

## EXPLORING POWER IN INTERNATIONAL AID RELATIONS

### Note 3: An invitation for reflection on your organisation's practices-January 2023

**Who is invited to reflect?** Any aid-funded organisation that collaborates with another for a particular goal or objective (of a programme or project), particularly when it provides the other also with money. This can be an international but also a national organisation. The invitation is to those who make key decisions in that collaborative process: that may be programme managers, but reflection is also invited from directors and members of the Board/Conseil d'administration, to consider what the dominant practice is of their organisation.

**How to reflect?** You can do this individually but better as a team. In the latter case, let each team member answer the questions first individually, then bring your answers together and compare. Later, invite the agencies you have given funding to in a collaborative arrangement to also reflect and share their perspective.

#### Power and its sources:

There are different types of power but here we focus on 'power over' another agency, or 'power with' another. Reflect also on the notion of one 'empowering' the other.

Remember there are many different sources of power (Note 1 on power literacy). Common ones are:

- Might: the ability to threaten or use violence.
- A formal position of authority that can punish or reward.
- Material or economic resources: possession/control of land, money, property, jewelry, gold, but also means of transport, means of communication etc.
- Control over information and the knowledge people can access, including but not limited to formal educational opportunities. This includes familiarity with the language spoken, but also with the particular specialised language (and acronyms) around a certain topic.
- Inherited or acquired social rank and status: The social status of the family we were born into; the colour of our skin; what formal educational level we achieved or where we studied; the wealth we accumulated, the status symbols we can buy with it, and the connections it enabled us to make.
- Connections, networks, memberships: Who you know and have access to; what network or union or movement you are a member of.
- Self-esteem and self-confidence: based on psychological and/or physical strength.
- Strong negative emotions: Impatience, anger, outrage, hate, loathing of certain others
- Control over people's bodies and labour: What they can and must do with their bodies (dress, overall look, mobility, sexuality etc.) and the work they can and must do, and the terms and conditions for both.

Remember that power can be exercised in a very visible way but can also be hidden or invisible. (Note 1 on power literacy). Power manifest itself also in who can participate in the spaces where key decisions are discussed and made: Are these spaces closed to important stakeholders; can key stakeholders access them by invitation only; or do they have to demand access or create their own spaces? Such spaces can be interagency spaces, but also spaces within your own organisation.

	In your common practice, are you using mostly 'power over' or 'power with'?	What are the sources of power/authority you are using here? (consider other sources than your control of money)	What makes your behaviour here a responsible use of authority – when would it be abuse of power/authority?
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ASSESSING AND SELECTING AN AGENCY TO COLLABORATE WITH</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We look for other agencies to complement the work of our own agency, where we cannot or do not want to do certain types of work ourselves.</li> <li>2. We look for other agencies whose work we can complement and strengthen/reinforce.</li> <li>3. When collaborating with other agencies, we tend to focus on the risk, more than on the opportunity of collaborating.</li> <li>4. When assessing another agency as potential collaborator, we assess more their weaknesses than their strengths, or their as yet unfulfilled potential.</li> <li>5. We invite the other agency to also assess us in a serious manner.</li> </ol>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ENTERING INTO A FORMAL AGREEMENT (MoU; contract)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We never add clauses and conditions to our formal collaboration agreements, beyond what our own donors require from us.</li> <li>2. Our formal agreements contain multiple clauses to protect our own agency, and few or none to protect the one that enters into agreement with us.</li> <li>3. Our formal agreements contain clauses not only on how we commit to manage the work together, but also how we handle the quality of our collaborative relationship.</li> <li>4. In our formal agreements, a court of arbitration is always in our home country.</li> </ol>			

<p><b>IMPLEMENTING A PROJECT OR PROGRAMME</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The conceptualization, design and planning with objectives, time frames and budgets is generally done by us, not fully together with the collaborating agency.</li> <li>2. We generally have in-depth conversations with a collaborating agency to identify the various possible risks for each of us, and how we can share those risks.</li> <li>3. The amount and details of the budget provided to the collaborating agency is largely decided by us.</li> <li>4. We normally do not provide or share our management fee with the collaborating agency.</li> <li>5. We tend to be more critical of the collaborating agency when they have delays, than of ourselves when we experience delays.</li> </ol>			
<p><b>RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We see the collaborating agency as partnering with us, more than we being a partner to them.</li> <li>2. We normally share the full budget with our collaborating agency, including what will cover our own expenses.</li> <li>3. In our collaboration, if the local agency has another working language than ours, both working languages can be used. If needed, we will pay for an interpreter.</li> <li>4. We normally go to the office of our collaborating agency, and try to adapt to their availabilities.</li> <li>5. We are conscious of the power inequalities and the possible fear and self-censorship this may create in our collaborators and make this an explicit conversation point as part of our relationship management.</li> </ol>			
<p><b>CAPACITY-SUPPORT &amp; JOINT LEARNING</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We generally speak in terms of us building the capacities of the collaborating agency, more than what we must and can learn from them.</li> <li>2. Helping local organisations become more financially sustainable is a regular part of the support we offer.</li> <li>3. We always set clear outcomes for our capacity-support, which we evaluate and hold ourselves accountable against.</li> </ol>			

<p>4. Our capacity-support is part of an explicit strategy towards the other agency taking over roles and responsibilities currently held by us.</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INTERACTION WITH DONORS</b></p> <p>1. Our proposals to donors generally portray the other agency as requiring our close oversight and capacity-development support.</p> <p>2. We have presented proposals to donors in which another agency had the lead and we mainly operating in a supporting role.</p> <p>3. We encourage donors and the agency we collaborate with to also have direct interactions. We always involve the collaborating agency in interactions with a donor.</p> <p>4. In our reports to donors, we truthfully communicate the contributions and achievements of the agency we collaborated with and give them full credit for their innovative ideas and approaches.</p>			
<p><b>INTERAGENCY COORDINATION AND POLICY SPACES</b></p> <p>1. Where we are present, it will be our staff who attend inter-agency meetings, not those of the agency we collaborate with.</p> <p>2. We believe that interagency coordination and policy discussion spaces in a particular country, need to be at least co-led by a national agency.</p> <p>3. We actively advocate for the inclusion of national and local actors in the international interagency spaces where humanitarian policies, standards and practices are discussed and decided.</p>			

**Anything that Needs to Change in your Organisational Practices?**

**What must you stop doing? What must you do less of? What must you do more of? What must you start doing that you have not done so far?**

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