power. 'Often we say we're doing in a 'shift the power' way', they pointed out, 'but it feels more top down than ever'. SNGOs also express these concerns with 12 percent highlighting the co-option of the shift the power agenda by NNGOs as the primary barrier, giving them little influence within NNGO agendas and processes.

Fear extends to concerns about the time and effort that must be invested in these initiatives to move from interest and willingness towards concrete steps and actions. As one NNGO respondent highlighted, 'A big concern is that the whole discourse of shift of power, making the analysis and discussing, eats a lot of energy...'.

And any time or resources invested in these efforts must be taken from elsewhere, making it hard for NNGOs to move beyond good intentions. '[We have] good intentions by us as an organisation' said one NNGO, 'but [there is] a lack of prioritising the changes we need over other needs of the org[anisation]'.

Learning what to do is time-intensive, but so to, is the process of unlearning decades of ways of dominance and ways of working. As one NNGO respondent frankly put it, *'Everyone comes to us to 'learn' but few realize that learning would require unlearning and resources both of financial and time. That's a commitment few are willing to make'*.

The time and financial costs associated with investing in these activities were also noted as the primary barrier by 36% of SNGOs, making it the second biggest barrier they highlighted. *'Funding has become a big challenge, [we] have brilliant ideas, but without resources it will be difficult to achieve any meaningful goal'*, explained one. Another pointed out that, *'Time is a huge barrier to undertake any feedback action... organisations are usually swamped in requirement fulfilling and doing the actual social transformation work'*.

Box 6 | Shifting the Power or Shifting the Problem?
New Intermediary Organisations in Ghana and Uganda

Clear from all three of our case studies in Ghana and Uganda was one strong unintended side effect of global efforts to shift the power to Southern NGOs. In the case of the Giving for Change (GfC) project, STAR Ghana Foundation as the 'anchor' institution receives funding from the GfC consortium and serves as a 'local donor' to implementing partners.

This positioning situates STAR Ghana Foundation as an intermediary organisation that wields much power in determining the funding priorities and modalities, including deciding on the thematic areas and amount to be disbursed and setting the reporting and accountability requirements for the partners. These are all detailed in an Expression of Interest that local CSOs respond to through their proposal. Interviews with the representatives of STAR Ghana indicated that the design of the GfC included minimal consultation with the CSOs and that the structure of the Expression of Interest (especially the matching fund) was co-created with the Communities of Practice (CoPs) before they were launched. However, as a partner interviewed shared: *'Normally, they will put out a call and then they set the parameters on what they are looking for and if you fit the requirements you go for it. So, we [the partners] do not set those parameters [e.g., grant amount etc]'* (Interview SNGO, 13-06-2023).

Here, the shift of power down the aid chain exacerbated power inequalities between national and local actors through the promotion of STAR Ghana Foundation to gatekeeper of resources.

Similarly, in the WVL project, Plan International Ghana receives the core funding from Global Affairs Canada and subgrants this to its implementing partners in Ghana. For this reason, funding decisions are made by the grant selection committee, the Project Management Team and the donor, putting the balance of power in favour of Plan International and Global Affairs Canada. In sharing their experiences of these power imbalances between SNGOs, one key informant stated that:

'you find power imbalances between national NGOs and CBOs or even local organisations [intermediaries] that give grants and those that receive grants. The power dynamics is also prevalent among CSOs at the national level, so it has been passed on from the INGOs or donors to the local donors (…). We are talking about shift the power at the international level but how do we ensure that in our own backyard we have an equitable balance of power between organisations?'

Interview SNGO, 24-10-2022

In Uganda, whereas Oxfam emphasized partnerships in the ELNHA project, some of the local actors doubted whether the manner in which this was handled was empowering to them. This is because in some cases the ELNHA funds were disbursed through intermediary NGOs. Additionally, the Humanitarian response grant Facility (HRGF) and the cash transfer programming (CTP) funding was given but in a consortia arrangement. A key informant observed: *'they are partnering but some of them are doing it just because it is a condition for them to get the grant'.* (Interview ELNHA Partner 2, 28-03-2023).

Consequently, some respondents stated that the ELNHA project did not challenge power imbalances among national and local humanitarian agencies in Uganda. It was for instance revealed that organisations that are headquartered in Uganda's capital Kampala continued to consider themselves as more powerful vis-à-vis those based in the countryside. The following quote is illustrative: *'Organi-*

sations like ours that have headquarters in Arua, when we are in Kampala, we are called sub-national or-ganisations and those ones in Kampala call themselves national organisations (...) [with such a language] they are sending a message to you that you are not as they are(...) it is a kind of psychological warfare' (Interview ELNHA Project Partner 2, 28-03-2023).
These issues raise critical questions on whether decentralizing power down the existing aid chain shifts power to those the action intends to empower or simply shifts the problem to lower levels.

Responses to this question also raise another level to this fear, the longer-term fear of 'success' that 9% of NNGOs reported. If organisations are successful in their goal of rectifying these power imbalances by finding ways to effectively transfer resources and decision-making power to Southern NGOs, what does this mean for them, their roles, their contributions and their survival? As one NNGO respondent reported, *'Although there is a wish for a shift, the true implications that [this] has are feared'*.

A lack of confidence and fatigue is evident in re-sponses from SNGOs, both in the categories that they prioritised and in their explicit responses. In terms of a lack of confidence, there were three categories in which only SNGO responses fit. First in terms of reference to their limited organisa-tional strength, internal fund-raising capacity and confidence in their own power, which 11% of SN-GOs indicated. A small number (2%) of SNGOs also mentioned a lack of collective action among Southern organisations holding them back. And lastly, there was the 11% of SNGOs who see their influence on NNGO agendas as quite limited in a context of NNGO co-option of the agendas.

This last one also reflects a fatigue among SN-GOs, including their resignation that NNGOs might be talking about these issues but prefer the comfort and power of the status quo (mirroring responses from NNGOs themselves) – *'Many donors want the status quo that gives them ample room to maintain their position'* explained one SNGO.

There is also a recognition that while there is an energy to generate discussions in these areas, momentum is easily lost. One SNGO respondent highlighted, for example *'[The] lack of interest and of follow up on the recommendations taken in the workshops initiated at this regard'*. This no doubt makes it even harder to justify significant time and resource investment. As, too, is the situation that NNGOs raised in which even conversations on shifting power in the sector have become dom-inated by Northern voices, diluting their impact and co-opting the agenda. As one SNGO put it, *'[We have a lack of knowledge of where to start and how to go about it, [but] sometimes this becomes even more challenging due to the frequent introduc-tion of co-option'*.

One last point that was not mentioned frequent-ly but is worth drawing out of responses to this question is around the capacity of Southern organisations to spend large volumes of inter-national funding well. One NNGO respondent suggested that the primary barrier for progress is the unwillingness of *'Global South CSOs to clean their houses of corruption, making it harder to push the agenda'*.

The following comment from one SNGO reveals an unintended consequence of this, namely that even where resources and power become de-centralised and Southern-focused, this happens at a very small-scale among a small number of 'trusted' organisations, creating new inequalities in the process (See Box 6). *'This is coupled with the challenge of competing against monopolistic organ-isations within the Global South'*, they said, *'who dictate the pace of growth being direct recipients of large grants from the Global North'*.

8. Conclusions & discussion

This research examines the extent and nature of concrete actions undertaken by NNGOs and SNGOs with the aim of tackling power asymmetries. In our analysis, we explicitly distinguish understandings, perspectives and initiatives of actors from the Global North seeking change, and those of Global South actors. This chapter starts with summarising the key findings emerging from our survey, interviews and case studies. We then continue with reflecting on these findings and teasing out their policy implications.

Where are Northern and Southern actors on the same page?

It is no surprise that above all, this research reveals a shared understanding of and frustration around a global aid system founded on colonial legacies of inequality that raise serious questions about whether it is fit for purpose. Global agendas and priorities are dominated by Northern actors and interests, with systems of funding maintaining this hierarchy. Across all actors, funding and resources are widely considered to be the main source of power imbalances and therefore it is no surprise to see that they also dominate the priorities of NGOs in the North and South.

Zooming in from these bigger systemic inequalities, we see their impact at the partnership level: more than 70% of NGOs in the Global North and South believe that there is a significant power imbalance between NNGOs and SNGOs. Interestingly, on both sides, NGOs report that their own partnerships are performing 'better' in terms of power imbalances, while, also on both sides, organisations see 'the bigger system' as problematic.

This raises the question of how to make progress towards more equitable relationships between

NGOs in the Global North and South (and the processes and outcomes in policies, programmes and funding within these) while simultaneously balancing this with the need for deeper systemic change.

This is not so much a 'chicken or egg' paradox, because action at one level (within partnerships) can still take place within a given system. But the question does remain as to the extent of change that we can see within the current system. As our survey reveals, this is not holding many NGOs around the world from thinking about, discussing and taking action on these deep-rooted power imbalances.

But these are accompanied by a widespread recognition that despite the increasingly high profile and frequency of these discussions, things are not moving far or fast enough, whether we consider the general progress of the sector or within the confines of particular partnerships. We explore these issues in the following sections.

Are we going far enough?

A greater proportion of NNGOs report having discussed actions to tackle power imbalances internally (80%) and within their external partnerships (75%), dropping to just under 60% for SNGOs along both dimensions. The driving seat role that NNGOs are playing in these processes is evident from our survey. It opens up the first sense of unease around a process that concerns shifting power and is being dominated and/or led by existing power holders. Nearly 70% of NNGOs highlighted that they had been the ones to initiate discussions and actions to shift the power within their relationship, in comparison with around one-third of SNGOs.

The survey reveals a range of actions being taken by NGOs within their partnerships in an attempt to tackle the power inequalities within them. 75% and 58% of NNGO and SNGOs reported having taken some action across a spectrum of areas that includes policy, programming, internal governance, improved funding and use of language and stereotyping.

There is a fair spread of activity across these five areas, though unsurprisingly actions towards improving the use of language and negative stereotyping is more prominent among Northern than Southern NGOs. Improvements to funding were the most commonly taken action, with around 80% of SNGOs and 64% of NNGOs reporting activities in this dimension. This is in line with all organisations' recognition that it is funding that underpins inequalities in the first place – whoever holds the money, holds the power.

What is clear, from these headline categorisations is that they are less frequently occurring in the areas of internal policy and governance. Contrary to the other areas of programming, improved funding and use of language and stereotyping, these might be considered more foundational, in that they are rolled out through entire organisations and partnerships – rather than tested within or confined to particular programmes. For NN-GOs, for example, taking action against unequal decision-making in programming is the most common action taken (73%), but this drops to 62% and 60% of NNGOs when it comes to taking action against unequal decision-making in policy and internal governance, respectively. This finding is matched by the document analysis, which explored the range of documented actions and evaluations to reveal that where actions are taking place they are largely at the programmatic level.

Clear, too, is that looking underneath these broad categorisations, where actions are being taken to rectify power imbalances, the actions being taken are the first steps on this ladder. That means, while some tangible actions may be taken in the right direction, we saw few examples where imbalances were being equalised or turned around.

In the area of policy, for example, more NN-GOs (27%) reported consulting their partners in policy-making, with only half of this number (15%) going further to move towards equal decision-making. An even smaller 4% of NNGOs reported that their partners are now in the lead. Where SNGOs report actions to tackle inequalities in policy, they are largely concentrated on their role of promoting conversations around power and the importance of equal partnerships (20% of SNGOs).

Actions taken within the realm of programming have gone notably further, with only 10% of NN-GOs suggesting that they have 'consulted' with their SNGO counterparts and 44% highlighting that they have moved towards co-creation in programme strategy and design. 12% also report the highest level of decentralisation of power in this area, that of partner-led programming. Here it is important to acknowledge that programmatic decision-making takes place within the overall framework of the underlying policy framework. Thus, SNGOs are becoming more powerful at the programmatic level, yet remain constrained in their ability to influence the overall framework in

which the programmes must take place (cf. Elbers & Schulpen, 2011).

But when we compare how NNGO responses align with SNGO responses, there are quite big differences in the proportion of organisations reporting these activities. For example, in comparison with 80% of NNGOs reporting undertaking such activities, only 49% of SNGOs reported similarly. And while nearly 45% of NNGOs report some level of partner involvement or co-creation of programme, this drops to only one-quarter (26%) of SNGOs.

This pattern of fewer SNGOs reporting the same level of activity along each dimension in the programme is repeated for most activities in this dimension. The exception to this is amongst the least radical actions where SNGOs report a greater frequency of action than NNGOs, namely in strengthening the capacity of partners and acknowledging Southern knowledge and priorities.

Likewise, while funding is the area in which most activity is taking place, these actions are concentrated heavily on supporting partners to build their local fundraising capacity (35 and 38% of NNGOs and SNGOs reported such actions, respectively). The focus, in this sense, is creating new forms of revenue locally that offer greater au-

tonomy and flexibility rather than taking remedial action on the large volumes of funding intermediated through NNGOs and the heavy conditionalities placed upon these. This is not to undermine this as a valuable investment for NNGOs to make in their partnership. Building strength in local fundraising capacity is an area in which NNGOs can support an activity outside of their own specific partnership and operation that in the long-term begins to dismantle systemic inequalities. Community philanthropy is right at the heart of the Global Fund for Community Foundation's Shift the Power movement.

If we add up activities that show 'improved' funding practices within partnerships, then we can see that only around 37% of NNGOs and 26% of SNGOs report activities in the areas of more flexible, unconditional, core funding or participatory grant-making provision. While these numbers are not insignificant, they do indicate a misalignment between the activities being taken and the well-identified priority of both NNGOs and SNGOs towards improving funding and finance in ways that offer SNGOs better volumes and terms of funding.

What is holding us back?

As we move towards the end of the report, the rich landscape of challenges it reveals lays bare the concerns, fear and fatigue that NGOs are facing within the current landscape. Actors in both the North and South are aware that progress is slower than they would like, and this is exacerbated by the continuing demands across the sector (and particularly those actors in the North) to move beyond rhetoric towards greater concrete action(s). At the root of the complexity of these changes processes is that there are both internal (to particular partnerships and relationships) and external barriers to progress.

Nearly all organisations reported multiple barriers to progress. Internally, questions of time and resources (namely, where to find them) to invest in these activities, of what to do and how to do it (given a lack of tangible 'best practice' emerging in the sector), and even of institutional resilience to change, highlighting the importance of not making assumptions about the homogeneity of organisations and recognising the different levels of 'buy-in' for agendas to shift power by department and/or individual staff member(s). Fear is also a clearly identifiable barrier for both NNGOs and SNGOs – around what to do, how to ap-

proach it, and even (especially for NNGOs) fear of success and what this would ultimately imply for their power, position, and survival.

There is one important distinction between the challenges faced by NNGOs and SNGOs. NNGOs indicate that the biggest obstacle(s) to progress within this sphere is beyond the confines of their relationship (thus excusing them from a lack of progress), but responses from SNGOs hold up a mirror to the limits of their willingness and ability to rebalance power inequalities. There is, this suggests, a bigger role for them to play as conscientious partners even within the confines of a highly unequal system.

Not only did SNGOs highlight their NNGO partners as giving them limited room for manoeuvre as a major barrier, they also highlight, more frequently than NNGOs, the fact that 'partners are not listening', that they hold different interests to their partners, and that their agenda to shift power is likely to be co-opted by their more powerful partners. As an interviewee stated:

> '[Global North actors] are the ones who hold the power, so they have to relinquish power, they have to decolonise, but slightly ironically, they are in danger of colonising the conversation about decolonising'.
>
> Interview NNGO, 11-11-2022

Looking across these questions, responses and complementary document analysis, it is clear that the issue of partnership – and of how NNGOs can be 'a good partner' – should be part of any ambition to works towards a new power balance between the Global South and North. For many respondents, their vision of 'being a good partner' echoes long-standing ideas concerning 'accompaniment', reflecting a relational approach where partners walk together to support each other on the basis of solidarity, humility and mutual respect. One NNGO respondent described this nicely as the process of '[b]eing on a journey together towards change, understanding how north-

ern NGOs can best support'. Such sentiments were also supported by Southern respondents. As one explained, 'we need '[m]ore interpersonal engagement and exchange which leads to understanding and solidarity' (Interview SNGO, 13-06-2022).

