



Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation

A practical resource for civil society, donors, INGOs and intermediaries



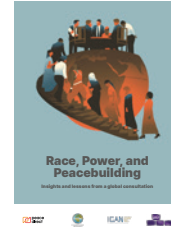
Decolonising the Sector

This is the third report in our series on decolonising the sector.



The first report, *Time to Decolonise Aid*, was published in May 2021 and can be downloaded here:

peacedirect.org/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/



The second report, *Race, Power and Peacebuilding*, was published in April 2022 and can be downloaded here:

peacedirect.org/publications/race-power-and-peacebuilding/

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Executive Summary

Partnerships between individuals and organisations in the Global North and Global South have become common practice in the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors. They aim to address critiques of international aid and development approaches by increasing local participation and ownership, and improving development outcomes.

Despite ongoing reform processes emphasising improved and equitable partnerships, many approaches still reflect neo-colonial hierarchies, undermining the value and dignity of local partners. More recent efforts to reform the sectors, including the Grand Bargain agreement,¹ the ‘localisation’ agenda and the ‘ShiftThePower’ movement,² have focused on the power imbalances between Global North donors, INGOs and intermediaries, and civil society actors in the Global South. In some parts of the sector, this has led to calls to decolonise international aid and development, and build more equitable partnerships.

In the second half of 2022, Peace Direct convened a global online consultation to discuss the issue of inequitable partnerships and how to decolonise them. Over 200 participants from 70 countries and across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors took part in the consultation and follow-up interviews. We are indebted to all those who shared their insights, stories and expert analysis.

Our findings presented in this paper build on our previous reports, *Time to Decolonise Aid* and *Race, Power and Peacebuilding*, which were published in 2021 and 2022, respectively. These reports highlighted the prevalence of systemic racism across the wider humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. Our aim for this report is to provide a series of accessible approaches to building and sustaining better partnerships between civil society actors in the Global South and Global North donors, INGOs and intermediaries.

Abbreviations

CSO

Civil Society Organisation

OECD

Organisation for Economic
Cooperation and Development

ICAN

International Civil Society Action
Network

P4D

Platform4Dialogue

INGO

International Non-Governmental
Organisation

SAS+

Stopping As Success

NGO

Non-Governmental Organisation

WPSO

Women and Peace Studies
Organization

¹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, ‘About the Grand Bargain’. Accessible via: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/node/40190>.

² Global Fund for Community Foundations, ‘Community Philanthropy and #ShiftThePower’. Accessible via: <https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/what-we-stand-for/shiftthepower/>.

Our findings include the following:

- Definitions:** The absence of clear a definition and understanding of partnerships – particularly ‘equitable partnerships’ and their guiding principles – means local organisations in the Global South do not have clarity on the motivations of Global North actors. This ambiguity has led many participants to perceive that Global North actors are primarily seeking subcontractors in the Global South who can simply implement projects or programmes designed externally, rather than fostering genuine collaboration and partnership within the local context.
- Transactional:** A considerable portion of the funding in the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors is highly transactional in nature. Donors, and by extension many INGOs, tend to prioritise short-term activities aimed at achieving specific project objectives, rather than the long-term transformation of communities and societies. This leads to partnerships themselves becoming an instrument for the delivery of outputs, rather than being mutually beneficial and transformative, both for the partners and for the communities they serve.
- Neo-colonial:** Many Global North actors continue to hold neo-colonial attitudes that have not been acknowledged or even recognised. This is seen by Global South actors as one reason for the failure of Global North actors to develop equitable partnerships. This is compounded by the reluctance of Global South actors to raise these issues for fear of losing funding. These attitudes and behaviours undermine any prospect for more equitable partnerships.
- Power:** Local actors believe that Global North donors and INGOs actively avoid addressing the power imbalances in their relationships with Global South organisations. This reluctance is attributed to Global North actors’ desire to preserve their own power, a deliberate ignorance of existing power imbalances, an inability to envision a world without their influence, or a lack of skills and experience in engaging in discussions about power.
- Reimagine:** Local actors continue to see partnerships with Global North actors as desirable, but participants emphasised that partnerships cannot continue as they are currently conceived. Instead, they need to be reimaged and transformed.
- Values:** Trust, humility, respect, and mutuality/reciprocity emerged as the foundational values for ‘decolonised partnerships’, with participants highlighting their importance in building relationships and achieving meaningful outcomes. Key behaviours outlined included mutual accountability and responsibility, clear communication, co-creation, shared vision and purpose, and respecting each other’s contributions.
- Mindsets:** A crucial building block towards more decolonised and equitable partnerships involves challenging and changing current mindsets and worldviews, both among Global North and Global South actors. This includes addressing racism, elitism, and other harmful attitudes when viewing Global South actors and communities, as well as recognising and reflecting on power and privilege in the partnership itself.

Recommendations

Many recommendations emerged from the consultation and the full list is included from page 25 onwards. Here, we have selected a few key recommendations for each aspect of decolonising partnerships. The key below indicates which group the recommendation is aimed at. The recommendations highlighted as ‘both Global North and Global South actors’ are applicable to both groups, while the ‘joint’ recommendations should be undertaken *together*.

Changing mindsets and worldviews

- GS** Allocate time with your staff to share alternative narratives that challenge dominant discourses and perspectives in international development.
- GN** Encourage an internal culture of openness to critique by encouraging Senior Leadership to hold difficult conversations about racism and power imbalances both internally and externally.
- Both** Educate yourself. Learn how the current international system of cooperation has been influenced by Global North thinking. Learn about how Global North actors have directly and indirectly imposed their ways of thinking across the international humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors.
- Joint** Explore together, through a facilitated conversation, differences and similarities in ideologies and motivations underpinning concepts such as ‘development’. By promoting mutual learning and recognising the value of diverse knowledge systems, you can challenge the notion that expertise solely resides in the Global North.

Vision, purpose and goal setting

- Both** Identify what partnership principles and behaviours matter to you most. Codify and share these with prospective partners.
- Both** Define what you mean by partnership, and critically assess *why* you want to establish a partnership.
- Joint** Co-create a vision document that outlines the aims/purpose of the partnership, distinct from project funding.

Communication and language

- GN** Practice active listening in conversations with your partner, paying close attention to what they may not be telling you.
- Both** Practice communication techniques to clearly express your perspectives, needs, and concerns in partnerships. This includes educating yourself around cultural norms in communication and taking these into account when communicating with partners from other countries.
- Joint** Agree on how to cultivate a safe space in which difficult issues can be raised without fear of retribution or defensiveness.

Key

- GS** Global South actors
- GN** Global North actors
- Both** For both Global North and Global South actors
- Joint** Joint recommendations, to be undertaken together

Practice

Roles and responsibilities

- GS** Use approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry to identify your organisational strengths and assets, rather than gaps, in order to help inform the roles and responsibilities that you should take.
- GN** Unlearn assumptions about who holds technical expertise and what technical expertise is. Reflect on how much of your work is focused on technical vs transformative outcomes.
- Joint** Commit to reassessing how roles and responsibilities will shift over time, in particular how any role assigned to the Global North partner should diminish.

Programme design

- GS** Build inception phases into projects to enable the project design to be 'stress tested' in communities and then adapted following feedback.
- GN** Ensure that project/programme design is led by the Global South partner and agree how they can challenge and/or refuse any imposition of ideas and activities.
- Both** Unlearn any prejudice you might hold about the value of indigenous knowledge.
- Joint** Review programme documentation together, before sign-off, to minimise the risk of any misunderstandings.

Budgeting

- Both** Build in emergency or contingency funds into budgets to enable you to adapt quickly to any rapid change in the context.
- Both** Recognise how budget discussions are often the most obvious manifestation of Global North control over their partners. Global South partners should call out such behaviours if they observe this, and Global North partners should train staff to be alert to the ways that this might show up in their work.
- Both** Build in costs that support strengthening the partnership, for example a yearly in-person meeting to review the health of the partnership.

Funding

- GS** Identify funding and in-kind contributions from your own communities and constituents.
- GN** Analyse how your funding may have created dependency among your partners and develop a strategy to counter this.
- GN** Provide direct, unrestricted and/or multi-year funding to foster trust, adaptability and sustainability in partnerships. If unrestricted funding is not possible, provide flexible funding to allow partners to navigate changing contexts and plan for the long term.
- Joint** Regularly share updates on your fundraising efforts, to build a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that both parties face.

Key

- GS** Global South actors
- GN** Global North actors
- Both** For both Global North and Global South actors
- Joint** Joint recommendations, to be undertaken together

Non-funding support

- GS** Identify the stakeholders and spaces that you would like to access and which partners could support you.
- GN** Build in additional staff time to implement non-financial methods of support, such as advocating for your partner in Global North spaces and events or supporting your partner to advocate directly in those spaces.
- Joint** Explore together the opportunities for different non-financial aspects of support, for example opportunities for joint advocacy, engaging with networks, promoting each other's work and so on.

Partnership duration and transition

- Both** Share openly your partnership aspirations and how such plans contribute to your strategy and mission.
- Joint** Discuss how and under what conditions the partnership will transition, including an eventual exit.
- Joint** Build in review periods that allow both sides to critically reflect on whether the transition plans need to be adjusted in any way.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

- GS** Identify what you and your communities consider success in your work/activities and use this as the basis for programme design and learning.
- GN** Be prepared to rethink and scrap your existing MEL approaches, such as logical frameworks.
- Joint** Build in regular learning exchanges, ideally once a quarter or every six months.

Organisational development

- GS** Identify and assert your own technical, contextual and social capacities/expertise before analysing gaps.
- GN** Stress-test your assumptions about the added value of your expertise by inviting your partners to assess the value they place on these skills.
- Joint** Share and discuss your organisational strategies together, using this as the basis for organisational development discussions.

Key

- GS** Global South actors
- GN** Global North actors
- Both** For both Global North and Global South actors
- Joint** Joint recommendations, to be undertaken together

Accountability

- GS** Develop mechanisms to ensure that your organisation is accountable to the communities and constituents you serve. Not only is this vital to ensure the best outcomes for communities; it also addresses a common criticism by Global North organisations of local CSOs that they lack ‘downward accountability’.
- GN** Unlearn harmful established approaches to accountability, which place reporting to you and your donors as the most important measure of accountability.
- Joint** Agree jointly how you intend to be accountable to each other, including behaviours and values.

Financial sustainability

- GS** Explore ways to generate non-grant income, such as setting up a small commercial enterprise, advisory services or fundraising from your own community. Share these with your partner.
- GN** Consider carefully the extent to which your business model relies on the existing framing of your organisation as the ‘technical expert’ and consider ways that your financial sustainability does not continue to depend on such a model.
- Joint** Agree milestones for the financial health of your respective organisations.

Check-ins

- GN** Build in staff time and budgets to allow staff to cultivate meaningful check-ins, including in-person meetings.
- Both** Ensure that check-ins do not focus just on programme/project delivery, but also focus on the health of the partnership.
- Joint** Practice how to give and receive difficult/challenging feedback, including agreeing in advance how tensions and disagreements will be handled by both parties.

Key

- GS** Global South actors
- GN** Global North actors
- Both** For both Global North and Global South actors
- Joint** Joint recommendations, to be undertaken together

Introduction

Partnerships between individuals and organisations in the ‘Global North’ and those in the ‘Global South’ have increasingly become common practice in programme delivery across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors. Partly responding to past critiques of international aid and development approaches,³ partnerships are seen as effective ways to increase local participation and ownership, and improve development outcomes.

Reform processes in international aid and development have been ongoing for over twenty years, with many of them emphasising the need for improved and more equitable partnerships. Yet, despite the lofty commitments and positive rhetoric, it has increasingly become apparent that many approaches are still rooted in neo-colonial hierarchies that fail to recognise the value, agency and dignity of those partners with less power.

Recent efforts to reform the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors has led donors, policymakers and international NGOs (INGOs) to begin rethinking the assumptions and practices underpinning partnerships between Global North and Global South actors. A particular focus has been the relationships between indigenous civil society actors in the Global South (commonly described as ‘local actors’) and Global North donors, INGOs and intermediaries, some of whom have a physical presence in the country of operation. It is between these two groups of stakeholders that power imbalances appear to be most pronounced and most in need of reform.

Recent initiatives or change processes that have shed light on the need to improve partnerships include the **Grand Bargain agreement** and the ‘localisation’ agenda, the growing **‘ShiftThePower’** movement and the calls to ‘decolonise’ aid and international cooperation. All of these change processes place greater emphasis on the need for equitable partnerships between Global North donors or INGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the Global South.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a series of accessible approaches to building and sustaining better partnerships between civil society actors in the Global South and Global North donors, INGOs and intermediaries. The paper does not explore relationships between Global North governments or funders and INGOs, those between different types of Global South entities, such as between the state and civil society, civil society to civil society, or between civil society and the private sector. However, we hope that the principles and approaches outlined in this paper might have relevance to other organisations and individuals seeking to establish meaningful partnerships, whether national or international.

³ The critiques often focused on how past international interventions were unilateral, top-down and northern-driven in approach, and dismissed the importance of local participation. See Francine Menashy, *International Aid to Education: Power Dynamics in an Era of Partnership*, New York: Teachers College Press (2019). Available at: <https://www.tcpres.com/international-aid-to-education-9780807761816>.

By focusing on the relationship between actors in the Global North and civil society in the Global South, we recognise that we are reinforcing the North-South binary that is often discussed and rightly criticised for giving the impression that the most important set of relationships that Global South actors can forge are those with organisations in the Global North. We do not believe this to be case, nor is it our experience that Global South CSOs only want Global North partners. However, we are also aware that, with the huge disparity in financial resources between Global North and Global South actors, partnerships between these two sets of stakeholders could be transformational for communities.

A note on terminology

In this report, Peace Direct has used the term ‘systemic racism’ to refer to the totality of ways in which racism is present in the sector. We are aware of the current debates around whether it is more appropriate to use ‘systemic racism’ or ‘structural racism’. After careful discussion, we have chosen to use the term ‘systemic racism’ to refer to the creation and perpetuation of racial disparities through structures, institutions and personal beliefs and attitudes. We use the term structural racism to refer to the policies, laws and practices within the sector that perpetuate racial inequalities.

We have also chosen to use the terms ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ while recognising that these terms are highly contested and not optimal. The terms grew in popularity following growing critiques of the term ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries’. In the absence of clear and adequate alternatives, we use the terms ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ in this paper to delineate individuals and entities operating in different contexts across the humanitarian, peacebuilding and development sectors.

It is important to note that the terms ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ are generalisations and do not capture the full complexity and diversity within and between countries. They are used as shorthand to highlight structural imbalances and power differentials in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. Finally, and crucially, ‘Global South’ is not always reflective of the hemispheric South.

Methodology

The findings and analysis in this report are based on a series of online consultations held during October and November 2022. These took the form of discussions using Peace Direct's online portal, [Platform4Dialogue \(P4D\)](#), supplemented by three focus group discussions and 16 semi-structured interviews held on Zoom, as well as a public survey on funding recommendations for Global South actors, which received nearly 300 responses.

Over 200 participants, spanning 6 continents and 70 countries, explored the unequal power dynamics underpinning partnerships in the sector and identified practical pathways to decolonise international cooperation. All quotes used in this report came from the aforementioned consultations and their publication was consented to by participants; some quotes were modified for clarity and length. We are deeply grateful to all those who shared their insights, stories and expert analysis.

Our findings build on our two previous reports, [Time to Decolonise Aid](#) and [Race, Power and Peacebuilding](#), which were published in May 2021 and April 2022, respectively. These reports highlighted the prevalence of systemic racism across the wider humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors.

Peace Direct acknowledges the concerns about reproducing the forms of coloniality we are attempting to dismantle. Therefore, at each stage of the process we consulted an advisory group made up of four local practitioners from across the globe. Additionally, Peace Direct is sensitive to producing another written report in a format suited to Global North actors and is therefore exploring alternative methods to communicate its contents.

Throughout the research and writing process, we aimed to be reflexive and centre the perspectives and experiences of practitioners based in the Global South. While we understand that writing the research findings in a report format will continue the normalisation of report writing and undermine the decolonisation of research methodologies, we acknowledge that this format is preferred by funders, international practitioners and decision-makers, who are the primary audience for this report. Nevertheless, we do hope that the contents of this report will add to the growing literature on decolonising the wider sector and help make way for greater investment in indigenous research methodologies in peacebuilding. We also acknowledge the gap in any analysis on gender. Our research was closely focused on the framing of 'Global North vs Global South' rather than through an intersectional lens. While we acknowledge this limitation to our research, it is something we look to address in the future.

Part 1 Defining Key Partnership Principles

Our exploration into partnerships across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors began with a discussion on what we mean by ‘partnerships’ and the principles that underpin them. While donors, policymakers and organisations worldwide have long recognised the need for effective partnerships (see box: ‘Global partnership commitments over the years’), there is surprisingly little in official statements or commitments that provide a definition or conceptualisation of the underpinning principles.

At its core, a partnership is a relationship between at least two organisations with the aim to achieve a common goal.

In *Partnership Principles for cooperation between local, national and international civil society organisations*, CIVICUS and the International Civil Society Centre describe partnerships as: ‘... a powerful tool to achieve societal change. They help local and national CSOs to empower citizens to perform their civic rights and to ensure representation of local communities as well as local ownership of programmes. Moreover, partnerships create benefits on both sides if partners work equally empowered towards mutually agreed objectives. International CSOs have a better chance to achieve long-term effects with higher legitimacy if they engage in partnerships with local and national CSOs.’⁴

In our consultation and focus group discussions with practitioners, most participants had similar aspirations of partnerships and what they could deliver. Godwin Yidana saw partnerships as:

“a trusted, collaborative process in which actors with a shared vision and shared goals journey together in humility, openness, transparency, inclusiveness and equity towards meeting their shared goals.”

In a similar vein, Victor Okechukwu Chimezie defined partnerships as:

“merging skills, ideas and efforts to provide solutions to problems.”

Likewise, Balkis Chaabane said that:

“Personally, and from experience, partnership means leveraging the best of both worlds: the resources and capacity building/development skills that each side can offer to combine the best inputs for a fruitful, impactful outcome. However, a partnership is also about compatibility. It is important to share the mission, vision and values so that there would be no future clash.”

The idea of the need for compatibility in mission and values was one that was picked up by many participants in the consultation.

David Porter put it simply, that ‘partnership is actually caring for the person you are working with’, while Amani Jospin talked of a partnership being like a marriage in which both parties are committed for the long term with a relationship based on trust.

⁴ CIVICUS, International Civil Society Centre, ‘Partnership Principles: For Cooperation Between Local, National and International Civil Society’ (2014). Accessible via: <http://civicus.org/images/stories/Partnership%20Principles.pdf>.

Moise Msabwa provided an extensive set of values, behaviours and expectations that characterise a good partnership. Below is an edited and summarised version (translated from the original French):

- Establish trust at the outset of the partnership.
- Organise good mutual communication of successes and failures.
- Mutually have flexibility, self-sacrifice, hard work and motivation.
- To have a mutual or reciprocal commitment.
- To be mutually understanding.
- Mutually have a real desire to learn from each other.
- Creating a common vision for the partnership to support mutual accountability.
- Focus on mutual sustainability.
- Develop partnership accountability mechanisms during and after partnership.
- Mutually plan long-term reciprocal strategies.
- Mutual concern for improving each other's financial viability.
- Mutual culture of realism about the project in partnership.
- Mutual respect for communication channels.
- Reciprocally, share difficulties and challenges more urgently, not later.
- Support each other.
- Provide for a responsible mutual transition.
- Provide ongoing technical and advocacy support, formal or informal, after the transition.
- Be accountable to each other.

Comments from participants across the consultation revealed a strong alignment with Msabwa's list. Analysis of all the comments received from participants reveals four core values that emerged most frequently: trust, humility, respect and mutuality/reciprocity.

Trust: *"In order to add value and develop relationships, it is about building trust. How can we create the conditions to build mutual relationships between people where people are valued for what they bring in?"*

Amjad Saleem

"For any partnership to be successful, there has to be mutual trust."

Alicho Ogbu

Humility: *"Humility and courage are needed by all."*

John Coonrod

Respect: *"There are partnerships between international and local actors that are 'decolonised'. These are partnerships where international actors give latitude to local actors to define priorities according to real local needs, and who recognise their expertise on the local, and agree to establish a partnership based on mutual respect."*

Eric Ndayikengurutse (translated from the original French)

Mutuality and reciprocity: *"Mutual respect for all is the principal thing. A partnership without mutual trust cannot stand."*

Dennis Ekwere

In addition to the above four core values, there were other frequently cited values and behaviours. These include solidarity, transparency and complimentary, the latter being used interchangeably with mutuality and reciprocity.

Behaviours and actions that emerge from these four values included: being mutually accountable, having clear and respectful communication, co-creating partnerships, having a shared vision and purpose for the partnership, and respecting each other's contributions.

Together, these appear to be the bedrock of all meaningful, decolonised and equitable partnerships.

A note on decolonised partnerships

Participants of the 2020 global consultation for our *Time to Decolonise Aid* report discussed the emergence of the term ‘decolonising’ in the international humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. While the term was not in widespread use in 2020, participants found it a useful framing for discussing structural racism and neo-colonial attitudes and practices that were embedded in the sector and which were only starting to be acknowledged. The working definition of ‘decolonising’ used by Peace Direct in that consultation and in subsequent Peace Direct reports is the ‘deconstructing and dismantling of colonial-era and neo-colonial ideologies regarding the superiority of Western thought and approaches.’⁵

So, what of decolonised partnerships? Using the definition above, a decolonised partnership aims first to dismantle neo-colonial attitudes and practices that entrench power inequalities, undermine trust and erode the agency, independence and dignity of Global South actors. Only then can a partnership based on shared values be built. A decolonised partnership is, therefore, both an act of dismantling and rebuilding.

Equitable vs decolonised partnerships: is there a difference?

Most papers and reports on partnerships refer to equitable partnerships. While there is no universally agreed definition of equitable partnerships, one is ‘Partnerships in which there is mutual participation, mutual trust and respect, mutual benefit and equal value placed on each partners contribution.’⁶

So, is there a difference between an equitable partnership and a decolonised partnership? While it could be argued that all decolonised partnerships aspire to be equitable, at Peace Direct we do not believe that the term ‘equitable partnerships’ and ‘decolonised partnerships’ are interchangeable. In our view, Global North organisations who strive for equitable partnerships without examining and acknowledging existing neo-colonial attitudes and racism are likely to fail.