The study also makes clear that 'being a good partner' implies being able and willing to listen and trust one another and invest in dialogue. For Northern organisations, this requires taking the time to learn Southern NGOs' priorities and asking them which support roles they want to see from their Northern counterparts (see also van Wessel et al., 2023). As explained by a respondent, we need, '[m]ore (real!) dialogue at all levels (donors, Northern orgs, Southern orgs, stakeholders) for more understanding and insight in each other's realities, needs and interests before designing programs, frameworks, subsidy instruments etc'.

The above ideas surrounding the importance of better partnerships are certainly not new, but date back to the 1980s (cf. Aagaard & Trykker, 2019; Elbers & Schulpen, 2013). That is precisely why it is highly doubtful that a renewed ambition of working towards becoming 'good partners' will be sufficient. If that was the solution, it is reasonable to assume that things would have already changed a long time ago.

Moving on from individual partnerships, can we ensure that individual improvements feed into a broader movement rooted in the Southern priorities and positioning, so that a move towards systemic change can occur simultaneously? We conclude by reflecting on this critical question.

Where do we go from here? Increasing momentum towards systemic change

For Northern organisations, the above raises the important question of whether it is ultimately enough to limit their actions and activities aimed at shifting power to within their own organisation. In other words, is being a 'good partner' sufficient? We can explore this question a bit more closely with a follow up question. Would the sum of all Northern individual efforts to become good partners result in a true reconfiguration of the existing North-South power relation?

The point here is certainly not to diminish the importance of Northern efforts to change their own practices. Besides the enormous challenge that actions to shift power entail for the Global North, the more Northern NGOs that move towards more participatory, less restricted forms of project-based funding, the better.

However, for many (Southern) respondents, changing individual partnerships would be very much welcome, yet ultimately insufficient. To address the root causes of the prevailing power imbalances in the aid system, it is essential that Southern organisations can take control and not just be 'given' new powers (which can always be taken away). Or as explained by a respondent:

> 'Majority world [Global South] organisations should be in the lead in decision-making, the aid system is designed for Minority world (Global North) organisations. It needs to be redesigned for Majority world organisations'.

If we start from the normative ideal that the global aid system should be characterised by equal North-South power relations, a complete reversal of power between NNGOs and SNGOs is also undesirable as it means a reversal - and thus continuation - of power imbalances. But then still a change is required that allows Southern organisations and voices to take the lead.

Such fundamental changes can only occur when the broader system changes. This implies revising the rules and regulations that make up the broader framework in which aid actors operate. Here it relates to questions about who sets agendas and makes key decisions, how resources are distributed, and how actors are held accountable. These systemic changes require change across a broad array of actors. This is an important lesson for Southern and Northern NGOs alike to not only look internally at what they are doing and what they can do better within their organisations and relationships, but to also work collectively to support advocacy efforts to push in the direction of deeper, more transformative and Southern-led change.

It also explicitly implies a change agenda and responsibility for institutional donors. If we conclude that the rules and regulations that make up the global aid system need to change to arrive at a more balanced power relation, and currently only powerful actors are within a position to change them, institutional donors cannot stay out of the loop.

The necessity of taking action beyond individual organisational change is perhaps one of the stand-out findings from this research; drawing across the different survey questions, interviews and case studies reveals that although Northern and Southern organisations highlight similar themes with regard to addressing power imbalances, they highlight a different scale of change. Northern organisations tend to prioritise actions that change their existing organisational practices and partnerships, while Southern organisations emphasise actions that imply broader system change. Opinions vary on what that change would look like exactly, but it would entail a global mindset change accompanied by an aid architecture that centres Southern voices and organisations while channelling a much greater volume of funds

directly to SNGOs (rather than having funds inter-mediated through NNGOs).

Distinguishing between these two arenas of action (within partnerships and within global systems and structures) highlights why getting the terminology right is so important. Different terms imply different types of actions and the scope of the envisaged change. For example, localisation demands little systemic change while decolonisation is by definition a (political) process of fundamental restructuring that system.

Nearly half of Northern NGOs highlighted that they used a mixture of the terms to describe their activities in this area: locally-led development, localisation, shift the power and decolonisation. For NNGOs that picked one terminology (17%), they were most comfortable with the language of global policy stakeholders, i.e. localisation, a term that firmly positions itself in the Global North as a process of giving away a greater volume of support or finance to Global South actors – but critically it does not ask for radical or fundamental change in the system or a restructuring of who holds the power.

In contrast, the majority (one-third) of Southern NGOs were most likely to use the language of locally-led development when they spoke about taking action against power imbalances. This asks for a deeper realignment of power and privilege across the aid chain, moving Southern NGOs away from being sub-contractors and agents of Northern NGOs to a position in which they are taking the lead across all strategic and operational areas. This does not just shift funding, but also power, autonomy and leadership away from Northern NGOs. It is thus representative of deeper political action. While 30% of SNGOs used a mixture of these terms, only one in ten used the word 'localisation'; this is not a term that has resonance and traction within Southern NGOs.

At the top of this political spectrum is the end goal of decolonisation. As Adeso's Degan Ali highlighted in a 2023 webinar on 'Are we really Shifting the Power?', in this the ultimate end goal is the dismantling of unequal systems and structures within and beyond the aid system' (Ali, 2023). There is a role in this for every actor, including Northern NGOs and institutional donors, in displaying real solidarity and allyship with the

Box 7 | Terminology of NNGO/SNGO

Early on in this report we highlighted our discomfort at the terminology of North and South NGOs, but our inability to find a language that we were happy with. As we moved towards the final stages of our analysis and write-up one alternative terminology did stand out, that of shifting away from geographic descriptors towards a language rooted in an organisations' position in the aid chain. In doing so 'Northern NGOs' would become 'Intermediary NGOs' (or INGOs, an acronym that is already in popular parlance) while 'Southern NGOs' would simply become 'NGOs'. One advantage of this terminology would be that as new dynamics are emerging in the global landscape – such as the rise of larger NGOs in the Global South beginning to play new roles in the system – their changing positioning can be captured in this hierarchy as they move from NGOs to Intermediary NGOs. But this same reason is why, ultimately, we decided against using this, simply because replacing one hierarchy with another brings its own problems. Box 6 does indicate that this trend is something that we must be intimately aware of moving forwards – are we shifting power, or shifting the problem in the way these processes are unfolding? – but key here was that we cannot say that a new 'Intermediary NGO' rising in the Global South is the same comparatively or analytically without further consultation and research.

Global South by confronting the inequalities of the aid system and speaking out. This requires action not only within an organisation's partnerships but to join forces and support – without driving or co-opting – Southern demands and visions for a more just future.

Alan Fowler (1993) has famously used the metaphor of an onion in his formative work on NGOs and their strategies. In discussing progress towards a genuine shift in power we find ourselves reversing this. That is, we are no longer looking at the process of NGOs building 'onion-rings' out-wards in order to build their success and impact through successive layers of strategic operations and actions. Instead we are looking inwards, at peeling back all of these layers through which behaviours, mindsets and power dynamics have become so ingrained and destructive. To take the onion analogy further, perhaps it is not until our cuts reach the onion's inner core – when the tears come – that we can achieve a true power shift. And that core has to be represented by genuine Southern leadership.
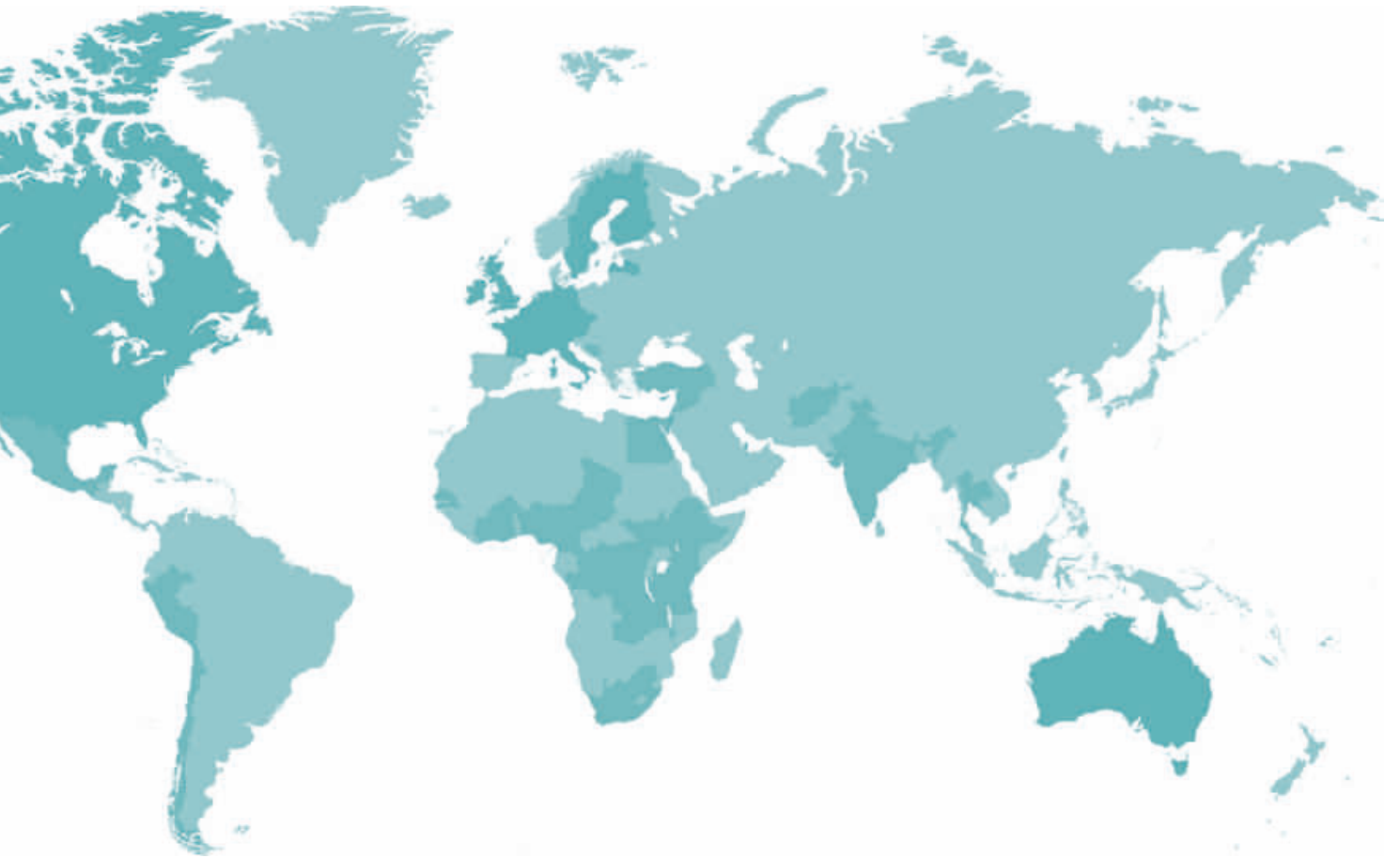
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APPENDIX 1
Full methodology

Mixed methods were necessary to meeting both sides of our research aims and objectives. To map the scope and breadth of shift the power initiatives being undertaken, a global survey explored people's perspectives on shift the power and locally-led initiatives, including what is being done and what is needed to be done. To provide more detailed insight into these trends and practices, we also undertook 'deep dives' into ideas, processes, outcomes and future prospectives via interviews with a selection of NGOs in Europe, Ghana and Uganda. Finally, we conducted three case studies of initiatives aimed at shifting power in our two case study contexts – Ghana and Uganda.

Survey

The research team developed a survey consisting of four substantive sections, made accessible online in English, French and Spanish. We disseminated this widely and repeatedly through diverse social media channels, our social networks and the mailing lists of core organisers and actors in this field across the Global North and South. This included, for example, WACSI in Ghana, Partos in the Netherlands, the Uganda National NGO Forum in Uganda and Bond and the Small International Development Charities Network in the UK. The survey was open for four weeks during November-December 2022, attracting a total of 830 respondents who started the survey.

Section 1 explored our respondents' background data (e.g., budget, focus field, sector, gender) (see Appendix 2 for an overview). These data serve as explanatory variables but also ensured that respondents met our study requirements. With our intention to understand the ideas and actions towards balancing power relations between development organisations (hereafter, NGOs) across the Global South and Global North, it was logical to select only respondents from those NGOs that

operate within such relations; they are, by definition, the ones with first-hand knowledge and experience of these power imbalances.

It was important to us that only one questionnaire was utilised for all respondents to answer the same set of questions. These questions also enabled us to categorise organisations in order to capture diversity in the opinions and experiences of NGOs across the Global North and South. Identifiers from these initial scoping questions allowed us to categorise organisations by geography and to understand diversity along this indicator.

Section 2 explored respondents' familiarity with popular terminologies around actions that seek to tackle power imbalances and their underpinnings (i.e. locally-led development, localisation, decolonisation and Shift the Power). It also explored their views on power imbalances between Northern and Southern development organisations – in general, and more specifically with regards to their own specific relationships with NGOs in other parts of the world.

Section 3 shifted focus towards the actual actions undertaken or experienced by our respondents. What are these actions and which do they consider most important? Who was the main driver of such actions and at what pace were they being discussed, adopted and implemented?

Section 4 continued to explore these actions, zooming in on possible evaluations of their effects and on the barriers that they and their partner organisations experienced in pursuing actions to change power relations.

While 830 started to fill out our survey, not all participants filled out the survey in its entirety. This may have been due to internet connectivity issues

(answers could not be saved to return to) or the survey length. All respondents finalising Section 2 were included in the analysis; these respondents answered core questions around the equality of power relations and the main sources of power imbalances and it was important that we captured these. This gave us a total of 458 respondents, of which 267 reached the final section of the survey.

A Sounding Board has been a critical support to the research team and process. As part of Partos's broader 'Shift the Power Lab 2.0' community of practice that funds six 'actions' in support of the Shift the Power movement, Partos members and the broader interested global community were invited to join our Sounding Board to support, give input into, and be kept informed about this research. Thirty members from a diverse range of organisations and countries joined this Sounding Board. We met three times at key stages through which their advice and constructive criticism could best inform the research. Firstly, in the early stages of research design; secondly, as the survey questionnaire was being developed and finalised; and thirdly, to discuss the early analysis of survey findings before finalising the report. Those who could not attend these meetings could feed back their thoughts on the outputs we shared by email. Across all three phases we are grateful for their time and critical feedback in encouraging us, challenging us, and pointing us in important directions.

We use descriptive statistics to paint a rich map of respondents' thoughts regarding and experiences of power imbalances across the North and South, alongside the initiatives that they are taking to tackle these. It is important to discuss briefly the North-South dichotomy across which our analysis takes place. While deeply aware that power imbalances take place at different levels, in diverse ways, and in accumulated, intersectional patterns, at the heart of discussions around localisation, locally-led development and 'shift the power' are the structural inequalities in power and resources between NGOs across the Global North and South.

In this broad characterisation, the concentration of power and resources in the Global North has led NGOs here to dominate development agendas and how they are monitored and evaluated, as well as language and terminologies around concepts of 'development' and change. This has had severe implications on the autonomy of NGOs located in the Global South, despite their closer proximity to the countries and populations in which these processes of change take place.

Methodologically we captured this geographic difference between development NGOs from the Global North (whether headquartered in the Global North or part of their broader 'family' of global offices) and development NGOs from the Global South through three survey questions in Section 1.