The current literature on equitable partnerships is almost completely lacking in any analysis of racism or even power. It is also debatable whether truly equitable partnerships are even possible, given the huge disparity in power and funding between Global North and Global South actors. Finally, as the participants discussed in our global consultation, one aim of decolonised partnerships should be a transfer of power to Global South actors. If equitable partnerships suggest a fair and equal division of power, then perhaps equitable partnerships are not necessarily the ambition of many Global South activists.

For the purposes of this paper, we have decided to refer to both ‘decolonised and equitable’ partnerships as a way of reflecting the importance of examining racism and power which is otherwise absent in discussions on equitable partnerships.

⁵ Peace Direct, ‘Time to Decolonise Aid: Lessons from a global consultation’ (2021). Accessible via: <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/>.

⁶ UKCDR, ‘Equitable Partnerships.’ Accessible via: <https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/equitable-partnerships/#:~:text=Whilst%20there%20is%20no%20agreed,stages%20of%20the%20research%20process.>

Global partnership commitments over the years

For decades, a model of direct implementation by Global North actors was the dominant approach across much of the international humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors. Communities and CSOs in the Global South were viewed largely as ‘beneficiaries’ of programmes led by the Global North, or – at best – conduits to enable humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts to reach particular groups. Nevertheless, the need for effective partnerships between Global North and Global South actors has been recognised for at least twenty years:

- The World Summit for Social Development (1995) refers to building a ‘culture of cooperation and partnership, to respond to the immediate needs of those who are most affected by human distress’.
- The Rome Declaration on Aid Harmonisation (2003) refers to the need to ‘forge stronger partnerships... to improve the policy relevance, quality, delivery, and efficiency’.
- The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) refers to donors and ‘partners’ being mutually accountable for development results.
- The Accra Agenda (2008) refers to ‘inclusive partnerships’ where ‘All partners – including donors in the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD] Development Assistance Committee and developing countries, as well as other donors, foundations and civil society – participate fully’.
- The Istanbul Principles on development effectiveness (2010) included a commitment to ‘pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity.’
- The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (2011) included a focus on ‘Partnerships for development’ where ‘Development depends on the participation of all actors, and also recognises the diversity and complementarity of their functions’.
- ‘The Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation’ was launched in 2012 and includes an emphasis on building better, more inclusive partnerships.
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were launched in 2016, with SDG17 focusing on, among other things, partnerships required to achieve all the SDGs.
- The Grand Bargain (2016) committed donors to ‘engage with local and national responders in a spirit of partnership and aim to reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities.’
- The OECD recommendation on enabling civil society (2021) is the first official OECD commitment focusing on the need for donors to engage meaningfully with civil society.

Despite these commitments, the nature and shape of most partnerships between Global North and South actors has remained largely unchanged.

Part 2 Partnerships: Where Did They Go Wrong?

As Part 1 explored what partnerships between Global North and Global South actors should look like, it is important to examine why these widely recognised aspirations have not been met.

1. A problem of definition

Consultation participants pointed to a common problem in the wider system: the lack of a definition or description of what partnerships are, and in particular ‘equitable partnerships’, which is a term most often used in donor and INGO statements.

Participants highlighted the array of commitments made by donors and INGOs regarding ‘equitable partnerships’, most of which lacked any explanation of what this means in practice. The lack of a definition has led many participants to believe what Global North actors really want is a sub-contractor to implement a project or programme designed by those outside the context. Calling this a partnership, in their view, is disingenuous.

If true partnerships are like marriages, remarked participant Tomas Serna, then perhaps what Global North actors really want is an ‘occasional relationship’. The lack of honesty in communicating what Global North actors really want was seen by participants in the consultation as contributing to the erosion of trust between Global North and Global South actors.

Themrise Khan noted that the Global North:

“...never designed the parameters of what partnership actually entailed. Would it be a 50/50 division of financial and/or human resources? Would it mean equal decision-making? None of this was ever laid out.”

She continued:

“In my experience, international agencies all view partnership in the same way. As a form of continuing to exert control of the issue or resource by bringing in the ‘partner’ when needed for photo ops or glossy reports.”

Marijke Priester built on this point by arguing that:

“The concept of ‘partner’ is one of the most misused concepts in international development, because so many partnerships in this field are still built on inequality.”

2. Transactional and technical vs transformational

Another reason that most partnerships between Global North and Global South actors fail to meet the aspirations of the Global South partner is the transactional nature of so much of the funding awarded in international development, humanitarian intervention and peacebuilding. Donors, and by extension many INGOs, focus on short-term inputs and outputs, to meet specific project targets, rather than the long-term transformation of communities and societies. Therefore, while Global North organisations may talk a good talk about partnerships, what they often really want is a local delivery mechanism. Godwin Yidana, noted during the consultation:

“Most aid organisations that I have dealt with are often more focused on programmatic inputs and outputs. They focus a lot on results and not the journey. Whereas most local actors in development and peacebuilding tend to focus more on the journey and long-term effects rather than quick fixes.”

The above comment, and others throughout the consultation, point to a fundamental mismatch between what many Global North actors want (i.e., a service delivery partner to meet certain short-term outputs, with the Global North partner assuming the role of donor) and what Global South actors want (i.e., a genuine long-term partnership in which both parties will learn together).

The ‘projectisation’ of the international development system is widely acknowledged and has led to a proliferation of transactional relationships which undermine the prospect of genuine partnerships. It has also led to a gross simplification of the roles that Global North and Global South actors play, with Global South actors relegated to ‘implementing partners’. Clara Pergola noted that, at best, partnerships:

“are envisioned as only a complementary expertise that is ‘global technical expertise’ + ‘local context knowledge’. It can seem a very simplified way to describe global-local partnerships but in practice it is how it looks like most of the time and is even displayed and described like this. It therefore assumes that local actors do not have technical expertise, which is of course far from being true.”

The tendency of Global North actors to focus on transactional relationships based on project funding and outdated conceptions of the transfer of technical knowledge from the Global North to South damage the prospects of genuine equitable partnerships and transformative social change.

As Christiane Essombe commented:

“I can only speak for aid and development where approaches to partnership were generally quite similar: 1. transactional/tokenistic (i.e., power dynamics remained unchallenged), 2. dismissive of local expertise, interests and knowledge.”

Gerhard Buttner added:

“As an INGO with partnership central to our approach and actively trying to engage and advance on decolonisation efforts, partnerships are not just technical relationships set up to deliver a project.”

3. Racism and neo-colonialism

A third explanation for why international partnerships have failed is that Global North actors have deeply held neo-colonial attitudes, which haven't been acknowledged or even recognised by most of those actors. These attitudes, outlined in Peace Direct's *Time to Decolonise Aid* report, undermine any prospect of meaningful, equitable partnerships.

As Sara Torrelles Vives noted:

"For too long 'internationals' have assumed that they have something 'invaluable' to bring to the table and that without them (us) everything would work differently (sometimes used as a euphemism to refer to inefficiently). Not only are those assumptions racist, but they are based on ideas and perceptions that are deeply rooted in colonialist and patriarchal mindsets, which unfortunately permeate the sector to this day."

In a follow-up interview, Christiane Essombe went further, suggesting that:

"[...] there ought to be an understanding that international actors are not doing a favour or 'helping' but instead contributing to addressing an issue that they are not immune to themselves, given how interconnected the contemporary world is. [...] with respect to money and donors, I believe it is high time to decolonise that concept. The aid sector should question how that capital was accumulated in the first place and which racist colonial hierarchies it still funds to this day. Having that genealogy outlined is critical for an informed use of that capital and the establishment of mutually beneficial relations between all actors."

Global South actors have also been reluctant to raise the issue of neo-colonialism and systemic racism for fear of losing funding and risking being seen as troublemaker. As Aicha Madi noted, that compounds the impact on those who do speak up:

"I think that if only a few local actors and small organisations report and criticise the problem of neo-colonisation in the international aid sector, they risk being blacklisted and won't have the opportunity to get funding and do their important work on the ground."

4. Power: the hidden dimension in partnerships

The final common thread running through our consultation was the issue of power, and the maintenance of it by actors in the Global North:

“Partnerships from the Global North are seen as one-way and there is a power dynamic and differential that we cannot escape.”

Amjad Saleem

“Partnerships should recognise power dynamics and take the necessary steps to not further entrench nor abuse those dynamics.”

Rehema Mussanzi

“I don’t think partnership really exists (or rarely to be fair) in the world of aid as one is giving [...] and another is receiving whatever is offered, therefore they are not equal. One has much more power than the other, and with power might come conditions, imposed demands and sometimes abuse or exploitation.”

Sawssan Abou-Zahr

“What sort of partnership is it when donors of the Global North sit there because they have the funds, decide and design programming, bring the model of the programming to the Global South, without any contribution at this phase from the Global South. Then call for grant applications, select and execute the foreign customised programming in partnership with NGOs in the Global South with partnership MoUs [memorandums of understanding] and call it a partnership? That’s how partnerships have been so colonised in Africa.”

Dennis Ekwere

“Partnerships should not be used to normalise or maintain historical asymmetrical power relations where one party is constantly favoured or has access to more leverage than the other. Doing so in aid and peacebuilding does little more than tokenising and instrumentalising usually parties from (formerly) colonised spaces to push a western vision that can be one-sided, western-centric, inconsiderate of local perspectives and ultimately disempowering since it does not always acknowledge the local knowledge and expertise.”

Christiane Essombe

The hidden dimension of power and specifically power inequalities, between Global North and Global South actors – which is closely linked to the general reluctance of Global North actors to discuss structural racism and neo-colonial attitudes – was seen as a major barrier in the pursuit of more equitable and decolonised partnerships. It is the elephant in the room. Global North actors rarely talk about the power that they hold, even if it is abundantly clear to those around them.

Power is infused in all aspects of a partnership, from how we communicate, how and when decisions are made and in the day-to-day processes and activities that govern partnerships, including budgeting, programme design, assigning roles and responsibilities, reporting, learning and project/partnership transitions.

Why have Global North organisations been reluctant to talk about their power?

Participants suggested that the reluctance to discuss power and power imbalances has four main roots. First, many donors and INGOs in the Global North wish to maintain their power. As one anonymous participant noted:

“I think it’s all skewed to maintain the power of larger middleman INGOs. There are no equal partnerships when it comes to local and global partners. This partnership conversation is geared towards suppressing local partners to the context as opposed to allowing them to access international platforms out of the fear of disrupting the status quo.”

Looking through this lens, partnerships will continue to be unequal because Global North actors have designed the system in that way. Self-preservation by retaining power, influence and funding are all reasons participants suggested the Global North may have for maintaining the status quo.

A second explanation is that Global North actors are wilfully ignorant of the neo-colonial attitudes that they hold and that perpetuate stereotypes about the ‘capacity’ of local communities and actors, who are still perceived as in need of ‘saving’. As Christiane Essombe explained, this perception:

“Ultimately reinforces the narrative according in which aid and salvation can only come either from the West, westernised folks or a westernisation of systems and processes.”

This paternalism and racism, which was covered extensively in *Time to Decolonise Aid*, depicts Global South actors as incapable of leading their own development without external support. What’s more, continued perceptions of Global South actors as ‘learners’ rather than ‘experts’ is exacerbated by the narratives spread through problematic storytelling and representation within the sector. This allows for the legitimisation of intermediary (and micromanaging) Global North actors, who need to hold onto power, as to share it would allegedly risk programme funds, reputation, and programme outputs.

A third explanation is that INGOs in particular cannot imagine a world in which they are not needed. This failure of imagination allows the Global North actors to perpetuate the myth that they need to continue to exert a dominant role in the sector in order to continue to save lives. But, as Sawssan Abou-Zahr highlighted in our consultation:

“Local actors know the needs of their communities best; they should be heard, and more importantly respected. They don’t need to be rescued by international superheroes, they just need a space to perform and advocate their rights.”

A final explanation is that Global North actors lack the skills and experience to talk about power. In previous global consultations held by Peace Direct, participants have noted that the increasingly contested term ‘capacity-building’ also applies to Global North actors, who lack the capacity to analyse their own power and privilege. In a sector where Global North actors are only slowly coming to terms with the harm they may have caused in the pursuit of ‘doing good’, reflecting on how power is held and maintained, consciously and unconsciously, appears to be a very difficult process for many organisations.

“I don’t think partnership really exists (or rarely to be fair) in the world of aid as one is giving [...] and another is receiving whatever is offered, therefore they are not equal. One has much more power than the other, and with power might come conditions, imposed demands and sometimes abuse or exploitation.”

Sawssan Abou-Zahr



Part 3 Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation

Are partnerships between Global North and Global South actors desirable?

Before considering how partnerships could be transformed, it is important to ask whether partnerships between Global North and Global South actors are even desirable, given how flawed they are. The response from participants in the consultation was overwhelmingly in favour of such partnerships:

“Yes, I think that respectful, context-sensitive, culturally appropriate, transparent, trusted, genuine, and planet and human-centred global-local partnerships are desirable as they can significantly contribute to strengthening local capacities by complementing local resources”
Godwin Yidana

“Global-local partnership is so desirable as it provides the opportunity of the transfer of ideas, skills and resources, but global organisations must note that there is no single template that is used to building peace across the world and we must listen more to the people and collaborate with them to build peace.”
Victor Okechukwu Chimezie

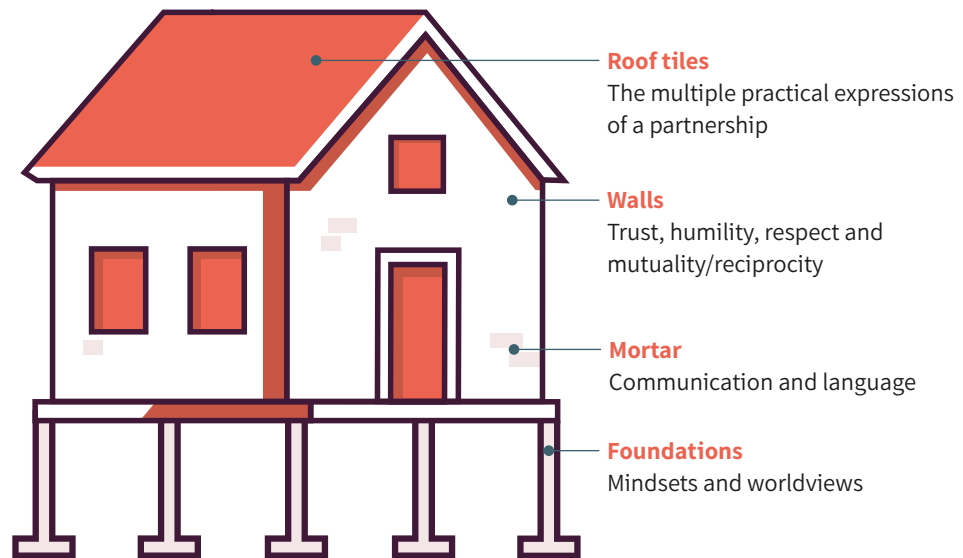
Common themes emerging from this discussion included the value of two-way knowledge transfer, mutual support and joint learning, which would lead to better outcomes for communities and people who are at the receiving end of this support. There was also a recognition that the issues facing communities, countries and the planet are so complex and interconnected that partnerships between the Global North and Global South are vital.

However, the majority of participants had a qualification: partnerships cannot continue as they have currently been conceived. They must be reimagined and transformed:

“We should explore more on complementary roles that local and international actors play, rather than competing.”
Gerhard Buttner

“Global-Local partnerships are not undesirable in principle, but they should be desirable for the same reasons than any partnership is desirable: a division of efforts, complementary expertise, different networks of relevant relationships.”
Clara Pergola

“Global-Local partnerships are desirable only insofar as unequal power dynamics are recognised early and the necessary mechanisms are put in place to mitigate abuse.”
Rehema Mussanzi



The building blocks of equitable and decolonised partnerships

Based on the global consultation and focus group discussions, there appear to be four sets of building blocks required to cultivate equitable and decolonised partnerships. We have used the metaphor of a house to describe the structure of a partnership.

1. Mindsets and worldviews



The first group of building blocks that needs to be dismantled and rebuilt are current mindsets and worldviews, represented by the **foundations** of the house. This finding is consistent with the global consultations that Peace Direct has held since 2020 and which led to the publication of our previous reports in the decolonisation series. Participants in our partnership consultation were clear that if there is no change in mindsets from Global North actors, nothing else can change:

“The greatest barrier is mindset and stereotype, foundational in racism.”
Dennis Ekwere

“What could they bring? Simply new mindsets and some transparency and modesty.”
Sawssan Abou-Zahr

“Breaking the harmful mindsets of racism, elitism and othering are steps each of us needs to make.”
David Porter

While the majority of comments from participants focused on Global North mindsets, it was argued that Global South mindsets need to change too, in two interlinked ways. First, some Global South actors have internalised the racism that is embedded in the sector and consider themselves lacking in skills and expertise. Second, and by extension, they sometimes view their communities through the same ‘deficit’ lens as many Global North actors. These mindsets are as important to shift as those of their Global North partners.

Linked to the previous points is the need to reflect on one's power and privilege. Part 1 of the report illustrated just how damaging it is when power is excluded from partnership conversations and yet permeates all aspects of a partnership. Becoming aware of how power manifests itself is a vitally important and yet relatively unfamiliar exercise for most Global North actors.

Working on these foundational elements is arguably the most challenging task. Changing mindsets about the superiority of Global North expertise and knowledge and dismantling ideas that the Global North is here to 'save' others is likely to be a painful process. Yet, this process of establishing 'equitable' and 'decolonised' partnerships begins with the process of decolonising mindsets, in the eyes of the Global South participants of the consultation. Without doing this deeper work, all other reform efforts which focus on changing practices may fail, much like building a house on poor foundations.

2. Four values: trust, humility, respect & mutuality/reciprocity



Holding the partnership together are the values of trust, humility, respect and mutuality/reciprocity. In our metaphor, **these are represented by the four walls of the house and the bricks that comprise them**. Without strong walls the structure collapses, and so it is with the four values.

All four values are interrelated to varying degrees. For example, Moise Msabwa's list emphasises mutuality in all dimensions of a partnership, including mutual trust and respect. Meanwhile, trust and respect are indivisible: one cannot trust without respect, and vice versa.

The four values must be reflected in the means and ways in which partnerships are implemented, and in how we communicate and live the partnership. This is expanded on in Part 4.

3. Communication and language



The third structural change is around the way in which Global North actors communicate with their Global South partners and vice versa. This includes examining the language used to define aspects of the work.

Using the house metaphor, **communication and language are the mortar – the substance that binds the bricks to ensure stability and strength**. The four aforementioned values are reflected not only in how partners treat each other and what they do together, but how they communicate with each other.

As Rehema Mussanzi said:

“I think the first obvious barrier that currently prevents meaningful partnerships is related to communication. There are instances whereby all parties within a partnership are supposed to communicate with each other at certain important junctures, but they communicate inconsistently. This can lead to a lot of unnecessarily confusion impacting the actual work needed to be done.”

Another participant, Clara Pergola, emphasised how communication in a partnership often lacks openness regarding essential information, such as the underlying motivations for the partnership, budgets and key decisions. She explained:

“One of the biggest issues preventing meaningful partnerships is transparency and open communication. I cannot count the instances I have seen of international partners who, for example, would not disclose the total budget of the project, for local partners to only be aware of the budget that is dedicated to their activities.”

In *Time to Decolonise Aid*, participants highlighted the need to retire language that diminishes the agency of Global South actors, including terms like ‘beneficiaries’ and ‘capacity-building’. For Alice Ogbu:

“Donors should look at local organisations, [as] their equals, and ‘partners’ rather than grantees.”

Open and frequent communication requires an approach that is sensitive to the different working styles, expectations and preferences of all those involved. As Marijke Priester commented:

“Genuine partnerships require an open culture with regular feedback.”

This is rare in the international development, humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors, where communication is typically focused on periodic formal reporting dates. This project-determined communication not only suffocates open and frank discussions; it also limits the discussions to project- or finance-related outputs and activities. Few equitable partnerships have ever been built on such conversations.

As Cherira Kheddar stated in the consultation:

“International actors need to listen, and be flexible, in order to shape their way of seeing.”

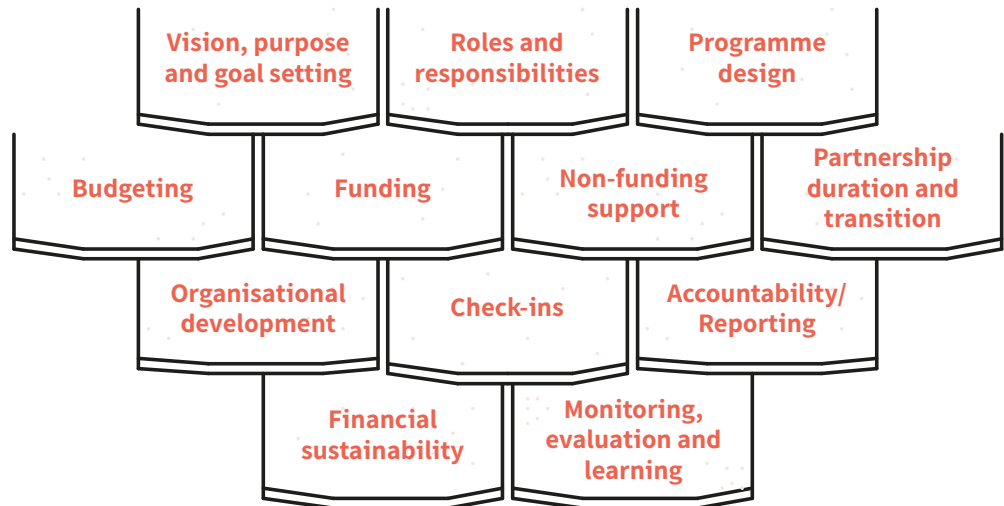
Scheduling frequent and varied communication opportunities is crucial for relationship building and encouraging reciprocity. However, frequency is only one aspect of successful communication. Moise Msabwa explained how it is important for both parties be transparent in terms of programmes, operations and funding. He suggested that partners should:

*“Make information from the partnership contract, partnership reports, partnership evaluations, projects and internal and external audits available to all stakeholders in the partnership (local and international actors, public administration and beneficiaries).
[Translated from the original French]”*