Firstly, we asked respondents what country their organisation is headquartered in. Countries belonging to the DAC list of ODA recipients 2022-2023 are taken as 'Global South' organisations and the corresponding respondents as SNGOs (Southern NGOs). All others are marked as NN-GOs (Northern NGOs). There were 29 cases in which respondents did not report their organisation's headquarter country. Here we relied on a combination of two questions to identify whether this was a 'Southern' or 'Northern' NGO. These were Questions 4 (whether the office the respondents is working in is based in the Global South or Global North) and 5 (whether that office is part of an international family or brand of organisations). If a respondent marked these two answers as 'Global South' and 'No', respectively they were considered SNGOs; if they answered these questions as 'Global South' and 'Yes' they were considered an NNGO.

Language is not neutral and we are aware of the pejorative connotations at play in this terminology of 'North' and 'South' when it comes to differentiating between NGOs. The terminology, at best, represents a hierarchy of privilege and, at worst, can be accompanied by perceptions or assumptions around effectiveness or legitimacy that we

do not intend. Yet given the explicit comparative analysis of our respondents across these geographies means that we have not yet found an alternative language that we are happy with.

Interviews

As an initial exploration of the knowledge and initiatives of shift the power, 33 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted – 11 in Ghana, 10 in Uganda, and 12 in Western Europe (i.e., the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany). The exploratory interviews demonstrate the prevalence of discussions about shift the power, which actors are involved in these discussions, and what are considered the most central elements of changing power relations.

The sample in Ghana was made up of 10 local CSOs of different sizes and scope (i.e., national, regional, district as well as CSO networks), 1 INGOs and 1 academic. On the other hand, in Uganda, 6 local CSOs and 4 INGOs were selected. Interviewees were predominantly part of senior management or were programme leaders of programmes that aim to address power relations. The sample in Europe was made up of networks to get a sector perspective rather than that of an individual organisation's actions. Interviewees were also mainly part of senior management or are leaders of programmes that aim to address power relations. Geographically, the organisations are headquartered in Western Europe – the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. The selection of interviewees was done through purposive sampling of actors with knowledge and experience with shifting power relations using the authors' own network, that of the Sounding Board, and through the assistance of local CSOs and INGOs. For instance, in the context of Ghana, STAR Ghana Foundation and Plan International Ghana provided access to their implementing partners. Interviewees were contacted through email and subsequent interviews were conducted using virtual platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams and Zoom) and face-to-face. The interviews in Ghana were conducted using a mixture of virtual and face-to-face while that of Western Europe was mainly through virtual means. On the other hand, the interviews in Uganda were conducted through face-to-face interactions. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. All interviews were recorded with the informed consent of the participants and were later transcribed for analysis. The interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams or a recorder and transcription was done by Top Transcriptions, located in South Africa. The retrieved data was securely stored with Wageningen University & Research. Finally, the interviews were analysed on NVivo, using open coding followed by the development of a typology. An overview of the initial interviews can be found on the next page.

Case studies

In addition to the survey, document analysis, and initial interview, case studies were conducted to provide more detailed insight into trends and practices, taking a 'deep dive' into processes and outcomes of three programmes in two national contexts – Uganda and Ghana. For each of the case studies a Memorandum of Understanding was drawn up and agreed upon.

In Uganda, the Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) programme was examined. This initiative sought to reduce power inequalities among actors in the provision of humanitarian response, the project was implemented by Oxfam Uganda. The selection was purposive based on the information availed from SNGOs interviewed during the initial exploration. These pointed to ELNHA as revelatory, a unique example of an intervention in place to reduce power differentials between local and international actors in Uganda. The ELNHA programme is led by an NNGO; Oxfam Uganda. The data was collected through eight in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants that were part of the project. Five interviews were with the partners and three with Oxfam, the lead organisation. For the ELNHA project, the Head of Programmes, Partnership Coordinator, and Programme Manager, and Co-ordinator were interviewed along with partners of the project. The interviews were conducted between December and March 2023. These were comple-

Overview of initial exploratory interviews

Type of organisation	Role in organisation	Date
Interviews in Western Europe		
SNGO	Director	28-11-22
NNGO Network	Coordinator Decolonisation	10-11-22
NNGO Network	Director of International Operations	13-10-22
NNGO Network	1. Funding Advisor; 2. Funding Advisor	18-11-22
NNGO Network	Regional Coordinator	02-12-22
Small NNGO Network	Executive Director	13-10-22
NNGO Network	Manager Learning and Innovation	09-11-22
NNGO	CEO	11-11-22
Small NNGO Network	1. Working Group Member; 2. Development Consultant	14-10-22
NNGO Network	Programme Co-ordinator	21-11-22
NNGO Network	Policy Advisor	25-10-22
Small NNGO	Director	25-11-22
Interviews in Ghana		
SNGO	Head, Capacity Development	03-10-22
SNGO	Executive Director	13-10-22
SNGO	Senior Research Analyst	14-10-22
SNGO	Executive Director	14-10-22
SNGO	Executive Director	19-10-22
SNGO	Executive Director	24-10-22
SNGO	Programme Manager	24-10-22
SNGO	Head of Programmes	24-11-22
SNGO	Executive Director	01-11-22
NNGO	Programme Manager	12-11-22
Academic Institution	Lecturer	06-12-22
Interviews in Uganda		
SNGO	Executive Director	07-10-22
SNGO	Research And Advocacy Coordinator	07-10-22
NNGO	Country Director	26-10-22
NNGO	Country Director	21-10-22
NNGO	Country Director	19-10-22
SNGO	Executive Director	11-10-22
SNGO	Executive Director	11-10-22
SNGO	Executive Director	23-09-22
NNGO	Country Director	29-11-22
SNGO	1. Head; 2. Deputy Programme and learning Manager	10-11-22

mented with a review of secondary evidence including project documents, performance reports, and evaluation.

In Ghana, a multiple case-study design was adopted examining the Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) Programme by Plan International-Ghana and the Giving for Change (GfC) Programme by STAR -Ghana Foundation. These two initiatives were purposively selected for several reasons. First, based on initial in-depth interviews conducted with key informants in the Ghanaian context, it became evident that these initiatives are among the most prominent and perhaps promising initiatives that have the objective to contribute to shifting the power between INGOs and local CSOs as well as among CSOs who act as 'donors' and their partners. between SNGOs and NNGOs. Second, both initiatives sought to 'do development differently' by changing power relations with partners. Third, the cases were also selected based on their differences in scope and operations. For instance, the WVL is led by Plan International Ghana together with two national CSOs (i.e., NETRIGHT and WiLDAF) while the GfC is implemented by STAR Ghana as an anchor institution with WACSI being a strategic partner.

In Ghana, data collection was through semi-structured interviews with the programmes team and partners of the WVL and the GfC between March and June 2023. For the WVL and GfC, eight and four interviews were conducted respectively. In total, 12 interviews were conducted for the case studies in Ghana. In both case studies, half of the interviewees were with partners and half with the lead organisations. For the WVL project, the Project Lead, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Sub-Grant Management Specialist and Finance Officer were interviewed. On the other hand, the Head of Programmes and Project Officer of the GfC were also interviewed. The WVL and the GfC project team were interviewed more than once during the data collection exercise. In addition, we also conducted in-depth interviews with the Executive Directors of partner organisations for both initiatives. We chose to speak to the Executive

Directors of the partner organisations because they were directly involved in the implementation of the programmes and were in the best position to provide valuable insights for the study. In addition, the case studies in Ghana were complemented with a review of secondary evidence including project documents such as operations reports, progress and performance reports, inception and mid-year reports as well as annual reports.

To streamline results, two sets of interview guides were designed for the case studies in both Uganda and Ghana. The design of the guides was informed by the research questions underpinning this study. The discussions focused on issues such as background information about the programme, elements of shift the power including specific initiatives to change power imbalances, approach to programme implementation, nature of relationships, reporting requirements and funding arrangements, flexibility and room for manoeuvring within the programme in addition to challenges and lessons learnt.

For all case studies in Ghana and Uganda, the interviews were conducted using both face-to-face interactions and virtual methods depending on the preference of the respondents. The length of the interviews ranged from 60 minutes to 120 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the informed consent of the respondents. The retrieved data was securely stored on the University of Wageningen's Microsoft Team environment. The interviews were transcribed for further analysis. The interviews were analysed on NVivo using thematic and discourse analysis. An overview of the initial and case study interviewees can be found on the next page.

Overview of case study interviews

Organisation	Role in organisation	Date
Interviews ELNHA		
Oxfam Uganda	Head of programmes	24-05-23
Oxfam Uganda	Partnership Coordinator	06-04-23
Oxfam Uganda	Program Manager	12-04-23
Project partner 1	Co-ordinator	03-04-23
Project partner 2	Chairperson	28-03-23
Project partner 3	Director	30-03-23
Project partner 4	Director	14-04-23
Project partner 5	Advocacy Coordinator	07-04-23
Interviews WVL		
Plan International, Ghana	Project Lead, WVL	21-04-23
Plan International, Ghana	Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, WVL	21-04-23
Plan International, Ghana	Sub-Grant Management Specialist	21-04-23
Plan International, Ghana	Finance Manager	21-04-23
Project Partner 1	Executive Director	12-05-23
Project Partner 2	Executive Director	14-05-23
Project Partner 3	Executive Director	19-05-23
Project Partner 4	Executive Director	18-05-23
Interviews in GfC		
STAR Ghana Foundation	Head of Programmes	14-05-23
STAR Ghana Foundation	Programme Officer, GfC	14-05-23
Project Partner 1	Co-Founder	12-05-23
Project Partner 2	Executive Director	13-06-23

Background of survey respondents

Country of origin

Our survey achieved a broad global reach across 55 countries (Figure 1). This has been noticeably influenced by the research team's social networks. Our global research team has researchers in Ghana (2), the Netherlands (4), Uganda (2) and the United Kingdom (1) and in all four countries we could draw upon our own networks and that of core associations and umbrella organisations at the national level.

Among NNGO respondents we had responses from 247 NNGOs headquartered in 19 different countries, ranging from Australia to the United States. Most came from European countries, in particular from the Netherlands (32%) and the United Kingdom (22.7%). Among our 211 SNGO respondents we had representation from 36 different countries, including from across Africa, Latin America and Asia. Here, too, our respondents were heavily concentrated in our two case study countries, Ghana (32.7%) and Uganda (21.8%).

Levels, sectors and fields

Respondents clearly show that the idea of thinking about NNGOs as working at an international and SNGOs at a local level, is outdated (if it ever existed) (see Figure 2). Although the international level is still central for INGOs, only 21% of SNGOs operate nationally and internationally.

Figure 1 | Countries in which respondent's NGOs are headquartered, with division between NNGOs (red) and SNGOs (blue) (n=426).*
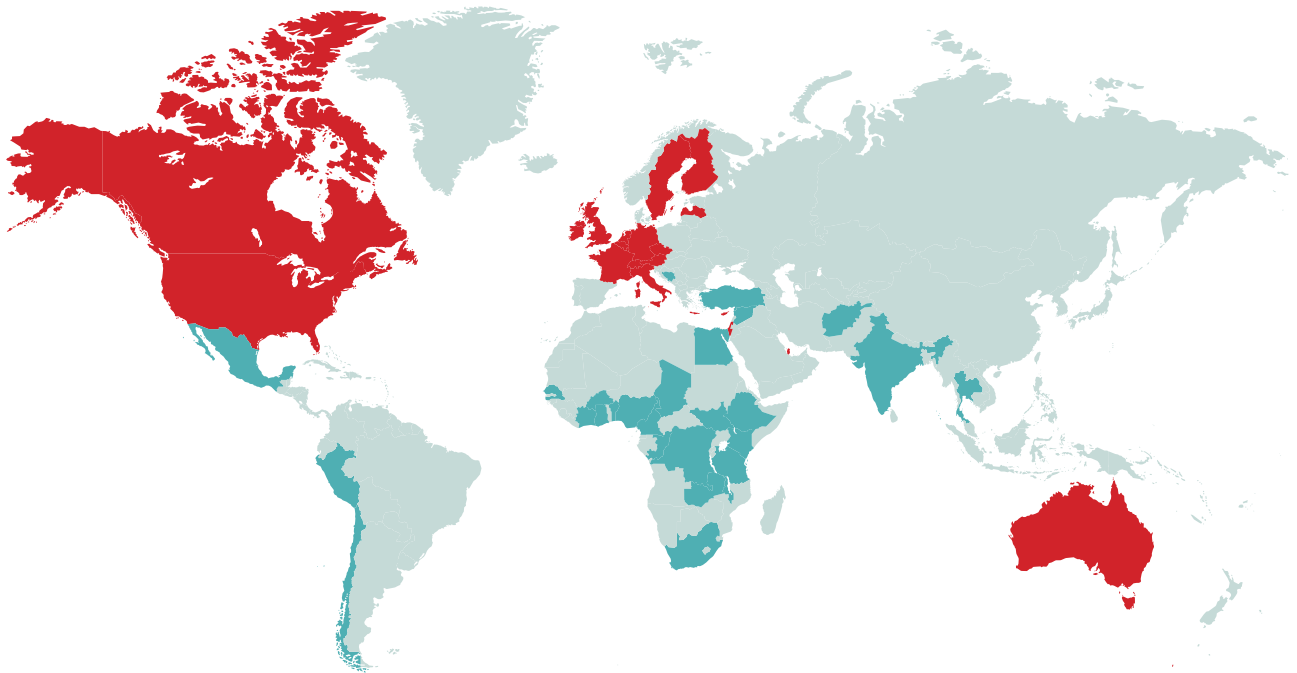
Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

* Not for all 247 NNGOs and 211 SNGOs the specific headquarter country is known.

Figure 2 | Level of operation, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=419).

NNGOs (n=233)   SNGOs (n=186)   *Source: Own calculations based on the survey.*
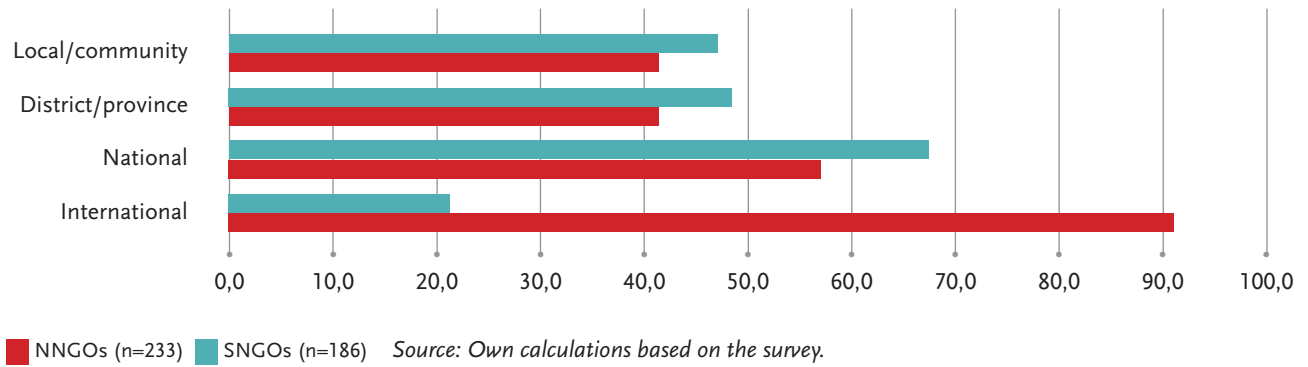
Looking at basic sectoral distinctions, Figure 3 shows that the vast majority of NGOs are in the broader sector of 'development'; the humanitarian sector comes second and peacebuilding third. Still, a substantial number of respondents are active in the peacebuilding sector, particularly among SNGOs. The data also clearly indicate that many organisations combine sectors. More than a quarter of NNGOs and SNGOs are active in two sectors (27.5% and 26.9% respectively) and just under one-fifth operate in all three (17.8% and 19.3%, respectively).

The most common activity that surveyed NGOs are engaged in is capacity strengthening (Figure 4). 85% of SNGOs and 90% of NNGOs are active

in this field. Advocacy comes a close second, with nearly 80% of organisations engaged in these activities in both North and South. Service delivery is the smallest field of action, but still 57% of SNGOs and 63.5% of NNGOs are active in this. Most organisations combine fields here, too. Only around 10% organisations in either geography restricts itself to one field of action. This mix of fields is also clear from the 112 respondents who ticked 'other': only seven did not tick any of the first three named fields. 'Other' in most cases referred to more specific fields such as research, education or 'disability inclusion'.

Figure 3 | Sector of activity, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=415).

NNGOs (n=231)   SNGOs (n=184)
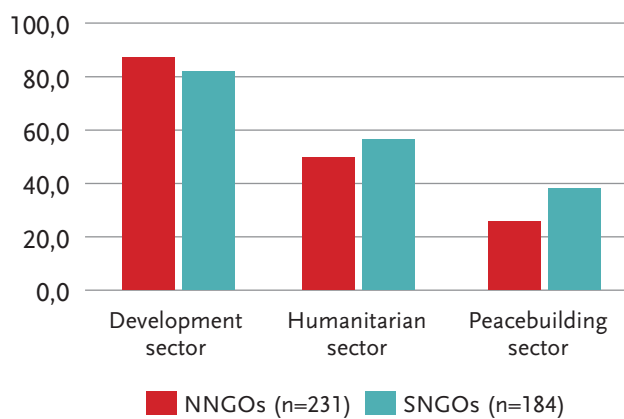
Figure 4 | Fields, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=416).

NNGOs (n=233)   SNGOs (n=183)
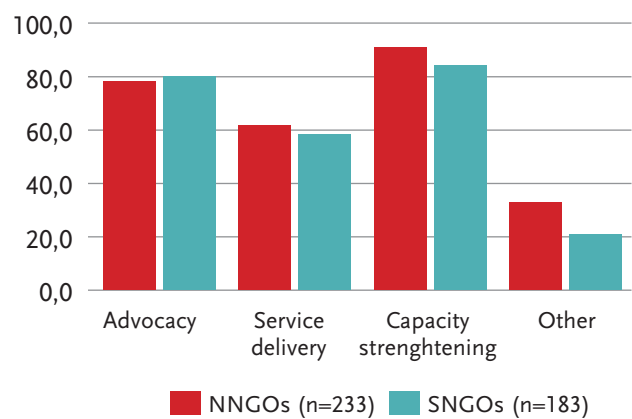
Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

Figure 18 | Preferred priorities for tackling power imbalances between NGOs in the Global North and South, with division between NNGOs and SNGOs, in % (n=343).
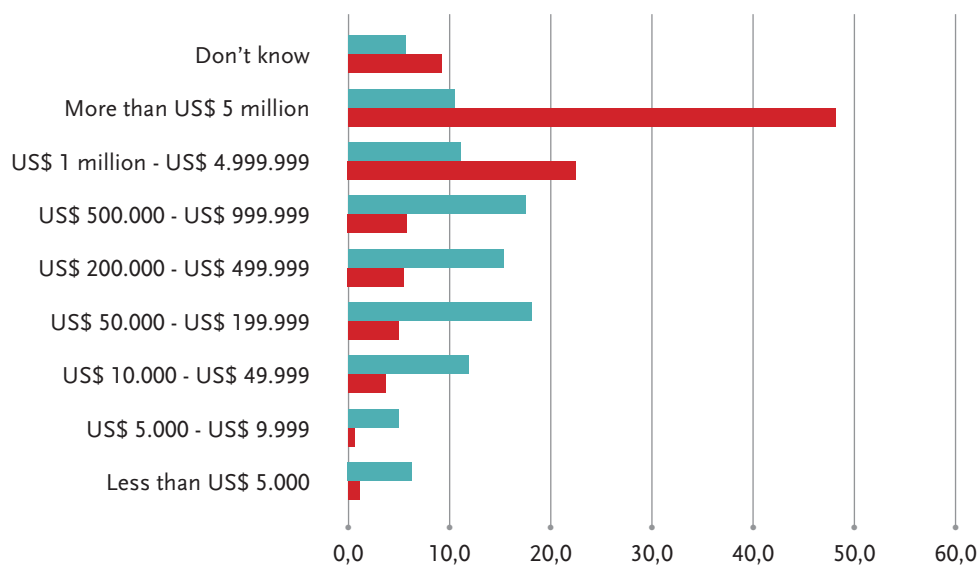
NNGOs (n=232)　SNGOs (n=184)　*Source: own calculations based on the survey.*

Budgets

Figure 5 shows the vast differences in budgets for SNGOs and NNGOs in favour of the latter. This is unsurprising, given that the concentration of finances in the Global North is an important background factor in the inequalities that underpin our survey and debates and actions around 'shifting power'. Only one in ten surveyed SNGOs has an annual budget of over US$5 million, while nearly half of surveyed NNGOs do.

Beyond this our sample also illustrates the diversity of NGOs by size across these different budget categories in both the Global North and South, with incomes ranging from less than $5,000 a year right up to this. If we group respondents into three broad income categories of small (below US$200,000), medium (between US$200,000 and US$1 million) or big (above US$1 million), the majority of NNGOs (70.7%) would be categorised as 'big'. In contrast, only 21.2% of SNGOs would be categorised as 'big'. Forty percent of SNGOs would be classified as 'small' and a further 33% as 'medium'.

Ghana case studies

Case Study 1: Background of the Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) Project

The Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) Project is a five-year (2019 to 2024) global initiative that identifies the potential and power of women and girls to work towards promoting, upholding, and protecting the human rights of women and young girls. The project is implemented by Plan International Canada, and Plan International Ghana with funding support from Global Affairs Canada. The project was launched as part of Canada's Feminist International Policy (FIAP) which is based on the core principle that gender equality is one of the most effective ways to eradicate poverty. A key informant interviewed noted that WVL is being implemented across 30 countries and in the Ghanaian context, Plan International Ghana is leading the implementation, in collaboration with two core national women's rights networks namely Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) and Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT).

The overarching aim of WVL is to promote and support the capacity strengthening of local and regional Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) and movements to achieve gender equality, enhance the protection of women's and girls' rights, and empower women and girls. According to a key informant interviewed from Plan International Ghana, WVL has the objective of *'increasing the voice of Women's Rights Organisations (the vulnerable groups; usually women and girls) to ensure that, they have a voice and empower them to do their work more efficiently and effectively'* (Interview, NNGO, 21-05-2023). The eventual outcome of WVL is to *'increased enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and the advancement of gender equality'* (Interview, NNGO, 21-05-2023). Three broad intermediary outcomes are set out under the project to achieve the long-term objective. These include:

Improving management, sustainability, performance, and innovation of local women's rights organisations
- Enhancing the delivery of quality services and advocacy by women's rights organisations to advance gender quality.
- Enhancing collaboration, collective action and innovation of local women's rights organisations and platforms to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls.[6]

The main activities implemented under the WVL include 1) strengthening organisational capacity, and 2) provision of flexible funding for WVL to implement their gender equality interventions. A review of project documents shows that Plan International Ghana is leading the implementation of core project activities, procedures and processes for grant management, and disbursement and management of funding support to grantees and implementing partners. As part of the project, Plan International Ghana is also responsible for managing relationships with beneficiary partners (WROs), government actors and other relevant institutional partners and implementing the gender equality strategy and feminist Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system.

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6 Plan International Canada (2022). Annual Project Results Report Year 3: Women's Voice and Leadership - Ghana.

Shift the power or changing power agenda in the WVL Project

Interviews conducted with the project staff of the WVL revealed that the aspects of the shift the power which WVL seeks to address are: 1) inclusion of partners in governance structures and programming, 2) strengthening organisational capacity; 3) improving organisational management and sustainability; and 4) provision of flexible funding.

Inclusion of partners in governance structures in programming but not in policy

According to the WVL project staff, there is some level of representation of project partners at all levels of governance or decision on the project. For example, the two implementing partners NETRIGHT and WiLDAF are represented at the highest decision-making on the WVL. They serve as members of the Steering Committee while Global Affairs Canada and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection sere as Co-chairs. The steering committee makes decisions on all matters relating to the project except for funding. The two organisations contribute to the selection of the WROs if the Project Management Team is in doubt of the credibility of an applicant (i.e. WRO) through consultation for verification. The final decision-making in terms of funding rest in the arms of Global Affairs Canada and the representatives of the Government of Canada. The WROs (NETRIGHT and WiLDAF) shaped the capacity building programme through self-assessments of what they identified as their needs. These were then developed by Plan in consultation with the independent core trainers and coaches, and feedback was solicited from WROs. The two organisations also have the power in terms of designing and implementing capacity building programmes to strengthen the organisational capacity of the WRO members. Furthermore, the NETRIGHT and WiLDAF lead the lateral coordination of all WRO partners bringing them together to define and deliver a common advocacy agenda, enabling them to hold the national and local governments accountable for Ghanaian women and girls' rights.

The Project Management Team and independently selected coaches and core trainers of the project lead in the strategic direction and guidance of project interventions, providing capacity building, mentoring, and coaching to WROs, and advocacy platforms for collective action. All these actions are being undertaken to strengthen the capacity of WRO members to better implement interventions and programmes aimed at protecting the rights of women and girls and achieve gender equality. The project staff of WVL made it abundantly clear at the project planning committee level, there is recognition of the agency (ability to make the best decisions for the project) and respect for the capacity and expertise of the WROs in project ideation, planning, proposal development and budgetary development.

'With this project, one key principle is 'Nothing for us, without us' – Nothing for the WROs without them. We also respect their agency; another key principle that goes to say 'they are experts in their own right' With this, we respect their expertise and recognise their capacity in developing the critical goals of the project. So, during the proposal development stage, the ideology and the planning, the Networks were directly involved. They came out with how the project should be structured, and how the design of the entire grant should be structured. This encouraged ownership from the onset'.

Interview, NNGO, 21-05-2023

Another staff added:

'Another example is when you leave the highest decision-making body, and come down to the grant-making processes, there is a Panel that sits, reviews and approves the applications that we receive as a project. Within this grant selection and approval panel, the membership includes the WROs. So, the networks or the WROs have their representatives in

there, with other individual experts in the field with the requisite knowledge when it comes to operating a gender transformative or a feminist project'.

<div align="right">Interview, NNGO, 21-05-2023</div>

Interviews with project partners revealed that the relationship between and among the leading implementing organisation and WRO grantees is very friendly. There is mutual respect and recognition of WRO grantees' expertise, knowledge, skills and value in decision-making concerning the WVL project. Partners interviewed confirmed their engagements and some level of autonomy in decision-making concerning project proposal development, design of project interventions and implementation. Respondents from one of the partner organisations interviewed for instance noted:

'Our relationship is cordial. They are our first partners. Whenever we call on them, they respond. Initially, we were thinking they will behave like superiors so we were reluctant to communicate with them about certain issues, but as time went on, we realized that the way we were thinking of them wasn't the case, so on the way we had to start feeling free and relate with them. We have room to decide on the kind of project to implement and they involve us in decision making. Initially, we weren't calling them very frequently, but when we realized that they had opened themselves to us, we could then call them very frequently and communicate with them'.

<div align="right">Interview, NNGO, 14-04-2023</div>

We were unable to seek the views of the two network organisations regarding their relationships and power dynamics in the WVL project. However, interviews with WRO grantees revealed that they only came to be involved in the WVL project at the stage of implementation where there was a call for proposals to submit an Expression of Interest to secure funding for the implementation of projects aimed at enhancing gender equality. Thus, while there is evidence from the interviews to suggest that WROs have space to determine the kind of

project or intervention they would want to undertake under the WVL, it appears that their involvement in the WVL project conception and design is very limited. Some grantees interviewed reported:

'We only came to be involved in the WVL through an Expression of Interest (EOI). We wrote a proposal and then our proposal was granted and we were selected to be a partner of the WVL project'.

<div align="right">Interview, SNGO, 12-05-2023</div>

In line with the above, interviews with the partners suggest that they recognised Plan International Ghana both as a donor and partner. This is due largely to the fact that the funds they received under the WVL were provided by Plan International but at the same time, they support them to implement their activities on the ground.

Interviews with project staff and the project manager of WVL revealed that the relationship between partners and Plan International Ghana follows what they described as 'feminist principles' of which a core element is power sharing. They made it abundantly clear that WVL employs a participatory and consultative approach to decision-making on project activities (e.g., capacity building). This approach, according to project staff interviewed, ensures the demystification and re-distribution of power to partners on the WVL. A project staff of WVL noted:

'We are implementing this WVL Project using Feminist Principles. One of them focuses on Power and Power Dynamics. So, on this Project, you would realise that it is highly Consultative, ensuring that, Power does not reside in one arm of the Project, either being on the Partners' side or the Project Management's side. Therefore, whatever decisions we come to, regarding what needs to be done on the project, such as capacity building, or monitoring, we do it in a very participatory manner ensuring that, all views are brought into question before we take any action. That was the approach we used to ensure that we demystify

power on our side since we are holding the money, and for that matter, power would reside with us, but we tried to use the Feminist Principles to distribute the power evenly among ourselves and the partners'.

<div align="right">Interview, NNGO, 21-05-2023</div>

Moreover, interviews with the project staff of WVL revealed that the approach to project decision-making and in all matters relating to the WVL implementation places beneficiary partners at the centre. As part of the process of shifting power, WVL has been intentional in ensuring that beneficiary partners form part of decision-making structures at all levels of the project. For example, a key informant interviewed at Plan International Ghana noted:

'The entire Project is being driven on the wheels of this is not business as usual. So, we are not doing the same things that every grant or donor process goes through. When you look at the WVL Project, at every stage of the process, the WROs that we work with have a say when it comes to decision-making on the type of project they would like to implement. We do not impose project on them. They have the power, so they have the majority of the issues that come to be accepted'.

<div align="right">Interview, NNGO, 21-05-2023</div>

Strengthening organisational capacity

Analysis of the interview data revealed that the WVL adopts a participatory approach to identify the organisational capacity needs of WROs. This approach involves careful and sustained interaction and engagement between the WVL project implementers and WRO members where WRO members identify and prioritise their organisational needs in terms of what capacity strengthening is needed to enhance their work. Based on the identified needs by the partners themselves, a range of capacity-strengthening modules has been developed throughout the project's lifetime. A review of programme documents and interviews with partners and project staff revealed that six organisational capacity strengthening modules

including Strategic Planning and Resource Mobilization, Gender Transformative Programming [GTP], Evidence-Based Advocacy [EBA], Communications and Media Engagement, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning [MEL] have been developed. For this reason, the WROs have benefited from a wide range of training programmes. For example, in 2022, three separate training sessions on MEL and EBA were organised for the WROs. In all, the MEL training reached a total of 23 staff (including 13 males, and 11 females) from 23 WRO networks and grantees. Additionally, during interviews, it was explained that partners' capacities have been built on how to undertake Feminist MEL, *'to develop MEL frameworks, to acquire the necessary information to improve on reporting of results and more'* (Interview, SNGO, 19-04-2023). The EBA training was also conducted in two sessions, one in the Northern and Southern zones with a total of 61 participants (46 females, 15 males), with two representatives from each GTP and Network partner (Plan International Canada, 2022: p.6).

Strengthening organisational leadership and governance structures

Interviews further revealed that WVL has worked to promote the organisational leadership of the WROs. What we gathered from the interviews was that before the WVL project, most of the WROs were managed and run by individuals, with limited structures for accountability and transparency. However, through the support of WVL, many of the WROs can now boast of functioning governance structures, that provide space for the voices of staff to be heard in management processes. Others have gone beyond setting up governance structures such as Resource Mobilization Units, Communication Units and the like, which initially were not in existence. A project staff of WVL interviewed noted:

'An aspect of shift the power in WVL can also be seen in the area of organizational leadership, within the same organization. Now we see more inclusiveness, diversity, openness, and transparency. Initially, because these organizations are owned by just one person,

structures for accountability and checks and balances were absent. Now they can boast of good governance structures, voices of staff are heard in the management processes. Others have established their own Resource Mobilization Units and Communication Units'.