4. The multiple practical expressions of a partnership

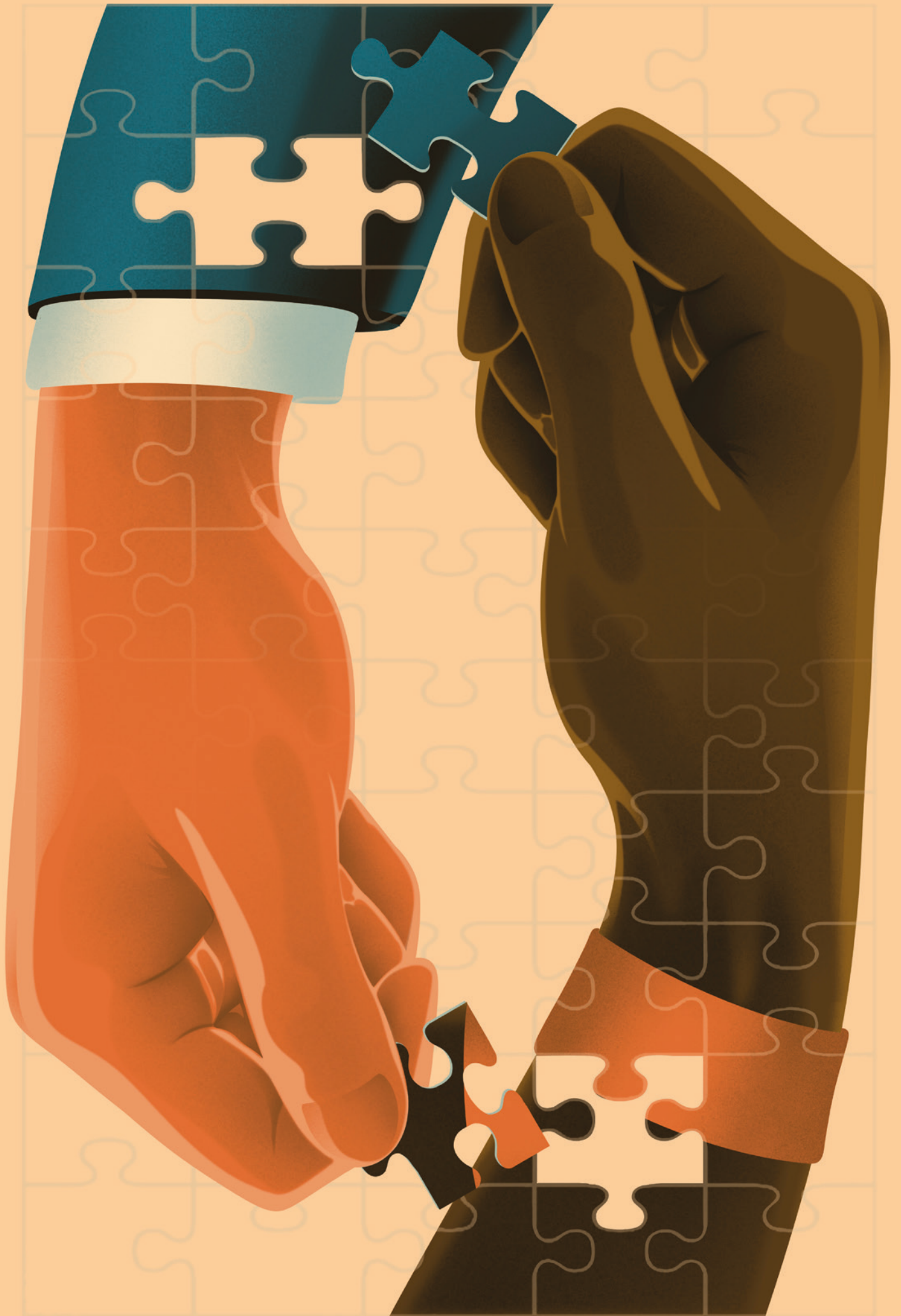


The final structural change relates to the different ways that partnerships are conceived, implemented and mediated through different practices. These include:



These are the **tiles** that make up the roof of the house. Readers of this paper may identify other practical ways that the mindsets, values and communication manifest themselves. Most partnerships focus on programme design, budgeting, funding and reporting, mirroring the 'projectised' nature of most activities across the sector, neglecting the other dimensions of a healthy partnership.

These different aspects of a partnership are influenced by the mindsets and values outlined in the sections above.



Part 4 **Operationalising Decolonised and Equitable Partnerships**

Implementing the changes we have described will take time and will require an additional investment in human resources. This is not easily achieved when staff from grant-making organisations or INGOs, for example, often have an unsustainably large number of ‘grantees’ or ‘partners’ to support; when so many organisational resources are allocated to donor compliance; and when Global South partners are already severely overstretched. However, participants felt that the investment was absolutely vital for a successful partnership.

The following pages offer a series of tangible ways in which the building blocks of equitable and decolonised partnerships can be implemented.

Each section starts with specific recommendations for Global South actors, reflecting our commitment to decentre Global North decision-makers and their power. We hope that Global South actors will engage with these recommendations, most of which were inspired by the participants in our consultation.

We then include a set of recommendations for Global North actors. Some of these are more tailored to donors than to INGOs, but we make no distinction between the two since INGOs are often seen as donors by their Global South partners.

We have included specific power aware behaviours because power, and how it is exercised, emerged as such a vital, hidden, component of all partnerships.

Finally, we include recommendations of actions that should be undertaken together.

For each set of practices, we have included suggested resources which demonstrate the recommendation in action. All the URLs to access these are in the References list.

Building block 1



JOINT PRACTICES

- **Explore together, through a facilitated conversation, differences and similarities in ideologies and motivations underpinning concepts such as ‘development’. By promoting mutual learning and recognising the value of diverse knowledge systems, you can challenge the notion that expertise solely resides in the Global North.**

Changing mindsets and worldviews

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- **Educate yourself. Learn how the current international system of cooperation has been influenced by Global North thinking. Examine how Global South organisations may have contributed to this system, involuntarily or voluntarily, and why.**
 - Watch: IFRA Nairobi’s interview with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, author of *Decolonising the Mind* on YouTube.
 - Read: *Time to Decolonise Aid* via Peace Direct’s website.
 - Read: The reflections of Epili Hau’ofa in ‘Our Sea of Islands’.
- **Explore and critically reflect on how structural racism and neo-colonial attitudes may have been internalised by your staff and may continue to shape your ways of working, as well as how you view your community.**
 - Take an implicit association test/training from Harvard’s Project Implicit or from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.
- **Allocate time with your staff to share alternative narratives that challenge dominant discourses and perspectives in international development.**
 - Prioritise and centre your own knowledge systems.
 - For example, see Council of Europe (COE) Policy Brief on the ‘10 criteria for the creation of effective alternative narratives on diversity’.
- **Explore, recognise and address traits of racism, ethnic divides and discrimination within your own countries that can sometimes wrongly provide excuses for neo-colonial attitudes and inappropriately justify structural, and cultural racism.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Analyse the risks of adopting a submissive position in partnerships with Global North actors and internalising Global North-imposed knowledge systems.**
 - Watch: ‘What if we broke the chains of neocolonialism?’ with Brittany Malcolm on YouTube.
 - Avoid replicating neo-colonial power dynamics within your own organisation and community, including silencing the voices of marginalised groups and limiting spaces for inclusive decision-making.
 - Read: ‘Race, equity, and neo-colonial legacies: identifying paths forward for principled humanitarian action’, on the Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog.
 - Read: ‘Mediating the power imbalances of development: a paradox for partnership brokers’ by Soli Middleby.
 - Read: ‘Reinforcing or Transforming? How partnership brokering should, and can, support decolonization of aid’ by Annie Sloman.
 - Read: ‘Who pays the piper? A synthesis of decolonizing aid conversations’ from the Global Fund for Community Foundations.
 - Read: *White Saviorism in International Development: Theories, Practices and Lived Experiences* by Themrise Khan, Kanakulya Dickson and Maika Sondarjee.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Educate yourself. Analyse your own privilege, prejudices and positionality. Learn about how Global North actors have directly and indirectly imposed their ways of thinking across the international humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. Recognise where you have built resistance to change.**
 - Take an implicit association test/training from Harvard’s Project Implicit or from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.
 - Dedicate time to reading about racism – look at Harvard Kennedy School’s Racial Justice, Racial Equity, and Anti-Racism Reading List.
 - Read: *Time to Decolonise Aid* via Peace Direct’s website.
 - Watch: ‘How to decolonise your mind’ with Kehinde Andrews on YouTube.
- **Draft and actively implement a positionality statement for your organisation in consultation with peers and partners of diverse backgrounds.**
 - See the Equality Institute’s guide on how to write one.
 - Read: Oxfam’s commitments to anti-racism, feminism and shifting power in ‘Transforming for a radically better world’.
 - Develop a monitoring mechanism to assess progress and promote self-accountability periodically.
- **Explore your organisational history by commissioning research into aspects of your past work, including the sources of your wealth, which may have been based on exploitation, harm or injustices.**
 - For example, see the Joseph Rowntree Trust’s statement on the origins of their endowment.
 - See also the *Guardian*’s series exploring the paper’s connections with slavery.
- **Explore how structural racism and neo-colonial attitudes may continue to shape your organisation’s ways of working by conducting an independent review or audit of your organisational culture through a racial equity lens.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Encourage an internal culture of openness to critique by encouraging Senior Leadership to hold difficult conversations about racism and power imbalances both internally and externally.**
 - Take a look at Bond’s Anti-racism and Decolonising toolkit.
 - Ensure that staff from across all levels and across intersecting identities are heard and listened to.
 - Develop your practice around admitting mistakes internally and externally and sharing how you are trying to address them. For example, see Médecins Sans Frontières’ report: ‘Tackling institutional discrimination and racism within MSF’.
 - Watch: ‘How to become an inclusive leader’ with Meagan Pollock on YouTube.
 - Read: ‘Mediating the power imbalances of development: a paradox for partnership brokers’ by Soli Middleby.
 - Read: ‘Reinforcing or Transforming? How partnership brokering should, and can, support decolonization of aid’ by Annie Soloman.
 - Read: ‘Who pays the piper? A synthesis of decolonizing aid conversations’ from the Global Fund for Community Foundations.
 - Read: *White Saviorism in International Development: Theories, Practices and Lived Experiences* by Themrise Khan, Kanakulya Dickson and Maïka Sondarjee.

Building block 2



JOINT PRACTICES

- **Invite partners/prospective partners to share their partnership principles, values and behaviours, and agree on how to put these into practice in your partnership.**
 - Showcase previous successful partnerships that were based on those principles/values/behaviours and use this as the basis of discussion about any new partnership.
 - Co-create a vision document that outlines the aims/purpose of the partnership, distinct from project funding.
 - Engage in values-based decision-making, ensuring that core values are guiding a partnership's actions.
 - Explore together any differences in ideologies and motivations underpinning the idea of partnership.

Vision, purpose and goal setting

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- **Define what you mean by partnership, and critically assess why you want to establish partnerships with Global North organisations. Carefully consider the spectrum of partnerships, including sub-contractor-type partnerships, and which ones you are comfortable accepting.**
- **Identify what partnership principles, values and behaviours matter to you most. Codify and share these with prospective partners.**
 - Watch: '4 Steps to Non-Profit Partnerships' on YouTube.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

Develop and articulate your ambition for partnerships with Global North actors.