<div align="right">Interview, NNGO, 21-05-2023</div>

Provision of flexible funding

Finally, another important aspect of the shift the power agenda in the WVL project relates to the provision of flexible grants to WROs at the national, regional and local levels in Ghana. According to project staff interviewed the grant is considered flexible in the sense that implementing partners take decision on the use of the grant. According to project staff interviewed, the WVL project pro-

vides flexible multi-year and short-term grants to partners. While there is also another domain of funding called 'Emergency granting', the representatives of Plan International Ghana mentioned during interviews that they were yet to receive any request for Emergency Funding. The interviews further revealed that the partners had room to decide on the specific intervention they would like to pursue with the grant they receive under WVL. According to the WVL project staff interviewed, the flexible funding received by partners has allowed them to gain a presence at the local level and also increased their organisational visibility. This in addition to improvement in governance structures and organisational capacity has allowed some WRO partners to secure additional funding from other donors to support their work.

Implementation challenges for the WVL project

Absence of core funding and high staff attrition

Interviews with the WVL project staff point to several implementation issues and difficulties in relation to WVL's attempt at shifting the power. First, it is abundantly clear from the interviews that organisational sustainability is one main challenge that WVL face. The project staff interviewed expressed the view that one core area of WVL is to strengthen organisational capacity. However, concerns were raised about the attrition rate for the staff of the WROs mainly as a result of the absence of core funding. For this reason, staff whose capacities have been strengthened may sometimes choose to leave for relatively bigger international organisation, affecting the goal of WVL in shifting the power. A key informant said:

'One of the challenges is that when you build the capacity of staff to a level, where we expect them to help the organisation improve, and they leave with the knowledge to join other organisations. This leads to a huge capacity gap, and loss of investment in a way, but you can't force people to stay because you want your project to succeed. So, that is one of the

negative outcomes we sometimes get as part of the project'.

<div align="right">Interview, SNGO, 18-05-2023</div>

Gaps in the implementation of feminist principles in the WVL project

Another important challenge identified through the interviews relates to what one WVL project staff of WVL described as *'gaps in living the feminist principles in the WVL project'*. Interviewees explained that the application of the feminist principles in WVL requires patience, time, effort, and unending consultation with partners before arriving at a decision or taking a course of action. There was a consensus from the project staff that applying feminist principles in relation to compliance and donor requirements is very daunting and conflicting. The evidence from the interviews show that some partners may sometimes misconstrue the flexibility they have under the guidance of feminist principles as 'doing things in their own way' as seen in the quote below:

'The other difficulty relating to the Feminist Principle is living the principle in relation to compliance and donor requirements. For in-

stance, sometimes you would need receipts, especially if you need to engage a consultant – as dictated by the procurement procedures. However, because we are using, flexibility, transparency and consultation, and all that, some partners may misconstrue 'Living the Principle' as 'doing it our own way' without

recourse to the procurement procedures thereby failing to comply with such major donor requirements. It then becomes a problem for the project team to go and clear their mess'.

<div align="right">Interview, NNGO, 21-05-2023</div>

Case Study 2: Background of the Giving for Change Project[7]

The Giving for Change (GfC) project is a five-year programme (2021-2025) aimed at enhancing freedom of speech by amplifying the voices of communities in claiming their rights towards duty holders through the mobilisation of domestic resources, particularly community philanthropy. It also aims to promote civic and civil society space, focusing on amplifying the voices of citizens and communities to claim their rights. In doing so, the GfC programme seeks to transform how 'development is done' by focusing on the recognition of domestic resource mobilisation in promoting local ownership, unlocking agency and strengthening the ability of communities to claim their rights and entitlements from different stakeholders especially government officials and international development actors. The mobilisation of domestic resources through community philanthropy is regarded as a strategy to shift power between local CSOs and their donors including INGOs.

The GfC project is part of the broader movement on community philanthropy which emphasises that communities have assets (financial and non-financial) and when the assets are pooled together, it helps in building community power and voice by enabling community members to become co-investors in their own development. For this reason, the GfC aims to create an enabling environment for community philanthropy through advocacy to foster the conditions for public participation, collective action and the expression of rights.

The project is structured around three main domains:

1. To unlock the collective power of local communities represented by civil society actors to express their opinion through community philanthropy.
2. To influence in-country national and societal actors to support community philanthropy through domestic resource mobilisation or local giving.
3. To challenge and change the existing practices of international development donors.
4. The GfC programme is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under its strengthening Civil Society Policy Framework. The programme is led by an international alliance or consortium consisting of the Global Fund for Community Development, Kenyan Development Foundation and Wilde Ganzen. It is being implemented in eight countries: Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Palestine and Uganda.

In Ghana, STAR Ghana Foundation is the anchor institution with the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) as a strategic partner. STAR Ghana Foundation acts as an 'intermediary organisation' or a 'local donor' and at the same time, an implementing partner of the GfC by working with local CSOs who are members of the Communities of Practice (CoP). As part of the GfC, STAR Ghana Foundation has provided funding to 5 local CSOs

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7 This section draws insights from the Giving for Change Multi-Annual Plan 2021-2025 and project documents (e.g. Terms for Reference for Expression of Interests, GfC 2021 Annual Report, Mid-year report and Annual learning event reports for Ghana). These documents were supplied by STAR-Ghana Foundation. It also relies on data from interviews with the team at STAR-Ghana Foundation and the partners of the GfC programme.

to pilot or test innovative ideas on community philanthropy. For example, as part of the funding, some local CSOs have established Community Foundations to mobilise community philanthropy in promoting local development. STAR Ghana Foundation also provided funding to 7 local CSOs to promote local giving infrastructure in Ghana.

Thus, the local CSOs are required to co-finance their projects. For this reason, the provision of funding was aimed at testing the extent to which funding support could serve as an avenue for developing local philanthropy infrastructure in Ghana.

Elements of shift the power in the Giving for Change Project

Analysis of the interview data led to the identification of the following themes as elements of shifts of power in the Giving for Change for Change Project:

1. mobilisation of domestic resources through community philanthropy;
2. flexibility in accountability requirements; and
3. flexibility in project design and implementation. These are explained in detail below.

1. Mobilisation of domestic resources through community philanthropy

Analysis of the interview data suggests that the GfC contributes significantly towards changing power dynamics by influencing the funding dependency of local CSOs on external donors. In doing so, the programme promotes resource diversification and capacity building or strengthening of local CSOs for the mobilisation of domestic resources. Many local CSO representatives mentioned that the mobilisation of domestic resources through community philanthropy would enhance ownership of development interventions by local communities, promote downward rather than upward accountability and also ensure the sustainability of development interventions, especially in the absence of external donor funding. For example, one interviewee highlighted the benefits of community philanthropy through the establishment of community foundations by saying:

> 'Through the Giving for Change Project, we have established a Community Foundation which is rare in Ghana. It's something new in our context where you ask communities to support their own development... Mo-

bilising community resources through local philanthropy helps us to hold duty bearers to account and also makes we [local CSOs] to be responsive to the needs of the communities'.

Interview, SNGO, 13-06-2023

According to some interviewees, the mobilisation of community resources creates opportunities for local CSOs to engage communities to identify and prioritise their needs. For this reason, *'the community decides on what they want to do and how they want to achieve it together'* as stated by one interviewee (Interview, SNGO, 13-06- 2023). Another interviewee also mentioned that:

> 'The community foundation is a good concept for mobilising local funds and also teach communities not to depend on other entities but look within to develop their resources and potentials so that if anything happens like COVID, we will able to contain those shocks'.

Interview, GfC partner, June 2023

A similar view on the importance of community philanthropy was shared by the representative of STAR Ghana Foundation who explained that:

> 'Some of the partners in the Northern Region of Ghana especially Sisala District have been able to use the local resources they mobilised to build Community Health Planning and Services (CHPs) Compounds, fixed roads and built schools. So, organisations are beginning to see that there are other ways of supporting community development in addition to receiving money from external donors [....]. In a

small way, it is contributing to strengthening organisational skills in relating better with constituencies and also getting them to contribute to our work'.

<div align="right">Interview, SNGO- 14-05-2023</div>

Despite the progress made by the GfC in promoting local philanthropy as a way to address the financial dependency issue which results in power imbalances, a major concern highlighted was the inability of local CSOs to mobilise enough local resources to support their work. For this reason, some interviewees explained that the level of success achieved so far was below their anticipated outcomes:

'I think we are aware that it takes so much more to be able to raise local resources so in the programme, reducing the level of dependency on external donors would not be significantly achieved. This is because raising local resources is not very easy especially when you're working in communities that are poor. So, we have seen some gradual changes, but it's not at the pace we have anticipated'.

<div align="right">Interview, SNGO- 14-05-2023</div>

2. Flexibility in accountability requirements

Analysis of the interview data suggests that the GfC programme created opportunities for much flexibility in the accounting requirements. Many interviewees for instance expressed the view that the Giving for Change Alliance has been given much flexibility or freedom by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in terms of accountability and reporting requirements:

'Between us [STAR Ghana Foundation] and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I think we have had a lot of room to operate where we make our choices in terms of where we wanted the programme to support and even the location as well as the identification of issues and partners. In terms of creating accountability for the programme, we have had room to negotiate with the donor [Dutch Min-

istry of Foreign Affairs] on how we wanted the reporting to be done and how often. And the donor [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs] has been very accommodating, open and flexible. We've negotiated on reporting timelines and the donor [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs] has also involved us in all kinds of reports'.

<div align="right">Interview, s SNGO, 14-05-2023</div>

The above statement highlights the efforts by some donors to address long-term or inherent systematic issues in the international development system. It also reflects efforts by some donors to improve their accountability requirements with southern-based organisations. Thus, the finding indicates that some donors are creating opportunities for their partners to co-decide on the accountability and reporting requirements.

The analysis of the interview data suggests that flexibility in reporting requirement is also given to the local CSOs by STAR Ghana Foundation. Many interviewees mentioned that although STAR Ghana Foundation has a reporting template, partners are able to make adjustments based on their contexts. According to a representative of STAR Ghana Foundation, the flexibility given is based on feedback received from the partners during the annual planning events. The respondent further added that:

'It has enabled us to be able to respond to the reporting framework and emerging needs of partners. If we share our annual plans and if you compare it to the 5-year plan, you would see that significantly we have introduced many new things. We thought that the reporting template that we used for the partners was too demanding because we sometimes ask for information that we don't use [...] So this year, we have reviewed the reporting template to get the necessary information we need'.

<div align="right">Interview, SNGO, 14-05-2023</div>

Similar sentiments were shared by the partners on the extent of flexibility in reporting provided by STAR Ghana Foundation.

The respondent had this to say:

> '*They [STAR Ghana Foundation] are very flexible and they have done that on numerous occasions. They give you the flexibility to submit your reports if you're unable to meet their timelines [....] The flexibility also includes involving partners in the design of the programme. It's like a participatory grant-making where partners are part of the design, implementation and evaluation of the programme*'.
>
> Interview, GfC partner, June 2023

Another respondent explained the level of flexibility in the programme by indicating that partners are given the freedom to include items that the organisations find to be useful in highlighting their success stories although these are not a reporting requirement by STAR Ghana Foundation: Thus, partner organisations go the extra mile to include items not required by STAR Ghana Foundation in their reporting template:

> '*I think there is a reporting template and you basically fill the template by putting as much information as possible. So, for example, we did a whole documentary which they [STAR Ghana Foundation] didn't ask for in our reporting. Although they didn't ask for it, we did it because we felt it helped us to tell our story better. So, from that perspective, there's flexibility and they haven't told us that next time, don't think that. So, I think in that regard, there is flexibility in the programme*'.
>
> Interview, GfC partner, June 2023

3. Flexibility in Project Design and Implementation

The empirical data from this study also suggests that much flexibility and autonomy is given to the local CSOs in choosing their initiatives and thematic priorities. Specifically, partners are given the flexibility to determine their priority areas and the activities to be undertaken. For instance, a local CSO representative shared his experience on the extent of flexibility offered to partners as follows:

> '*The GfC project gives us the flexibility to decide on the specific community philanthropy initiative we want to work with the communities. So, the flexibility has to do with STAR Ghana Foundation involving us in the design of the initiatives. It's like a participatory grant making where the local CSOs are part of the design and implementation of the project*'.
>
> Interview, SNGO, 12-06-2023

Interviewees further mentioned that although STAR Ghana Foundation has a general framework that guides the design of the initiatives, partners have the flexibility to change aspects of their projects in responding to prevailing circumstances on the ground. The interviewees explained that they were provided with the flexibility by STAR Ghana Foundation to alter the focus areas of their projects:

> '*STAR Ghana Foundation has a policy for the partners. So, we discuss with them that between sending concept notes and approval of the grant, a lot of things change. So, once we get to the field and realise these changes, you are able to go back to them, talk to them and say that, we went to the field and because of these things, we need to change our approach and goals*'.
>
> Interview, SNGO, 12-06-2023

Although interviewees said they had some flexibility and room for manoeuvre in negotiating reporting requirements, the same cannot be said of funding requirements. Indeed, interviewees explained that funding decisions are set by STAR Ghana Foundation once their proposals are approved. For this reason, they are unable to negotiate the funding requirements of the programme as described by an interviewee who argued that:

> '*No, we have not seen that [negotiations on funding requirements] yet. Normally, they will put out a call and then they set the parameters on what they are looking for and if you fit the requirements you go for it. So, we [the partners] do not set those parameters [e.g., grant amount etc]*'.
>
> Interview, SNGO, 13-06- 2023

Moreover, the analysis of the interview data indicates that for programmatic and funding accountability requirements, measures (e.g., using external auditors, quarterly reporting or updates) are put in place to ensure value for money. For this reason, there is an emphasis on ensuring that partners adhere strictly to the requirements specified by STAR Ghana Foundation. During interviews, the representatives of STAR Ghana Foundation were asked about the extent to which partners are able to bypass the programmatic and funding accountability requirements. This is how the staff described it:

> '*We expect a certain level of accountability from our partners and even before grants are given to our partners, we make sure certain mechanisms are in place to ensure transparency. I think there's no room for partners to bypass accountability requirements*'.
>
> Interview, SNGO, 14-05-2023

In sharing her experience of the financial accountability processes, one respondent recounted:

> '*When they [STAR Ghana Foundation] sent the auditor to us, we felt that they had all our documents, so why are they asking us everything again from the start even things that we have submitted? But again, it's a new project so I guess, at some point, they have to change*'.
>
> Interview, SNGO, 13-06-2023

The statement suggests that although some level of flexibility is given to the GfC partners, the need for efficiency and effectiveness often puts pressure on the partners to demonstrate transparency and accountability in the use of donor resources.

Implementation challenges associated with the Giving for Change Project

Project-based funding arrangements

The study identified some challenges such as the short-term nature of funding arrangements and the absence of core funding which affect the ability of the GfC programme in changing power relations. According to some interviewees, given the project-based nature of the GfC programme, funding was provided for specific initiatives over a short period of time, hence it was difficult achieving demonstrable or significant results. For example, an interviewee explained that his/her organisation was provided with funds to implement an initiative over six months. The interviewee went further to mention that some advocacy interventions or initiatives require long-term funding but the funding arrangements do not allow for this. In sharing his/her experience, the interviewee observed:

> '*The Giving for Change programme for my organisation was six months. If you're actu-*

ally going strictly by the terms of references, it wasn't even up to six months, so that's a learning curve because it was short in itself. It's a very short period to achieve any meaningful impact [...] To talk to schools, getting a meeting etc., the whole process takes longer time'.
>
> SNGO, 16-06-2023

Another interviewee added:
> '*I think they should give us multi-year funding like two or three years grants so that it will be able to sustain the organisation. Because of the short-term nature of the grant, you're always under pressure to deliver*'.
>
> Interview, SNGO, 16-06-2023

Aside from the short-term nature of funding, an interviewee also mentioned the absence of core funding including overhead costs as a key challenge. According to the interviewee, the GfC programme does not provide core funding which also

affects organisational sustainability. The interviewee explained that many partners spend a lot of time on the programme but (...)

> '(...) there are no overheads, even my time on the project is not catered for. They only cater for one programme officer and that's all so it becomes a challenge for the organisation'.
> Interview, SNGO, 14-06-2023

Difficulty changing the mindset of donor dependency towards domestic resource mobilisation

Another challenge faced by the GfC relates to the willingness of the local CSOs organisations to change their mindset from donor dependency to domestic resource mobilisation or local philanthropy. Although the GfC programme seeks to promote local philanthropy, the concern among the staff of STAR Ghana Foundation was that many local CSOs in Ghana perceive domestic resource mobilisation as a difficult endeavour compared to writing proposals to external donor agencies. For this reason, the mindset of dependency on external donor funding served as a key hindrance towards efforts aimed at shifting power. According to the representatives of STAR Ghana Foundation, they had to drop some partners of the GfC programme because they had become so reliant on external donor funding and were not willing to seek alternative domestic resources:

> 'We also realise that there's still that perception that people are refusing to move away from looking out for grants [external donor funding]. We dropped three of our partners because they were only interested in the grants [...]. In addressing the mindset challenge, we've had to have very difficult conversations with some of our partners. We also had to reengage the members of the Communities of Practice for instance, to know if they were still interested in the GfC programme knowing there will be no financial incentives'.
> Interview, SNGO, 21-05-2023

It was further explained that the mindset of donor dependency was not limited to local CSOs but also communities who are used to receiving support from external donor agencies and NGOs. For this reason, mobilising communities to use their own resources for development through community philanthropy was a challenge *'because some communities are always waiting for donors, governments and NGOs for help'* as observed by an interviewee (Interview, SNGO, 16-05-2023). In addressing this challenge, the partners of the GfC programme focus on learning new skills and building the capacity of communities to take the lead in promoting their own development.

Conclusion

The GfC project is an innovative initiative aimed at changing power dynamics in the international development system through the mobilisation of domestic resources (i.e., community philanthropy) by local CSOs and communities. On the other hand, the WVL seeks to contribute to shift the power by promoting and strengthening the organisational capacity of WROs in terms of their governance and leadership structures as well as the provision of flexible funding to support the work of WROs to promote gender equality. The findings from both case studies indicate some level of flexibility in the project design and implementation and reporting requirements. However, the study found that despite the flexibility in reporting requirements, funding decisions were unilaterally set by the intermediary organisations (i.e., STAR Ghana Foundation and Plan International Ghana) with little involvement of the partners. Moreover, what is common across the two cases is that the project-based nature of funding characterised by the absence of core funding and short-term funding arrangement serves as a barrier or hinderance to efforts aimed at promoting shift the power.

Uganda case study

Introduction

Globally, there is increased demand for a more equitable relationship between actors in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector. Until recently, humanitarian responses were significantly dominated by Northern NGOs (NN-GOs) possibly due to the financial resources that they possess. However, many questions arise over their monopolisation of this space: are they as effective as they claim to be; could the involvement of organisation already on ground, known as local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs) improve the timeliness and quality of the response? What encumbrances do the LNHAs face in these humanitarian efforts? Such questions bring to the fore the need to address the inequalities between NNGOs and the local actors, and this is at the core of the shifting the power movement. The Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) project that is the focus of this study illustrates an attempt spearheaded by Oxfam, a NNGO, to augment the capacities of Ugandan CSOs to play more leading roles in the humanitarian response.

Background

This case study is part of a larger study on transforming power inequalities between development NGOs in the north and those in the global south. To collect the evidence in a systematic way, the study started off by mapping existing initiatives through a global online survey; this was followed with in-depth interviews with selected civil society organisations both in the Global North and South. Through the interviews initiatives aimed at shifting power relations in the global South were identified. Within the Global South our focus was on two countries – Ghana and Uganda.

When juxtaposed with the findings from the online survey, this case study is aligned to the category localisation as one of the terminologies respondents were more familiar with. It falls under the humanitarian sector, the second biggest categorisation of the organisations from which the survey respondents were drawn. It comprises of capacity strengthening, the most commonly mentioned category as an avenue to reduce power inequalities.

This report documents the views of some of the participating partners of the Empowerment of Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) project. It focuses on the way the project was organised, the relationships between partners in Uganda's humanitarian space. The data was collected through eight in-depth key informant interviews (3 Oxfam Uganda staff; 5 local project partners). We complemented the interviews with a review of secondary evidence including project documents.

The ELNHA project

Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) sought to challenge and reverse the tendency where global actors including donors, UN agencies and NNGOs dominated the humanitarian space in developing countries. This was part of the Charter for Change (C4C) commitments made at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) to reduce barriers that prevent organisations and donors from partnering with local and national responders. Thus, ELNHA was piloted in Uganda and Bangladesh by Oxfam between 2016 and 2021 to promote more equal sharing of power and resources between external humanitarian actors and local and national

ones in the two countries. It exemplifies efforts by Oxfam, an NNGO, to empower as well as create space for local organisations to take leading roles in humanitarian preparedness and response within their countries.

In Uganda, ELNHA focused on strengthening the capacities of about 60 LNHAs to be able to actively participate in managing the huge refugee influxes in northern and north-eastern part of the country. The specific approaches for strengthening local partners employed in the ELNHA project can usefully be categorised into three complementary strategies, namely:

1. Technical capacity strengthening (capacity)
2. Creation of new structures and platforms to influence the humanitarian agenda in Uganda (voice), and
3. Convincing large international donors and NNGOs to tailor their policies in support of local humanitarian actors' leadership (space).

One of the major justifications for ELNHA related to the funding. The project attempted to eliminate the middleman (NNGOs) to give the local actors the capacity and opportunity to engage directly with the donors. Unlike the conventional approach to development interventions where the local actors are sub-grantees, the ELNHA actors worked in a partnership model that had a learning component, empowering the partners to enable them to feel respected and play a leading role in all aspects in terms of decision-making.

Some of the project implementation was also done in consortia in contrast to partners having the monopoly of certain donors, this was helpful in breaking such barriers was a helpful in reducing power inequality. Working in consortia, gave members the opportunity to share and learn from each other. However, given that all this happened in the context of the shrinking funding in the humanitarian sector suggests other intentions such as the need to maximise efficiency that is part of the neoliberal agenda. Working through local organisations was deemed less costly especially

through reducing reliance on international experts. The local actors are deemed more knowledgeable and faster in the humanitarian context. Below we examine each of the project components in detail.

Strengthening the capacity of the local and national organisations

This component arose from the recognition that it was neither possible nor desirable for NNGOs such as Oxfam to respond to all disasters as they occurred across the globe. For effectiveness, Oxfam thought working through local agencies would be the best approach to responding to disasters in real time. The 2017 refugee influx in northern Uganda served to support this thinking. Oxfam felt that the response would have been quicker, more efficient and sustainable had local partners been at the frontline. However, Oxfam and gatekeeping agencies that determine who is admitted to work in the sector, perceived of local organisations as having limited capacities in all organisational aspects including governance and management structures, organisational policies, strategic plans, financial controls and orientation in the core humanitarian standards. Building the institutional structures of local and national partners to be able to 'take a leading role in the design and implementation of humanitarian responses' (Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023) therefore constituted ELNHA's first pillar.

Local and national organisations were subjected to the Humanitarian Country Capacity Assessment which identified their individual capacity needs/gaps that needed to be plugged to transform them into LNHAs. The response was holistic, whereby partners were trained in different aspects ranging from governance and management to resource mobilisation, book keeping, and improving accounting systems to be more accountable. The project included training of the board members of the LNHAs to appreciate their roles.

Consultants and/or experienced organisations like Development Research and Training (DRT) and Uganda Red Cross were identified to provide technical support to each organisation depending

on their unique needs. These aspects were critical in allaying the fears of NNGOs and funders concerning providing direct funding to southern NGOs due to weak governance and accountability systems.

According to ELNHA partners *'Oxfam wanted us to own up and do better in their absence(...). It built our capacities and afterwards put us, the local actors, in charge of the whole intervention. That was tremendous for me!'* (ELNHA partner 4, 28-03-2023).

Another one opined,

> *'It would have been impossible for Oxfam to work with us and have the intended results without first strengthening sectors like finance, procurement and logistics. Oxfam had to bring two of their staff to sit at ELNHA partner 1 for like two years as a way of mentoring to make sure we implement the project the way Oxfam was doing'.*
>
> Interview ELNHA partner 1, 03-04-2023

Oxfam set aside a Humanitarian Capacity Development Fund (HCDF), to ensure that the gaps identified by local actors are addressed. Regional support partners were identified to help coordinate the capacity strengthening initiatives.

Through organisational and institutional development and by building quality assurance mechanisms ELNHA partners could get certified by the office of the Prime minister(OPM), the line ministry in charge of humanitarian response.

The capacity strengthening was twinned with an aspect of co-creation where some proposals seeking funding were written by Oxfam together with some partners, giving them an opportunity to give their ideas. Also, partners were invited on an annual basis, invited for joint reviews of some of the smaller projects implemented.

According to one of the partners, ELNHA enabled them to have practical direct coaching and mentorship on humanitarian response by Oxfam staff.

This interaction helped them to learn; for example, two engineers from Oxfam were seconded to CEFORD for two years, strengthening CEFORD's capacity in WASH related engineering.

Other project partners also reported being allowed identify project interventions and take decisions since they were on the ground. A respondent observed:

> *'There was respect of organisational management and systems, recognising that ELNHA partner 4 also has its own governance system that also is a plus, because we were never pushed to say do it this way unless when it was an area of strategic planning. We developed emergency plans, they said do it in your capacity so that you develop. For me that was a better way of supporting local organisations to take decisions'.*
>
> Interview ELNHA partner 4, 14-04-2023

It should be remembered that strengthening the capacity of local organisations was mentioned by a significant proportion of the survey participants from the SNGOs. Their responses focused more on the capacity for raising funds for their organisations. The evidence from ELNHA indicates that some of the actors had been able to obtain funds to implement interventions.

Giving LNHAs a voice
Giving partners a voice was intentioned to help local partners gain entry and recognition at the decision-making table of the humanitarian ecosystem. Oxfam spearheaded a campaign for opening the decision-making spaces both locally and internationally. ELNHA made efforts to enable 'local actors to be able to participate in meetings and speak for themselves in both national and international fora'. According to key informants ELNHA partners 'started attending coordination meetings at settlement level, and inter-agency meetings where they had never imagined to be part of' (Interview ELNHA partner 1, 03-04-2023).

ELNHA facilitated the creation of four regional civil society platforms namely, the West Nile, Acholi, Karamoja and later Western Uganda humanitarian platforms, to aid the coordination of all partners from those regions (including local governments, media and academia), encourage sharing of experiences, strengthening of capacities, and to 'advocate collectively so that we have strength in the numbers in whatever we do' (Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023). A national-level steering committee (the national platform) was also set up comprising of representatives from the regional platforms. Through these platforms joint action plans and advocacy plans were developed. The platforms acted as spaces for humanitarian information sharing and dialogue. They were used to engage government agencies, donors, NNGOs in support of localisation of humanitarian aid:

'In these fora we continuously advocated for the things that we believe in, that is to say, the issue of power imbalance, making sure that the relationships are very meaningful for us to work well as the local actors because we are the first responders and understand the context better'.

Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023

The experience from the regional and national platforms helped LNHAs to participate in other international and global spaces where the debate on localisation takes place. Respondents mentioned the Grand Bargain and the Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC) as some of the international initiatives supporting locally led responses where they have effectively participated with a united Ugandan voice.

Through these platforms, the idea of LNHAs working through consortia was hatched and piloted. Beyond access to funding opportunities, these humanitarian platforms and networks enabled the sharing of humanitarian information across the membership and strengthened coordination and collaboration among LNHAs.

These platforms put emphasis on strengthening coordination among LNHAs and to promote partnerships among and beyond the traditional humanitarian actors. It provided for collaboration and building synergies with local governments to improve coordination in the humanitarian setting. As one respondent noted:

'Before ELNHA, the relationship between the civil society and the district local governments was about blame; us in civil society thought we are doing the best thing and the district were not doing anything right. There was always something the district didn't do well. When we started having such kind of interactions in ELNHA, we were in the same space together, we stopped fearing the district, they were part of us, I could go to the CAO's office and tell him I have this activity going on, I need you to come and take part'

Interview ELNHA partner 1, 03-04-2023

In the same vein, ELNHA partnered with academic institutions like Gulu university to undertake research that would produce evidence-based advocacy. The project also partnered with the media to aid the dissemination of information.

Space to act
The project purposed to create spaces or opportunities where local actors would be able to showcase their abilities, including abilities for planning, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian projects, this was intended to change the impression that local actors do not have the capacity to respond to humanitarian situation.

To achieve this goal the project implemented three sets of activities:

1. Convincing donors, government, and NNGOs to demonstrate accountable partnership with LNHAs.
2. Convincing donors, NNGOs and government to allocate resources to support LNHA initiatives.
3. Convince NNGOs to use their influence in sup-

port of strengthening the role and leadership of LNHA.

To demonstrate accountable partnership with LNHAs, Oxfam led by example. It re-oriented its financing and partnership policies, systems, and practices to actualise the call for localisation when it introduced funding streams to provide LNHAs with start-up resources for showcasing their capacities: the humanitarian action fund (HAF) and the humanitarian response grant facility (HRGF). Between April 2019 and Dec 2020, four rounds of HRGF were conducted and supported 17 locally led humanitarian responses including 11 that were implemented through consortia. ELNHA provided grants to local actors up to $500,000 and through other co-created projects, LNHAs have obtained over $1,600,000 million from various donors and international agencies. The HRGF funding was accessed through a competitive process, partly to determine the partners' ability to write proposals that could be funded by donors:

> '*We wanted to see if organisations could come up with fundable proposals that any other donor could also appreciate to provide them with money*'
>
> Interview Oxfam, 12-04-2023

The other aspect of competition was to encourage cooperation among local humanitarian organisations:

> '*We advised that to win these grants, organisations needed to form consortia to bring different skills and ideas together to be able to shoot with one strong proposal that brings out complementarity among them*'.
>
> Interview Oxfam, 12-04-2023

According to Oxfam, efforts to reduce the power inequalities necessitated having local actors interface with donors and other powerful actors in spaces where they influence the humanitarian agenda. Respondents explained that prior to the ELNHA project local partners felt unwelcome in the humanitarian response meetings convened by UNHCR. Meetings involving NNGOs and local organisations would only happen through the local government as an intermediary. With ELNHA, they began attending without going through the local government. According to the local actors, the project helped to change the way they were viewed by NNGOs. At the national level, there were conversations on shaping refugee responses in Uganda happens at the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) steering committee – a multi-stakeholder group hosted in the Office of the Prime Minister. Through the ELNHA advocacy, the membership of the CRRF was expanded to include the chairperson of the national humanitarian platform. This enabled LNHAs to be part and parcel of those who steer Uganda's humanitarian agenda.

Besides providing direct funding, Oxfam worked with the CRRF Secretariat to conduct studies into tracking the funding flows in Uganda to local humanitarian actors. The resultant money talks reports helped to establish a baseline from which international actors could measure progress on achieving the C4C commitment for NNGOs to channel at least 25% of their funding to LNHAs.