- Align vision and values with local priorities, development models and indigenous knowledge systems to promote contextual relevance and sustainability in the partnership.
- Read: 'Fostering equitable North-South Civil Society Partnerships: voices from the south' from WACSI and Rights CoLab.
- Read: *Reimagining Civil Society Collaborations in Development: Starting from the South*, edited by Margit van Wessel, Tiina Kontinen, Justice Nyigmah Bawole.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Define what you mean by partnership, and critically assess why you want to establish a partnership with Global South organisations. If you want a sub-contractor-type implementing partner and not a genuine partnership, then be clear about this in your internal and external communications.**
 - Read: 'Global partnerships on paper and in practice: Critical observations from inside a Global Challenge Research Fund capacity-development project' in the Journal of International Development.
 - Take a look at The Pledge for Change 2030.
- **Identify what partnership principles and behaviours matter to you most. Codify and share these with prospective partners.**
 - Watch: '4 Steps to Non-Profit Partnerships' on YouTube.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Consider how and when you share your vision, purpose and goals with your partners. Invite partners to share theirs first, to avoid your goals influencing theirs.**
 - Allow partners to review your vision, purpose and goals for the partnership internally with their staff, before sharing their thoughts with you.
 - Read: 'NNGO Voices: Leader Perspectives on Locally-Led Development' from humentum.
 - Read: *Reimagining Civil Society Collaborations in Development: Starting from the South*, edited by Margit van Wessel, Tiina Kontinen, Justice Nyigmah Bawole.
 - Read: 'Fostering equitable North-South Civil Society Partnerships: voices from the south' from WACSI and Rights CoLab.

Building block 3



Communication and language

JOINT PRACTICES

- **Discuss together whether there are any particular phrases or sentences that should be avoided.**
- **Establish reciprocal feedback loops with your partner to reflect on the partnership, cultivating an environment where feedback is valued and encouraged. Feedback channels can also be anonymised so partners can freely express their thoughts without fear of repercussions.**
- **Agree how to cultivate a safe space where difficult issues can be raised without fear of retribution or defensiveness.**

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- **Don't assume that partners in the Global North will understand your cultural norms around communication. Educate them. Also educate yourself about the cultural norms that prevail with your prospective partners.**
- **Practice communication techniques to clearly express your perspectives, needs and concerns in partnerships with Global North actors. This includes advocating for your interests, setting boundaries and challenging unequal power dynamics.**
 - Look at the Mindtools guide on assertiveness.
- **Recognise the risks of adopting donor language that perpetuates neo-colonial attitudes and removes local agency to secure funding (e.g., referring to communities as 'beneficiaries').**
- **Practice the skill of disagreeing with your partner if/when you feel that the programme design is not being led by you and/or if you are not being consulted on key decisions.**
 - Take a look at the checklist 'Eight steps to effective conflict management' from the Canadian government's dispute resolution process.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Educate yourself around cultural norms in communication in countries in which you have or want to develop partnerships. Take these into account in all of your communications with those partners.**
 - Watch: 'Eliminating Microaggressions: The Next Level of Inclusion' with Tiffany Alvoid on YouTube.
- **Practice communication techniques to clearly express your perspectives, needs, and concerns in partnerships.**
 - Look at the Mind Tools guide on assertiveness.
- **Identify and retire certain language that diminishes the agency of actors in the Global South.**
 - Take a look at RINGO Lexicon and watch 'RINGO Prototype: Language and Lexicon' on YouTube.
 - Read: 'It's time to put an end to supremacy language in international development' by Ann Hendrix-Jenkins on openDemocracy.
 - Look at Bond's language guide, 'Taking British politics and colonialism out of our language'.
- **Practice active listening in conversations with your partners, paying close attention to what they may not be telling you.**
 - Read: 'Active Listening Skills' by Dianne Grande Ph.D. on Psychology Today.
- **Build in time, resources and, where necessary, budget to be able to cultivate relationships that enable honest and open communication to thrive.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Carefully assess the language and language style (often based on cultural norms) that you use which may reinforce power imbalances. E.g., 'Financial and narrative reports must be submitted on time' or 'due diligence and compliance processes are non-negotiable' and proactively put in place new guidance for communication.**
 - Look at Africa No Filter's handbook, 'How to Write About Africa in 8 Steps: An ethical storytelling handbook'.
- **Aim to communicate in your partner's preferred language.**

Building block 4



JOINT PRACTICES

- **Commit to reassessing how roles and responsibilities will shift over time, in particular how any role assigned to the Global North partner should diminish.**

→ Read: 'Roles and Skills of partnership brokering' from Partnership Brokers Association.

Practice / Roles and responsibilities

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- **Use approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry to identify your organisational strengths and assets, rather than gaps, in order to help inform the roles and responsibilities that you should take.**
 - Take a look at Positive Psychology's visual guide on 'How to Apply Appreciative Inquiry'.
- **Proactively communicate with prospective partners about the roles that you expect to play in the partnership.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Recognise the inherent power that you hold as the organisation closest to the issue and community. Where there are gaps, or you work with other national or local partners who are closer to the issue you are trying to address, apply the same questions applicable to Global North partners.**

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Begin by asking yourself: 'Are we actively working towards a point when we are no longer necessary?'**
 - Read: 'Zombie Missions: Organizations that should close but won't' on NonProfit AF.
 - Take a look at the resources from Stopping As Success, which equip development organisations to effectively transition to local leadership.
- **Have an honest and open discussion with prospective partners about the role that you hope to play in the partnership, while being open to taking on different roles that might emerge to better benefit the partnership.**
 - Take a look at WaterAid's 'Partnerships in Practice Tools'.
- **Unlearn assumptions about who holds technical expertise and what technical expertise is. Reflect on how much of your work is focused on technical vs transformative outcomes.**
 - Read: 'Unlearning: The Other Side of Skills/Knowledge Acquisition' by Julie Winkle Giulioni.
- **Unlearn assumptions about what 'capacity' gaps exist with your Global South partner. Reflect on the capacity gaps that you may have.**
 - Read: 'Time to rethink "capacity" in the Global South' by Global Fund for Community Foundations.
 - Read: 'Rethinking capacity and complementarity for a more local humanitarian action' from Humanitarian Policy Group.
- **When recruiting, consider a broader range of skills beyond technical skills or experience – include relational skills, intercultural communication skills, and lived experience.**
 - Read: 'Lived experience isn't an optional add-on' in Peridot.
 - Read: 'Why employers value intercultural skills' in the British Council's magazine.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Periodically ask your partner how the power that you hold may unintentionally manifest itself in the relationship.**
 - Analyse your power using the Power Cube framework.
 - Take a look at the Power Awareness Tool from the Spindle/Partos.
- **Start from the position that your role is to be a support team or ‘sidekick’ to your partner, and frame roles and responsibilities from there.**
 - Take a look at the Sidekick Manifesto.
 - Read: Peace Direct’s paper, *The nine roles that intermediaries can play in international cooperation*.
- **De-centre your role and decision-making power by identifying budget, project decisions and specific functions that can be transferred to your partner(s) immediately, as well as those that can be transferred over time.**

Practice / Programme design

JOINT PRACTICES

- Review programme documentation together, before sign-off, to minimise the risk of any misunderstandings.

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- **Unlearn any prejudice you might hold about the value of indigenous knowledge, especially from the communities you serve.**
- **When communicating with any prospective partner, assert the importance of indigenous knowledge generation as the basis for the programme or project design.**
- **Practice the skill of disagreeing with your partner if/when you feel that the programme design is not being led by you and/or if you are not being consulted on key decisions.**
 - Take a look at the checklist ‘Eight steps to effective conflict management’ from the Canadian government’s dispute resolution process.
- **Build in inception phases to projects to enable the project design to be ‘stress-tested’ in communities and then adapted following feedback.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Resist efforts by your Global North partner to include activities and outcomes that you don’t agree with.**

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- Unlearn any prejudice you might hold about the value of indigenous knowledge.
- For Global North donors, ensure that calls for proposals are designed in a more accessible way for a wider range of Global South actors to apply.
 - Examples include: applications forms in different languages, longer deadlines, FAQs, opportunities to receive questions.
- Ensure that project/programme design is led by the Global South partner, and agree how the Global South partner can challenge and/or refuse any imposition of ideas and activities.
- Modify the risk profile for the project/programme to enable your Global South partner more freedom to experiment and adapt.
 - Take a look at some of the learnings from Peace Direct's Youth Action for Peace Programme in *Youth Action for Peace – Programme Evaluation*.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- Be aware that changes to programme design/activities proposed by you may be interpreted as instructions, which partners may find hard to challenge.

Practice / Budgeting

JOINT PRACTICES

- Review the final budget together, before it is signed off, to ensure that both parties have a shared understanding of each budget line.

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- Develop a long-term budget to share with your partner, even if short duration projects are all that is on offer.
- In your budgets, show the full amount needed to run your project, including proportionate salary, rent and other overhead costs, even where your partner is only funding part of this.
- Build in costs that support strengthening the partnership, for example a yearly in-person meeting to review the health of the partnership.
- Build in sufficient staff time to enable the fostering of a meaningful relationship with your partner.
- Build in emergency or contingency funds into budgets to enable you to adapt quickly to any rapid change in the context.
- Construct the budget in ways that allow maximum flexibility, for example aggregating similar activities together. This approach enables greater adaptability and freedom for you to adjust the specifics of activities as needed.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Assert your claim to some of the overheads, unless your overheads can be built into the budget.**
 - Read: ‘Five Initiatives for Successful Cost Recovery’ by Shila Nhemi on humentum.
- **Recognise how budget discussions are often the most obvious manifestation of Global North control over their partners. Call out such behaviours if you observe this, and train staff to be alert to the ways that this might show up in the work.**
 - Read: ‘Breaking the starvation cycle – How international funders can stop trapping their grantees in the starvation cycle and start building their resilience’ by humentum.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Share the full project budgets and documents that you are submitting to your donors.**
- **Build in institutional strengthening budget lines and not just costs for programme delivery.**
 - Examples include new software and hardware, office renovation costs, staff training, exchange visits, subscriptions to paid learning content online, improvements to internet access, and vehicle purchases.
- **Build in costs that support strengthening the partnership, for example a yearly in-person meeting to review the health of the partnership.**
- **Build in sufficient staff time to enable the fostering of a meaningful relationship with your partner.**
- **Eliminate the discrepancy in pay scales between any in-country expatriate staff and staff from local partners. Work towards transferring all roles allocated to expatriate staff to local partners.**
 - For transitions, read Stopping As Success’s ‘Practical Guidelines on Responsible Transitions and Partnerships’.
- **Build in emergency or contingency funds into budgets to enable you to adapt quickly to any rapid change in the context.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Share overheads, in line with the proportion of direct costs managed by each partner.**
 - Read: ‘Five Initiatives for Successful Cost Recovery’ by Shila Nhemi, on humentum.
- **Be prepared to justify your budget lines in the same way as you expect of your partners.**
- **Recognise how budget discussions are often the most obvious manifestation of Global North control over their partners. Invite partners to call out such behaviours if they observe this, and train staff to be alert to the ways that this might show up in their work.**
 - Read: ‘Breaking the starvation cycle – How international funders can stop trapping their grantees in the starvation cycle and start building their resilience’ by humentum.

JOINT PRACTICES

- Regularly share updates on your fundraising efforts, to build a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that both parties face.

Practice / Funding**GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS**

- **Challenge the ‘Global North funding dependency’ mindset and explore how this mindset may have influenced your strategy and plans.**
 - Take a look at the African Visionary Fund and Thousand Currents.
- **Identify funding and in-kind contributions from your own communities and constituents.**
 - Take a look at the resources on community philanthropy from the Global Fund for Community Foundations.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Analyse how your funding may have created dependency among your partners and develop a strategy to counter this.**
 - Read: ‘Breaking the starvation cycle – How international funders can stop trapping their grantees in the starvation cycle and start building their resilience’ from humentum.
- **Provide unrestricted funding, and at the least ensure that flexibility is built into restricted funding.**
 - Take a look at the ‘trust-based philanthropy project’.
- **Support your partner to access funding opportunities directly.**
- **Begin with an assumption that you should provide multi-year funding for project activities, unless there is a compelling reason not to.**
- **Explore funding models that help strengthen the ecosystem of actors in the Global South.**
 - Take a look at Thousand Currents.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Resist the urge to control how partners use unrestricted funding.**
- **Share information on your donors and encourage ways to facilitate funding directly to your Global South partner.**

Funding as a proxy for power and trust

Throughout the consultation, participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of flexible funding when rethinking partnerships between Global North and Global South entities. Rather than focusing on the size or value of grants, participants talked about the quality of funding as being much more important; ‘highly valued’ funding instead of ‘high value’ funding.