With better coordination and collaboration among LNHAs, other organisations slowly started trusting them by funding them directly. ELNHA project document lists over 12 local organisations that obtained funding from donor agencies including USAID, European Union, DGF, UNDP, GIZ among others. Interestingly some of the funding came in form of long-term programmes (Oxfam, 2021). For example, in 2020, one of the LNHAs called Vision for Humanity (ViFoH) secured a multi-year project from the European Union to respond to the increased environmental degradation and to promote alternative energy sources in refugee hosting districts in West Nile, Uganda. This grant was the first of its kind as ViFoH had previously depended on activity-based and short-term grants.

Convincing donors to allocate resources to support LNHA activities was achieved via the enhanced visibility that local actors obtained through working in consortia, being better coordinated in the humanitarian platforms and being represented at the CRRF. With this, donors like USAID, EU, UNASO, UNDP, TROCAIRE, DGF, Oxfam, GIZ and Share Trust allocated about USD 2million (USD) to LNHAs in direct funding (Oxfam, 2021). In October 2020, the World Bank invited two ELNHA members – Care and Assistance for Forced Migrants (CAFOMI) and Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) – to apply for a grant to enhance district capacity to prevent and respond to Gender Based Violence and Violence Against Children. This was a clear example of increased visibility and appreciation of the contribution of LNHAs from an agency whose funding is often reserved for governments and/or big development agencies.

With regards to convincing donors and NNGOs to support LNHAs to take lead in the humanitarian sector Oxfam through ELNHA initiated dialogues between Local and National Humanitarian actors, and like-minded NNGOs in 2019. These dialogues culminated into the Charter for Change (C4C) Working Group in Uganda. The African Women and Youth Action for Development (AWYAD) and Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD) both partners in the EL-

NHA project were nominated to respectively chair and co-chair this working group. The C4C network in Uganda has been able to obtain endorsements of over 50 local and national agencies as well as international agencies to the Charter for Change movement in support of localisation of humanitarian aid.

Some of the actors also acknowledged that there was more working together between organisations, there was more exposure even beyond Uganda. There is a change in their advocacy strategies, relating with different stakeholders and the interaction has become less confrontational. One of the achievements, as perceived by a respondent, is that there was a better approach to humanitarian response because of the capacity strengthening by project. According to this respondent, the organisations have, apparently adjusted their policies to suit humanitarian response; there was also a creation of a relationship between organisations. A project partner observed that they engaged in useful conversations with Oxfam about what works and what does not work. This according to them was an indication of commitment to give local organisations the confidence to engage with other NNGOs. The platforms created by the project made the actors know that they could talk or disagree with international partners/donors about what can or not work.

Outcomes of ELNHA

Faster and more context appropriate response to disasters

The project envisaged that placing local actors into leading roles would make emergency response faster and more context appropriate. In some ways this was realised. For example, when conflict broke out between refugees and the host communities, LNHAs played crucial mediation roles – engaging the host communities to harmoniously live with refugees in ways that would be difficult for INGOs devoid of the local knowledge (Tonning et al., 2021). It was also observed that

when Covid-19 broke out LNHAs were readily available to send staff at the frontline in refugee settlements as most NNGOs staff movements were constrained by the national lockdowns. Fortunately, LNHAs were located close to refugee settlements in the West Nile and ready to respond thanks to the earlier capacity strengthening activities of the project. According to Oxfam (2021)

LNHAs were supported to take up new roles, such as supporting food distributions and organising radio talks shows as learning platforms

for disseminating Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). With support from ELNHA, refugee-led organisations were able to translate Covid-19 standard operating procedures into languages spoken by the refugees, and also distributed soap and masks to the most vulnerable refugee populations.

> *However, some LNHAs complained that their role was seen as temporary, only recognised as first responders soon after a disaster happens. In this case they would be required to handover areas of operation when the well-resourced INGOs arrive. During the 2017 refugee influx in Palabek refugee settlement, local agencies claim that they were pushed out when the big and well-resourced international organisations arrived. This is problematic because NNGO interventions tend to be short-term, and they usually exit before communities fully gain capacity to stand on their feet. As noted by a key informant: 'Many of these organisations leave, many left since 2017, but we are still here'.*
>
> Interview ELNHA partner 4, 14-04-2023

Moreover, criticisms have been voiced in the literature regarding downloading the burden of responding to disasters to local organisations. Critics note that fronting local organisations at the forefront of humanitarian activities is part of the wider neoliberal humanitarianism of pursuing efficiency amidst global reduction in funding for humanitarian responses (Roepstorff, 2020). Hence attention turns to working through the cheaper local partners. Oxfam's own staff confirmed this:

> *'It was realised that working with the local organisations is cheaper than when you jet in the experts from the global teams. [NNGOs] come and respond and when the response is done, they leave for another response in another country'.*
>
> Interview Oxfam, 12-04-2023

Improved confidence of local partners

Local organisations appreciated Oxfam's willingness to take a chance and trust them with large amounts of money while the other NNGOs were shunning them. Respondents argued that no other NNGO was willing take the risk- entrusting money with a local organisation without being sure of their capacity to properly use the money.

According to one respondent, at the time when ELNHA started, there was no local actor involved in the standardised humanitarian response. With ELNHA, CEFORD became the first local actor to work in a refugee settlement in West Nile. Whereas Oxfam had been working with CEFORD prior to the ELNHA, it was a sub granting arrangement. With the ELNHA project, there was a deliberate effort to strengthen the organisation in terms of accountability. They started transferring money directly to CEFORD.

> *'Oxfam came to us for humanitarian response when no donor was willing to take the risk of working with local organisations'.*
>
> Interview ELNHA partner 1, 03-04-2023

This helped build confidence among local organisations; a respondent from YSAT the local to local partnership formed through the project were of added value since actors continued to work together beyond the project supported by Oxfam. These actors combined their strengths to apply for funding from other international and global donors. YSAT was nominated for the UNHCR NGO implementation award and came second in the east African region because of their COVID 19 response.

> *'Oxfam really wanted us to have this conversation that local people had to lead the humanitarian response and the rest of the organisations needed to follow. It achieved this by first making local organisations gain confidence that they can discuss such issues with other NNGOs'.*
>
> Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023

The ELNHA initiated dialogues resulted in the C4C working group in Uganda. Two of the ELHNA actors AWYAD and CEFORD were nominated to chair and co-chair respectively for the working group. Another of the project partners, Community Empowerment for Creative Innovation(CECI) in 2020 secured membership to the global movement of civil society organisations, becoming the first refugee led organisation from Uganda to be nominated to the network for empowered aid response's advocacy working group, it was subsequently added to the membership. It also became the first RLO from Uganda to be admitted to this global humanitarian space. This allowed the organisation to add a voice and strength in shaping the humanitarian agenda.

There was initial hesitation in clearing local CSOs for humanitarian response by UNHCR. However, overtime, trust has been built and organisations like Rural Imitative for Community Empowerment (RICE) West Nile, CARITAS Arua, CEFORD among others started receiving funding. According to a project document-Localisation Through the Lens of Elnha Model, the active participation in the Western Nile humanitarian platform raised the profiles of the LNHA's profile among NNGOs and UN agencies. The international actors participated in this platform, and this accordingly, instilled a sense of mutual trust. This resulted in partnerships and collaborations between LNHAs and INGOs.

According to respondents, participating organisations learnt to negotiate, engage or disagree with the international partners (donors) about what can work for them and what could not work. That courage was picked from the way Oxfam interacted with them. The ability of some of the local actors to begin obtaining funding directly from the donors bypassing the intermediary role of the NNGOs was attributed to the ability that some of the project actors gained to speak at humanitarian actor's meetings, and getting recognised for the work they had done. By passing the intermediary resonates with some of the evidence from the SNGO respondents, that these intermediaries gain the status of donors, creating additional conditionalities for the actors in the global south. A respondent, talking about the ELNHA project observed as follows:

> '...I think a lot of capacity strengthening was done for local actors so that they can engage with the international actors and other humanitarian agencies. The other one was to make sure that people advocate for the issues of funding but also the grievances in the relationship between international NGOs and local NGOs. That comes with also identifying space where we can sit and discuss about issues, the round table'.
> Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023

Oxfam made sure that its slot in some of the international spaces were utilised by local actors:

> 'There are other spaces where Oxfam as an international organisation can access but the local actors have no knowledge of them. Oxfam has been holding hands of our representatives to advocate in such spaces'.
> Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023

As a consequence of the project, there was gradual attitudinal change of the NNGOs in the humanitarian response to the abilities of the local actors. The respondents observed that much of the work that was supported by the project around space and voice resulted in some mindset change of their donors. In addition, there is evidence that some of the project partners are obtaining direct funding without having to go through middlemen. Talking about the outcomes of the project a respondent observed:

> 'One of the outcomes is some change in attitudes of the NNGOs, UN and others towards local actors much as we have not completely reached the level we want. We have largely moved away from the fear that the local actors are risky, they have gradually increased their ability for us to support them. Currently, the donors are now asking for proposals to see how they are going to work with local actors; it is now a requirement'.
> Interview Oxfam, 24-05-2023

There was an increase in the coordination and collaboration of the local partners, reducing the individualistic approach to intervention. Some of the actors in the project are actively participating or engaged with the Charter for Change (C4C) discussions. At the time of conducting this case study, a local actor was hosting the global forum for C4C.

The project also increased the visibility of some of the participating organisations. Some of them showcased their work during the Uganda National Refugee Summit in 2017. Working closely with Oxfam gave them mileage and some of these actors have subsequently been recognised as UN implementing partners.

According to one respondent that participated in the project implementation, some of the actors improved their skills for resource mobilisation through the project's competitive process for the seed fund through proposal writing. There was also an increase in the partners' knowledge of the of the humanitarian response standards. They gained the capacity to initiate their own interventions, this was attributed to the holistic capacity strengthening in human resource management, improvement of the governance systems. Documentary evidence indicates that the HRGF helped the actors to demonstrate capacity to design and manage response programmes. This aimed at increasing direct access to other sources of funding for future response.

Organisational growth

Through the project, some of the actors got to appreciate the need for structures in place; governance structures and the segregation of duties. They also appreciated the training on developing organisational policies. By the end of the project, many of the actors had improved their ability to operate in humanitarian situations. A case in point is the Youth Social Advocacy Team, (YSAT) which began as a refugee led initiative in 2017, then it was registered as a community based organisation in Rhino Camp Refugee settlement. By 2023, the organisation had attained the status

of a regional NGO in Uganda, focusing on the challenges that face young people, and that they can do something constructive instead of causing violence when given an opportunity.

Recognition

Some of the study respondents said that taking part in the ELNHA project increased their recognition by donors/NNGOs and government. This was evident from some of them getting funding directly from the funders. Prior to the ELNHA, UNHCR worked through intermediaries like Oxfam, but post the project, they began giving the funds directly to the local actors. This, according to some of the study participants, reduced the cost of the intervention. Through the Office of the Prime Minister a number of ELNHA partners were registered as humanitarian responders. Even the language of reference began to change from local actors to implementing partners, some of them being taken as leading agencies for some sectors. Organisations like AWYDA started playing the leading role in the sector of protection.

Being part of the project gave the partners the opportunity to showcase their capacity to the effect that a local partner is the one hosting the global platform for C4C in Uganda. There was a reduction in the gap between NNGOs and the local organisations; there is minimal difference between the staff while in the field. The following is illustrative:

> 'The other one was it reduced the gap between the NNGOs and local organisation now when you are in the field and you are a staff of a local organisation, and you meet a staff of NNGO, there is no difference, right now when you go, you are all responding, you are all humanitarian workers but before the gap was very big, the other one is a staff of an NNGO and for you, you are a community volunteer'.
>
> Interview ELNHA partner 5, 07-04-2023

Recognition of the local humanitarian players was not limited to NNGOs. It included the private

sector, government structures like for instance the district disaster management committees (DDMCs,) the refugee led organisations and the women rights organisations, and the faith-based organisations. Community Empowerment for Rural Transformation (CEFORD), one of the local humanitarian actors on the refugee crisis in the west Nile region was approached by the government of Uganda through the OPM to facilitate stakeholder engagements to calm growing tensions between refugees and the host communities.

Local NGOs were admitted to decision-making spaces that they never dreamt of entering:

'At national level, certain meetings, local actors would not appear within the humanitarian settings but this has changed'.

Interview ELNHA partner 4, 14-04-2023

Some the respondents observed that coordination mechanism in the humanitarian sector had changed, when making up clusters, they ensure that local organisations are part of the structure. This was attributed to the ELHNA project that began the conversation about letting the local actors do humanitarian response work and being recognised.

ELNHA project challenges

The project had a number of challenges that compromised the achievement of all its goals.

Limited geographical scope
As an initiative to address the inequalities among humanitarian actors, the implementers felt that restricting it to the northern region of the country was constraining since there are other regions that also had humanitarian interventions. Many more local actors need the capacity strengthening to improve their response and to also demonstrate that they can play the role of international actors.

Organisational inertia
The ELNHA MEAL coordinator observed that some of the project partners were not as responsive as had been anticipated especially regarding adjusting the governance systems. The respondent attributed this to the founders' syndrome, that resulted in some inertia. Some the founders viewed system changes as intended to keep them out of the strategic control of the organisation. Organisations that are formed with the main purpose of assisting the communities are more responsive. Organisations with the founders' syndrome are said to be slow at developing financial and governance systems making it difficult for other partners to work with them. Talking about the founder's syndrome, an informant observed:

'Some still have those risks and they need to be supported but also the support sometimes was not effective where their founders were not willing to change, there were such cases where the local partner's environment was a bit risky for the other partners to work with. There are those who needed more support than the others and it affected implementation; we had those few cases'.

Interview Oxfam, 24-05-2023

Sustainability
Some of the interventions, especially the platforms that brought partners together, the spaces that were created did not remain as active after the closure of the project, they remained in name but with minimal activity although they continued providing actors of different organisation with vital connections.

Whereas the project received some support from government structures especially at the local level, some of the respondents said that the political environment at the national level was not very supportive to complement the ELNHA efforts. The second phase of the project was affected by the closure of the accounts of the NGO forum, a CSO umbrella organisation for a period of six months. This constrained the activities project activities since some of the local implementers

accessed intervention funds through the umbrella organisation.

Resistance of the international agencies
Initially, there was some resistance to the idea of allowing local actors to be the frontline responders to humanitarian crises from the international actors including UNHCR that hitherto dominated this space. When Oxfam Uganda engaged the local actors to respond in its position the other Northern responders argued that the local partners did not have capacity and letting them respond would put the lives of the refugees at risk. Also, the attitude of international actors was negative when local partners invited them to the regional platforms:

> *'Local governments had to write to them to come and attend our meetings but later they started attending the meetings voluntarily which means there was a change in mind'.*
>
> Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023

Finally, the HRGF as one of the funding element of ELHNA faced delays due to the resistance from the OPM and UNHCR, actors that are responsible for clearing humanitarian responders.

Half-hearted acceptance of sharing power
There is evidence that some of projects participants doubted the NNGOs full commitment to work with the local actors. When the conditionality for funding becomes the basis of a partnership, it does not result in genuine power sharing. This is partly attributed to the reality that those with financial resources or direct link with the funders still have an upper hand in any partnership. This can also be the case where a grant is jointly written, the partners that takes the lead will have more power. A respondent observed: *'Northern NGOs are working with the local partners, they are partnering but some of them are doing it just because it is a condition for them to get the grant'* (Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023).

Respondents explained that power imbalances have persisted both in development and even in humanitarian response. There are also within country imbalances, there is a perception that the organisations that are spatially at the core will hold more power than those at the periphery. The following quote is illustrative:

> *'Organisations like ours that have headquarters in Arua, when we are in Kampala, we are called sub-national organisations and those ones in Kampala call themselves national organisations ... [with such a language] they are sending a message to you that you are not as they are... it is a kind of psychological warfare'.*
>
> Interview ELNHA partner 2, 28-03-2023

Moreover, some of the respondents mentioned that not all the Oxfam staff were converted and committed to the project aim of genuinely empowering the local actors. There was some evidence of bad staff attitude towards the local partners, being looked at as competitors that could take their jobs. Such staff wanted to impose themselves on the leadership of the project partners. The high staff turnover on the side of Oxfam also negatively affected project implementation. Some respondents mentioned that changes in the supporting staff that they worked with was problematic since some of the new recruits took a long time to adjust to their role and seemingly learning on the job. Some of them, sent to support the partners were not able to give the requisite support. The local actors in some instances had to support themselves yet the technical support from Oxfam was crucial.