While funding is only one dimension of partnership, it is the most visible and most contentious manifestation of most partnerships. Participants highlighted how funding to local actors in the Global South is used by the Global North as an instrument of control and power. But they also described how funding modalities often reflect a lack of trust in local actors:

“Inflexible funding agendas and programs that limit the role of local actors as service and data providers prevent meaningful partnerships between local and external partners”

Ghida Krisht

“race, gender, age, education, all massively impact [on] who can access funding and the knowledge, tools and relationships that deliver funding”

Craig Pollard

Furthermore, the pursuit of funding by Global North INGOs entrenches power imbalances that are difficult to untangle. As Aditi Gupta remarked, the relationship between Global North and Global South actors is:

“often based on the need to access funding – from both sides – resulting in civil society having to ‘professionalise’ to western standards in order to gain access to funding streams, and international organisations gain legitimacy with funders by bringing in local partners. The resulting power dynamic is inherently unequal and colonial, perpetuating rigid systems and less opportunity for small organisations without connections.”

If funding is such a potent symbol of the health of a partnership, what can be done to change the status quo? Below is a list of ten key recommendations for Global North funders made by participants in the global consultation:

1. Fund directly, and not through Global North intermediaries.
2. Provide unrestricted funding as a true demonstration of your trust in the partnership.
3. If unrestricted funding is not possible, provide flexible funding to enable your partner to adapt to changes in the context.
4. Provide multi-year funding, thereby helping your partner to avoid ‘feast or famine’ funding cycles and enabling them to plan long-term.
5. Co-design programmes with your partners and be prepared to change your assumptions and plans if they don’t align with your partners’ needs.
6. Modify your risk appetite to enable you to experiment with different funding mechanisms for local actors.
7. Work with other donors to establish country-based pooled funds earmarked for local actors, thereby coordinating efforts and sharing risk.

8. Change your reporting requirements and formats so that local actors can report in their language and in different ways, such as video, oral reporting or WhatsApp recorded messages.
9. Provide non-financial support through convening, networking, and advocacy opportunities.
10. Support local organisations to generate their own income.

Using this list, Peace Direct launched a public survey on social media to gauge practitioner views on how to prioritise funding to local CSOs in the Global South. Nearly 325 practitioners responded, with the top four recommendations highlighted here:

Priority 1: Fund local CSOs directly instead of relying on intermediaries from the Global North to disburse grants in partnerships.

Priority 2: Provide unrestricted funding that allows local actors to utilise funds according to their specific needs and priorities.

Priority 3: Provide multi-year funding to provide stability for local actors and enable them to implement long-term initiatives that are more sustainable.

Priority 4: Provide more flexible funding for local actors.

Survey respondents provided additional valuable insights regarding the importance of the funding selection process. They emphasised the importance of involving local actors directly in decision-making. By including local voices, they argued that funding design can be community-led, ensuring that grants address the actual needs and priorities of the communities they serve. To achieve this, respondents proposed adopting more participatory grant-making approaches that allow for greater community engagement. Additionally, respondents suggested that donors should adopt more flexible eligibility criteria for local organisations to access funds, including removing the requirement for a large annual income and lowering the threshold for organisational and financial management capacity.

Respondents also advocated for diversifying the pool of grantees and providing financial support to new and innovative ideas. Instead of solely funding more established organisations, there should be spaces created for new grantees in order to foster creativity and encourage fresh perspectives. Furthermore, taking an intersectional lens to grant-making is crucial to ensure that funding is distributed equitably and addresses various social issues. Respondents further emphasised the need to avoid disproportionate amounts of funding being earmarked for specific causes, and called for more rapid response mechanisms to reduce delivery time and enable timely support during crises.

Sustainability was another critical aspect highlighted by respondents. Many suggested that up to 20% of grants be earmarked for organisational development, allowing CSOs to focus strengthening their internal capacity while implementing programmes. Additionally, earmarking funds to assist organisations in raising additional funds, such as through fundraising trips or activities, could help local actors create a more sustainable financial base. Many respondents also saw the need to support social enterprise models as a way to enhance the financial resilience and independence of local CSOs in the Global South.

Practice / Non-funding support

JOINT PRACTICES

- Explore together the different opportunities for non-financial aspects of support, for example opportunities for joint advocacy, engaging in networks, promoting each other's work, and so on.

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- Identify the stakeholders and spaces that you would like access to, and which partners could support you.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- Draft a non-financial support 'offer' document that outlines the range of ways you could support your partners beyond funding.
 - Read: Peace Direct's paper, *The nine roles that intermediaries can play in international cooperation*.
- Build in costs to support 'value added' activities, such as convening, international networking opportunities and opportunities for partners to advocate directly to policymakers.
- Build in additional staff time to implement non-financial methods of support, such as advocating for your partner in Global North spaces and events or, preferably, supporting your partner to advocate directly in those spaces.

Practice / Partnership duration and transition

JOINT PRACTICES

- Aim for a long-term, strategic partnership, decoupled from projects or any other type of funding.
- Discuss how and under what conditions the partnership will transition to full local ownership, including an eventual exit by the Global North partner.
- Build in review periods that allow both sides to critically reflect on whether the transition plans need to be adjusted in any way.

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- Share openly your partnership aspirations and how such plans contribute to your strategy and mission.
- Manage your team's expectations about the duration of any new partnership.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- Don't be afraid to talk about partnership transitions. Claim the agenda for yourself – don't wait for it to be raised by your partners.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- Share openly your partnership plans and long-term ambitions for support to that particular country/issue.
- Share openly your partnership aspirations and how such plans contribute to your strategy and mission.
 - Read: *What Transformation Takes: Evidence of Responsible INGO Transitions to Locally Led Development Around the World* by the Stopping As Success consortium.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- Resist the temptation to set a timeframe for the length of the partnership. Cede decision-making power in order for this decision to be made jointly.

Case study

Transforming relationships through partnership transitions

Partnerships between international and local organisations often revolve around programmes that are funded by the Global North partner or another external party. There is usually an underlying assumption that the partnership would naturally come to an end once the funding has ended. However, in many cases, this approach has unintentionally undermined the work of local actors, often plunging them into financial crisis when budgets and exit strategies have been hastily and unilaterally planned and implemented by the Global North partner.

Despite efforts to shift more power and resources towards people operating within their own contexts, there have been few examples of how partnerships can end or transition to local ownership more responsibly.

To address this issue, the Stopping as Success project (SAS) – a collaborative learning project led by CDA Collaborative Learning, Search for Common Ground, and Peace Direct – has sought to strengthen the evidence base of what responsible partnership transitions look like. Through the development of 19 case studies between 2017–2020, SAS explored how partnership transitions between international and local entities can be more sustainable. The project developed tools and resources that can be used by partner organisations to guide their approach.

These case studies and the wider activities of the SAS programme also identified practical insights and lessons for partnership transitions. Responsible transitions were found to address both technical and procedural aspects of the local partner organisation assuming greater leadership, alongside relational and partnership-based aspects.⁷ This includes rethinking responsibility, ownership, and resources, and ensuring ongoing power dynamics are acknowledged and addressed.

From this process, eight broad lessons⁸ were identified:

1. How INGOs enter partnerships matters just as much as how they leave: partnerships based on solidarity and trust from the beginning allow for smoother transitions.
2. Having a joint vision for the eventual transition, from the very start of the partnership, enables accountability.
3. INGOs that promote local leadership are able to transition in a more sustainable way.
4. To support local leadership, INGOs need to address existing power imbalances and engage in mutual transformation.
5. Transition plans must remain flexible and adaptive to support local ownership.
6. Periods of overlap (when INGOs and local entities operate simultaneously) can help to minimise the disruption of transition periods and foster financial sustainability.
7. Smaller, more flexible funding sources and other types of resource transfer are invaluable for successful transitions.
8. Transition is as much a beginning as it is an ending: post-transition relationships can continue in many different forms.

The SAS project is now continuing its efforts to apply these tools and learning through an accompaniment approach model in which we assist partnerships in transition and generate new learning to enable future responsible transitions to local leadership.

Dimitri Kotsiras

Stopping As Success (SAS+) and Research Manager at Peace Direct

7 Stopping As Success, What Transformation Takes: Evidence of Responsible INGO Transitions to Locally Led Development Around the World, Peace Direct (2020). Available at: <https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/What-Transformation-Takes-book-December-2020.pdf>.

8 *Ibid.*

Practice / Monitoring, evaluation and learning

JOINT PRACTICES

- Don't confuse learning with reporting.
- Co-create a learning agenda and include learning questions that are reviewed each year.
- Build in regular learning exchanges, ideally once a quarter or every six months.

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- Create accountability processes that are centred on the communities you serve.
- Identify what you and your communities consider success in your work/activities and use this as the basis for programme design and learning.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- Be prepared to rethink and scrap your existing MEL approaches, including logical frameworks.
- Consider alternative forms of reporting, such as video stories and interviews, including in native languages.

Practice / Organisational development

JOINT PRACTICES

- Share and discuss your organisational strategies together, using this as the basis for organisational development discussions.

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- Identify and assert your own technical, contextual and social capacities/expertise *before* analysing gaps.
- Consider joining networks and movements such as the CIVICUS alliance or the #ShiftThePower movement to build allies and solidarity globally.
- Collaborate and strengthen your own networks with other Global South actors, where desirable.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- Review your organisational strategy, analyse to what extent it is donor-driven and adapt if appropriate.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- Stress-test your assumptions about the added value of your expertise by inviting your partners to assess the value they place on these skills.
- Use your memberships of global networks or movements to cede space and provide direct opportunities for partners to engage in these.
- Foster collaboration and strengthen networks between actors in the Global South, where this is relevant for and desired by your partners.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Review your organisational strategy and consider to what extent it supports a shifting of power over time to Global South CSOs who share a similar mission.**
 - Take a look at Bond's guide, 'Becoming locally led as an anti-racist practice'.
 - Review whether your accompaniment helps strengthen partners' organisational development to exist and sustain themselves independently from your partnership.
 - Periodically ask your partners whether you should close down.

Practice / Accountability**JOINT PRACTICES**

- **Agree jointly how you intend to be accountable to each other, including behaviours and values.**

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- **Develop mechanisms to ensure that your organisation is accountable to the communities and constituents you serve. Not only is this vital to ensure the best outcomes for communities; it also addresses a common criticism by Global North organisations (sometimes used to avoid shifting power) of local CSOs that they lack 'downward accountability'.**
 - Read: *Dynamic Accountability: Changing approaches to CSO accountability* from the Global Standard for CSO Accountability and Accountable Now.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Examine how neo-colonial practices have shifted accountability from communities towards donors. Make accountability towards communities and your constituents a central part of programming.**

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Unlearn harmful established approaches that place reporting to you and your donors as the most important measure of accountability.**
 - Read: *Dynamic Accountability: Changing approaches to CSO accountability* from the Global Standard for CSO Accountability and Accountable Now.
- **Consider regular reporting to your Global South partner(s) on the work you have done as part of the partnership, and more generally on your work.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Examine the extent to which your work may be guided by neo-colonialism and White Saviourism. Take steps to unlearn and dismantle White Saviourism in your organisation and work.**

Practice / Financial sustainability

JOINT PRACTICES

- Agree at the outset how the partnership can avoid a relationship based on financial dependence.
- Agree milestones for the financial health of your respective organisations.