Inadequate funding
The capacity was given but some of the actors felt that it should have been accompanied with more financial resources than were availed. Organisations should have been structurally more organised, better facilitated. There was also a high staff turnover. After gaining the capacity/skills, employees would leave for better remunerating employers.

Consortia were a form of forced marriage

Respondents observed that the consortium element of the project did not grow organically, it was rushed and therefore not sustainable. When it commenced in the second phase of the project, Oxfam seemed to be under pressure to have that component implemented. This did not give enough time to the partners to form solid working relationships. The consortia were expected to implement the Oxfam funded projects in a period of six months. Documentary evidence indicates that one of the challenges to the space element of the project was that some LNHAs were more interested in getting the resources and paid less attention to strengthening the platforms (Oxfam, 2021). Nevertheless, the actors that had previously worked under consortium arrangement were more successful and have implemented other projects beyond ELNHA.

Discussion and key lessons

The respondents shared what they considered to be key lessons from the project. They emphasised the importance of engaging people that are going to benefit from intervention in order to address those issues that affect them. Talking about the importance of engaging people, a respondent observed:

> *'Empowering local humanitarian actors to deliver humanitarian response in their localities, is very critical if we are to implement appropriate and timely responses. Because they understand the context, even when you say these people are suffering, they know the kind of suffering, you cannot waste time again to do a lot of studies and comprehensive studies that take time and people are dying. For them, they can be able to deliver appropriate and timely responses'.*
>
> Interview Oxfam, 12-04-2023

It was argued that the biggest lesson was that, although the external actors can help, they cannot replace the local actors since they live with the affected, they understand the context. This is a boost for the sustainability of interventions in the community. The local actors, once trusted, given support, can take the leadership role in humanitarian response. They can share power equally with the international actors, therefore, the fear that many donors have with regard to these actors is exaggerated. Working with the local actors is less costly, may give more value for money. Exposure is key for local humanitarian actors, their participation in the spaces of decision-making with international organisations is key to breaking the boundaries between international and local NGOs.

The documentary evidence indicates that the project's capacity strengthening initiatives increased the actors' ability and confidence to lead humanitarian response activities and coordination efforts. The following actors played leading roles: AWYAD and CEFORD co-chaired the charter for change; CAFOMI represented other LNHAs at the comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) steering group (CRRF-SG) and chaired the National Humanitarian Platform. Community Empowerment for Creative Innovation (CECI) secured membership to the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR)'s advocacy working group - a global movement of CSOs.

In addition, it is important to legislate the local actors as frontline responders, and the NNGOs should concentrate more on the mobilisation of the resources rather that doing the actual implementation. This is because the local actors may have a better understanding of the context of the humanitarian response.

From the evidence, for the participants, the ELHNA project was an eye /opportunity opener in terms of giving them exposure, enabling their interaction with international actors in the human-

itarian sector. The project helped with strengthening their systems and capacity, facilitated and enabled them to work in groups to take advantage of synergies with other local actors.

Based on the evidence, the project achievements can be attributed to the partner capacity assessment conducted that established existing gaps; the empowerment, the platform accorded, some freedom granted to make decisions on how to implement projects, funding facility, and partnerships that enabled co-creation.

The alleged lack of capacity is one of the justification for local actors always acting as sub grantees of NNGOs. This rhymes with some evidence from the interviews. Some of the respondents said that one of the things that would make the shift the power movement difficulty is the misperception that the SNGOs do not have the systems to account for the funds given for development interventions. The ELNHA projects shows with support through capacity strengthening, local actors can successfully deliver humanitarian responses,

Based on the survey findings, one of the sources of the power imbalance was the difference in capacity between the NNGOs and SNGOs, the ELHNA project was an attempt at addressing this. The funding that was given to the project partners, was a response to the lack of access to financial resources as a constraint to shifting power. The terms of access, were such that the partners were to implement their own interventions, this could be construed as not having as stringent conditions as those that may come from a context of being sub grantees. Through the capacity strengthening, the partners were given information for example on the standards of humanitarian response. This feeds into one of the recommendation given by the survey respondents.

It was highlighted in the survey responses that some of the NNGOs are reluctant to share power, the ELNHA was a gesture in contrast with that observation. The partnership was to an extent transformative, according to the evidence, there

is likelihood that the ELNHA project to an extent transformed the relations with OXFAM Uganda. The exposure to other international actors could have had the same effect. By the end of the project some of the actors had direct interaction with donors, a number of them received direct funding. This is in line with the survey recommendation of doing away with the intermediary role of the NNGOs. It was, however not possible, to interrogate any change in the relations with these donors.

The other recommendation included the strengthening of the capacity for local NGOs, capacity strengthening was a central in the ELNHA project. Although there was an element of the project partners taking some decisions in terms of what intervention they wanted to make, but possibly not very substantial, and not in key areas. The project also created a level of trust between Oxfam and its partners, based on some evidence where some of the actors represented OXFAM in Humanitarian sector fora, sometimes with other international actors.

Whereas the case study, to an extent, shows a change in relations with between actors and Oxfam, it does not explore changes in relations with other NNGOs/donors that are attributable to the project. The gathered evidence only shows that the participation of the local actors enabled them to access funds from donors.

Conclusion

The ELNHA project experimented a shift from sub-grantee relationships with local actors to a partnership model. In some ways it reduced the degree of control and progressively increase the decision-making power of the local actors. In addition, it improved the trust relationship through capacity strengthening, assisted in resource mobilisation, enhancement of technical and advocacy skills. The project, in trying tackle some of the central issues in the power imbalance that is capacity and forum for engagement is an essential step in the direction towards reducing power inequalities. During the life course of the project, LNHAs collaborated and coordinated among themselves, with other sector stakeholders and with the host communities for more effective humanitarian preparedness and response. However, there is limited evidence that these aspects continued after the project. Relatedly, what is documented as the most effective forms of humanitarian response that LNHAs adopted such as cash transfer programming, which support the agency and resilience of affected people, were fronted by Oxfam and they depended on its funding.

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Analysis of documented initiatives

The survey requested respondents to add links to online resources about the actions they reported in the survey. This resulted in 50 links to documents discussing various types of actions, some of which included further links providing further information or actions or leading to related actions. The documents are of varied kinds. Many are discussions rather than reports of concrete actions, and have varied forms including blogs, workshop reports, statements about principles and future commitments, and interviews. Other documents are more extensive, offering research results or detailed recommendations. Many such discussions remain generic, providing analytical statements about problematic power relations that need to be addressed urgently, rather than identifying specific and concrete steps organisations take, plan to take or advise. Other documents are more specific, providing research results or more specific forms of advice regarding elements of relations.

A wide range of organisation types contribute. Northern-based organisations, ranging from consultancies and think tanks to NGO platforms, prominently contribute to the debate, providing problem analyses and future directions. Also NNGOs contribute, but they are not as much represented as one might expect given their central role in the issue. SNGOs are even less present, but those that are provide some of the bolder analyses and actions.

Problem analysis
Many documents primarily provide analyses of power relations, expressions of commitment to change and calls for change, commonly also providing organisation-level recommendations on how to collaborate differently. These analyses and recommendations address all the domains addressed in this report, ranging from unequal decision-making in policy to colonial language and stereotyping. Often the documents address change at the programmatic level. Some of these analyses address specific aspects of relations in brief articles or blogs, for example, speaking of staff diversity, mutual capacity strengthening, adjustment training to the local context, and creating space for Southern NGOs to influence decision-making. Being brief, these discussions are commonly generic in nature.

Other efforts are more extensive and concrete. For example, the Movement for Community-led Development provides an analysis of practice in this domain. It conceptualises community-led development and 'seeks to identify the current practice of CLD programming – its strengths and weaknesses – so that implementing organisations and funders can course-correct where needed' (Veda, 2021: 12). It provides a critical analysis of the lack of transparency when it comes to organisations' practices when it comes to the question of what makes programmes community-led. 'Accountability, sustainability, community-based monitoring or evaluation, and feedback loops are mostly missing from program and evaluation reports' the report states, adding that 'details about the nature of participation and facilitation or about adaptability are rarely available' (ibid: 11).

Principles and strategies
Directly connected with problem analysis is the identification of principles, often also translated into strategies. These are differentiated in line with the differentiation in problem analyses. Many analyses appear to remain within programme limits, speaking, for example of 'drawing on local capacity', 'meaningful participation', or 'equitable recruitment'. Questions of policy are, however, commonly woven into discussions. Documents often speak of partnership relations and accountabilities, typically addressed in terms of values. Reconsiderations of risks and how to handle these

are often discussed, as well as trust as the new basis for collaboration. Qualities like humility, listening, and learning are embraced as new elements of relating. Some qualifying comments can be made here though. Such assertions generally constitute calls to action for others or the development sector more broadly. NNGOs holding much of the power over SNGOs are hardly present as speakers redefining their own futures.

Also funding is commonly woven into the analyses, as a key feature of transformed relations, with the power of catalysing further transformation. Documents recognise that funding relations can define decision-making power for SNGOs, and discuss it primarily in terms of adjustment of requirements for SNGOs, while aiming for transformed relations through changed funding practices. To facilitate the leadership of SNGOs, funding should be more flexible, more accessible, more long-term, less restricted, and with less administrative work. An example is a tool for assessing community-led-development practice offered by the Movement for Community-Led Development, discussed above (The Movement for Community-Led Development, n.d.). Concrete discussions of percentages of funding that should go to SNGOs are, however, never mentioned, and implications for the roles of NNGOs addressing their future relevance and added value are hardly addressed.

Many documents addressing principles and strategies are brief articles, offering mostly general discussions, with occasionally also some detail. An example is an article by development consultancy Humentum on 'equitable development through operating models', which promotes practices like 'prioritize investment in the professional development of local staff' and 'commit to and require full and fair coverage of project-associated administration costs' (Kucinskas, 2022). Some documents are more extensive, as with Trócaire, an NNGO that published its 'partnership and localisation strategy'. This document provides specific objectives and actions, with the aim to 'increase voice and influence of local and national partners in key spaces nationally and internationally' committing to 'facilitate local actors to actively participate in coordination and decision-making spaces, acquire agency and leadership in these spaces, and influence policies and practices within the sector', specifying also specific actions towards this (Trócaire, 2021).

Another example is of peacebuilding and conflict prevention NNGO GPPAC, which provides a document offering three principles for partnerships, that reflect collective priority-setting and co-design of programming and encourage continuous reflection and adaptation. GPPAC also offers more detailed discussions addressing how to transform intermediary roles, zooming in on financing mechanisms that centre on partners and their needs and agency (Kantowitz, 2021).

NPC, which describes itself as a 'charity think tank and consultancy' offers foundations extensive guidelines for how to deal with power. The guidelines promote such aspects as understanding one's power, using innovative approaches like participatory grant making, trust-based philanthropy, place-based funding and redesigning application and reporting processes. It speaks of sharing power, building collective power, and wielding power to benefit the sector or a cause. Discussion of how to do this is included, urging funders, for example, to 'understand who is and who isn't applying', and 'give multi-year, unrestricted funding' (Asif, 2020).

A final example is of NGO platform Accountable Now. In varied documents, it presents its approach titled 'Dynamic Accountability', which 'make a whole organisation's way of working adaptive to these stakeholders' needs'. It is described as transformative and as 'a systemic approach to CSO accountability that is grounded in processes of meaningful engagement with all stakeholders that are inclusive, participatory and continuously practiced', thus seeking to shift power in relations between CSOs and their stakeholders (Baranda & Büchner, 2019).

Documents commonly assert a transformative aim, stressing, for example, principles of equity and communities in the lead, and a more facilitative role for NNGOs. This happens also while keeping the discussion often within the bounds of programming. However, in many cases the degree of transformative aim is ambiguous, as discussions seek to provide general recommendations on, for example, what types of funding are advisable (e.g. flexible, unrestricted), how to relate to partners (e.g. 'as equals'), without necessarily calling an end to the 'fundermediary' role of NNGOs. An exception here is Just Associates (JASS), which describes itself as an ' international feminist movement support organisation rooted in the Global South'. JASS seeks to transform civil society collaboration through recentring movements and addresses power in many of its communications on its websites in more challenging terms. Funding is an important theme here. For example, JASS calls for funders to 'be imaginative and expansive about what and how long you fund', 'fund movement infrastructures', and 'think of philanthropy as a redistribution of resources to communities to which it belongs' (Just Associates, n.d.).

Reports on actions and their effects

Very few documents report on concrete actions changing power relations. Those that do tend to centre on specific aspects, generally remaining within programmatic limits. Some are small-scale and indirect, for example reporting on courses or workshops about accountability, capacity strengthening or financing mechanisms, often including lessons learnt, reflections, and recommendations. Some documents are brief articles, as with a blog reporting about capacity strengthening as part of exit strategies, supporting SNGOs to take over NNGO-administered programmes (Lemma & Morris, 2022).

A few documents are more extensive, as with a report on mutual capacity strengthening by consultancy INTRAC and NNGO Pax. This report illustrates the transformative quality of joint learning for relations, and charts lessons regarding, e.g., the political dimensions of shared learning,

and what it takes in terms of commitment and form (Morris & Hoogenboom, 2022).

An exception of an action at policy level is the Local Coalition Accelerator (LCA), an initiative of NNGO the Share Trust and the Warande Advisory Centre, a consultancy in Kenya. The LCA involves supporting 'coalitions of local actors who can effectively co-design and implement holistic, evidence-based programming at scale to address systemic, multi-sectoral problems', and consolidating individual organisations into joint platforms that bilaterals can fund, thus supporting their development as recipients of direct funding (The Share Trust, n.d.).

Only one report provided analyses of effects of actions. A study commissioned by Both ENDS and DOB Ecology analysed the functioning and effectiveness of small grants funds - which are seen as a way of redressing 'power imbalances [...] by strengthening disempowered groups so they can regain power and control over their own lives and simultaneously create space to challenge existing power structures'. The report shows how small grants contribute to success at the level of organisations and networks, speaking of building of organisations and their capacity, self-esteem, recognition, decision-making power and engagement in, and creation of, larger networks or movements. Impact in society reported in the study is anecdotal, and the authors discuss measurement challenges and the need for realistic indicators (Kraan & Wensing, 2019).

Conclusion

Most of the documents involve problem analysis and strategy development regarding programming. They mostly do so from Northern perspectives, be it that NNGOs are less prominently present in the documents shared through the survey than consultancies, think tanks, and platforms. Some documents do address policy, and SNGOs appear to be relatively strongly represented in these. Financial dependence and restricted funding are key topics in many of the documents, but this theme is mostly woven into broader discus-

sions addressing programming and policy, keeping away from discussions of more fundamental funding transformations.

Across the board then, shifting power is embraced, but this appears to lead to varied degrees of reconsideration of relations and practices. On specific themes, concrete directions and lessons learnt are provided. However, concrete actions to shift power are barely reported or assessed. Thus, while it appears that NNGOs are actively engaging with the issue, transparency is lacking. Importantly, transformative and encouraging exemplars are scarce and seem to be more easily found with other actors than NNGOs. More broadly, documents by and large remain silent on questions sensitive to NNGOs, regarding their continued role, relevance, and funding base. Colonial language and stereotyping are rarely mentioned. At the same time, Northern actors, frequently speak of a need for new values of humility and trust on their part. This does indicate that some form of transformation in culture and identity is recognised to be overdue – without, as yet, fully envisioning implications.

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