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- Explore ways to generate non-grant income, such as setting up a small commercial enterprise, advisory services or fundraising from your own community. Share these with your partner.
- Research the non-profit legislation in your country or context to better understand what for profit activities are permitted.
- Set clear targets for the proportion of your total income that can come from different sources over time.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- Draft a capacity statement that outlines the knowledge, connections, expertise and access to communities that you have.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Allocate funding to enable your partner to move towards financial independence and sustainability.**
 - Examples include purchasing land, buying property that can be rented out, or investing in social enterprises that generate income to cover running costs.
 - Read: LINC's research on facilitating financial sustainability.
- **Carefully examine the extent to which your business model relies on the existing framing of your organisation as the 'technical expert'. Consider ways that your financial sustainability can cease to depend on such a model.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Actively identify other potential Global North and Global South partners for your partners and make the introductions.**
- **Talk to your donors and explore whether they could fund your partners directly.**

Practice / Check-ins

JOINT PRACTICES

- Agree regular 'touch points' for communication outside of formal reporting dates.
- Aim for the fullest transparency possible in communication, even if it feels uncomfortable to do so.
- Practice how to give and receive difficult/challenging feedback, including agreeing in advance how tensions and disagreements will be handled by both parties.

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- Ensure that check-ins do not focus just on programme/project delivery, but also focus on the health of the partnership.
- Ensure that check-ins involve a cross-section of staff and not just those responsible for programme delivery. Doing so enhances organisational learning and minimises the risk of gatekeeping.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- If the partnership feels strained, don't wait for the next check-in. Be confident in your ability to request a check-in outside any agreed dates.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- Ensure that check-ins do not focus just on programme/project delivery, but also focus on the health of the partnership.
- Where possible, ask for senior-level participation at some check-ins to foster organisational buy-in for the partnership.
- Build in staff time and budgets to allow staff to cultivate meaningful check-ins, including in-person meetings.

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- Be aware that check-ins may be interpreted by your partner as another accountability mechanism in disguise. Be clear about the purpose of the check-ins as being distinct from reporting.

Operationalising the recommendations

Some of the recommendations were discussed by participants in our consultation and focus group discussions, offering insights into how organisations have tried to implement them.

One example of how to talk about power was shared by Karen Karnicki, a Program Officer for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's peacebuilding programme, during the consultations. She explained how she leads with vulnerability to confront her positionality. Karen explained how she shared her weaknesses, recognised her faults and was self-reflective when talking to partners. Although this did not build trust straight away, in time and through continuously leading with vulnerability, her local partners were encouraged to do the same. Ultimately, this process allowed both parties to speak up and share thoughts and feelings about the partnership that would not have traditionally been discussed. She said:

“One thing that I think has been helpful has been sharing what I am learning or going through with partners [...] and] creating space for people to just be people. So, I think maybe both of those things [...] being vulnerable and having that emotional connection [is fundamental to] the learning the process, the emotion, the humanity underlying all the work that we do.”

Building trust in a relationship is fundamental to a partnership. Initially it requires a leap of faith and can take time to be solidified. But through open, honest and transparent communication, it can underpin and form the basis of any partnership.

One of the most challenging recommendations for Global North actors is to decentre themselves and their role. Shifting decision-making to local actors requires funding partners, donors and intermediaries to change their own behaviours and adapt existing policies, guidelines and partnership agreements to hold themselves accountable.

Sarah Mueller, a Project Manager at Robert Bosch-Stiftung, explained how, in her role, she is able to centre decision-making with local actors. By doing so, she can act in solidarity with her local partners, recognising and prioritising the local community's interest and the responsibility to address the issues at hand. She said:

“I would see the developing of a project and its ideas, as the role of our partners. We are not so much involved, unless they need our partnership, in that because I don't think we have the expertise. I think that is mostly with our partners.”

Regarding the need to be more flexible in reporting, Corie Walsh from Humanity United noted that:

“It's really important that partners be able to report in their native languages. We're dealing with incredibly sensitive personal traumatic issues that our partners should not have to translate into English.”

Introducing oral or visual reporting formats that complement or can be used as alternatives to written narratives can ensure the effective transfer of information but also move beyond the colonial misconception that oral tradition is inadequate, unobjective and lacking in rigour.⁹

⁹ Myra Khan, 'The role of oral traditions within marginalised societies and their validity within archives' (April 2021). Available at: <https://lib.asu.edu/news/role-oral-traditions-within-marginalized-societies-and-their-validity-within-archives-myra>

Case study

Adapting funding approaches towards local actors: The Innovative Peace Fund¹⁰

Women and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO) is a local peacebuilding organisation that has been active in Afghanistan since 2012. Since 2018, we at WPSO have received financial support through the International Civil Society Action Network's (ICAN) 'Innovative Peace Fund'.

At the beginning of this partnership, we proposed starting a network of local women peacebuilders that would be active throughout the country. ICAN recognised that we are the best placed to understand the solutions for our own context and gave us the financial and technical support needed to turn our idea into a sustainable programme. With this support, the network grew to over 200 members in all.

The funding we received through this fund initially focused on supporting us to build out our focal points network. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic spread across Afghanistan in 2020, we informed ICAN that the local peacebuilders were not able to mobilise their local communities as we had originally planned. ICAN was able to provide us with additional rapid response funding that enabled us to integrate COVID-related safety guidance and create opportunities for local women peacebuilders to continue their peacebuilding work. This funding was directly based on the community needs identified by the members of the local focal points network.

While the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing, the Taliban offensive in August 2021 made it impossible for many peacebuilders to continue their community mobilisation work. ICAN was understanding and responsive, working with us not only to shift funding to meet new needs on the ground but also helping us relocate and evacuate our staff and members of the local women peacebuilders' network. Through a rigorous communication process – over WhatsApp, Signal, and via email and phone calls – ICAN supported us to provide internal relocation and security emergency support to the peacebuilders and move them to a safer place.

During late 2022, Afghanistan's south-eastern region was hit by a strong earthquake that affected over 10,000 homes. We turned to ICAN and flagged the immediate needs of female-headed households, which were being side-lined because most of the aid workers were male and could not enter their homes. ICAN responded by mobilising additional funds that enabled us to support these marginalised families. ICAN trusted that women peacebuilders on the ground were in the best position to assess the risk and determine the best approach to addressing it.

Most recently, in December 2022, the Taliban decree banning women from working in NGOs put WPSO in a compromised position. Instead of halting their support to Afghan women like many other international organisations, ICAN immediately started consulting with us and other Afghan partners to determine how to continue sustaining WPSO. After many consultations, we shifted our strategy and together developed an approach that would allow us to continue operations and maintain our female staff and our focal points network.

The relationship between WPSO and ICAN has not been that of a typical donor and grantee, but rather an equal partnership that has flourished over the years. Despite many difficult days in Afghanistan, WPSO and ICAN have remained in constant communication, sharing needs and realities from the context, and proposing solutions. ICAN is always by our side – valuing our expertise in Afghanistan and trusting our approach, while offering the institutional support, strategic guidance, and solidarity we need to sustain our organisation.

Wazhma Frogh

Founder of WPSO; Afghan human rights activist
Twitter: @WPSOafghanistan @FroghWazhma

¹⁰ This case study is adapted from a version previously published in ICAN's 2022 Annual Report: <https://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ICAN-Annual-Report-2022-Mobile-Version.pdf>.

Conclusion

Efforts to transform and decolonise the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding system are underway, being led by a wide variety of actors in the Global South and North. However, for the most part, partnerships between entities in the Global North and South are still largely underpinned by neo-colonial power dynamics that prioritise the interests and agendas of the Global North. Ultimately, the dominance of Global North attitudes and approaches undermines efforts to build equitable or decolonised partnerships, no matter how committed the Global North is in pursuing this aim.

The recommendations presented in this report offer one possible way to reform how partnerships are conceived, maintained and concluded, ensuring that they are underpinned by values rather than the programmatic outcomes. These values – trust, respect, humility and mutuality – ultimately represent a decolonised partnership approach that centres the knowledge, priorities and agency of local actors and creates a relationship based on the exchange of ideas, learning and resources. Through trust-building, frequent and open communication, supporting local ownership and decision-making, and flexible funding, partnerships can move away from their current exploitative nature.

It is important to emphasise that these recommendations can only transform the sector if there is acknowledgement of racism on a structural, institutional and personal level.¹¹ This means that staff working in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding system must continue to reflect on their personal attitudes and behaviours. This personal reflection should underpin the operationalisation of all the practical tools and mechanisms presented in this report.

Building and sustaining decolonised and equitable partnerships will take time, and requires significant investment, beyond what most Global North organisations have been accustomed to undertaking until now. However, we hope that all readers will take steps with the resources that they have to begin the journey.

¹¹ Raaval Bains, 'Recovery, Self Improvement and Decolonising', Peace Insight (2022). Accessible at: <https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/recovery-self-improvement-and-decolonising/>.

Glossary of Terms

Complementarity: A partnership where parties supplement and enhance each other's qualities. It provides balance to a relationship and allows support for each other's weaknesses.

Decolonising international development, humanitarian intervention, and peacebuilding: refers to deconstructing and dismantling colonial-era and neo-colonial ideologies regarding the superiority of Global North thought and approaches. It also refers to the redistribution of power acquired by Global North actors during colonialism, and which has accumulated since.

Equality: is about ensuring that every individual, regardless of race, age, sex, gender, class, religion or disability, has an equal opportunity to make the most of their knowledge, skills, experience and expertise.

Global North: consists of the richest and most industrialised countries, formerly described as 'developed' which are mainly based in the northern hemisphere. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Global North includes Northern America, Europe, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Global South: consists of countries previously described as 'developing' which are mainly based in the southern hemisphere.

Humility: the ability to move beyond a self-centred outlook to one that is more reflective. Being humble allows us to remain open about our views, beliefs and opinions, as well as to recognise our own limits.

Mutuality: For those in the partnership to think of themselves as one, embodying solidarity. They share successes, problems, understanding and have good communication.

Neocolonialism: the practice of using economics, globalisation, cultural imperialism and conditional aid to influence a country – an evolution of the previous colonial methods of direct military control or indirect political control.

Positionality: a methodology where actors recognise their own privileges in terms of race, class, age, sex, gender, religion in order to act on one's social position to overcome imbalances in power and position.

Power: an entity or individuals' ability to control, discipline and direct others based on an influence that is predicated on perceived legitimacy.

Solidarity: those involved in partnership share a common interest, purpose and responsibility for the issues at hand.

Structural racism: refers to the policies, laws and practices that create and perpetuate racial inequalities.

Systemic racism: a system of structures, institutions and personal beliefs and attitudes that create procedures or processes that disadvantage individuals or groups on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group.

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Appendix **Participants of the Consultation**

Below is a list of the participants who took part in the online consultation and follow-up interviews. We also acknowledge the contributions made by participants who wish to remain anonymous. The details included here represent those provided by participants at the time of the consultation, and may no longer reflect their current roles.

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