Global Perspectives 2021
Let's Talk About Power!

Outcome

The 13th Global Perspectives conference was held as a hybrid experience, from 25 October to 4 November 2021. It brought together an international audience from national and international civil society organisations (CSOs), foundations, governments and business. This year's theme focussed on the **civil society sector approaches, opportunities and challenges of Shifting Power.** We provided global and regional perspectives – **holding in-person meetings in three hubs in East Africa, South East Asia and Latin America.** The conference offered panel discussions, work sessions and peer-to-peer exchange, high-quality conversations and intensive networking.

Day 1 - Bogotá, Colombia, Latin America Hub: Understanding Power Shift Challenges in Civil Society Sector in Latin

The participants in **Bogotá** focused on exploring the challenges of power shift in the civil society sector in Latin America. Some key points from the discussion were:

- The importance of building on history, technology and awareness – as long as this is turned this into effective action to change practices – and also **'unlearning' what is no longer functional**
- Acknowledging and **stopping the large amount of money which 'disappears' from the system** before it reaches community-based organisations and the communities they work with, and the often-paternalistic attitudes in defining what civil society organisations do with the money and how it should be spent, which undermines their self-reliance and agency
- **Creating far more space in the system** for groups like children and young people to define not only what they want to change, but shaping how they want it to change and the role they want to play in that change process.
- Some participants in the workshop found the idea of 'shift the power' and language of 'deconstructing' aid more suitable than 'decolonising' aid for the Latin American and Caribbean context. For some participants, this was the first time they had heard or used 'colonisation' to refer to practice that they have lived for years in their work. However, the session confirmed the **diversity of experiences and understandings within Colombian civil society organisations,** and a clear divide between established non-governmental organisations serving as focal points for international organisations and grassroots, unregistered or small civil society formations. The use of concepts like decolonisation and foreign language can make this gap feel even greater.

Call to action which international civil society organisations can join or help promote is:

- Red S.O.S Aldeas Infantiles: an initiative created to promote and support spaces for participation, mobilisation and citizenship for young people in Bogota. Learn more.

Day 2 - Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa Hub: Decolonising Aid and Embracing New Power in East Africa
On Day 2, the participants in Nairobi focused on decolonising aid discussions in East Africa and how international civil society organisations can contribute to but not colonise local civil society spaces through more equitable partnerships. Some key points from the discussion were:

- The aid sector in East Africa needs to decolonise, but avoiding elite capture at all levels, so it isn't just replacing old colonial powers with new colonial powers. For instance, close links to government can lead to lack of support for critical grassroots accountability work especially around elections,
- Local civil society should start with small ideas based on empirical research and engagement with communities and move forward seeking out the right partners, before resources. They can exercise their positional power, knowledge and voice, rather than focusing on financial power,
- **Local organisations should push back on donor demands** and also say no to international civil society organisations partnership interest where these mean too much compromise in their delivery of people-driven solutions,
- Information and communications technology (ICT) has a huge role to play as an empowerment tool in power shift and decolonisation for East African civil society to generate its own solutions, knowledge and information transfer. B**uilding grassroots digital skills and enabling protection and security from digital threats** is critical to this, as well as Africa developing its own research and continental body of knowledge on digital developments.

Calls to action which international civil society organisations can join or help promote are:

- iHub an innovation centre dedicated to accelerating the application of social capital and technology for economic prosperity. Get in touch with iHub.

Day 3 - Jakarta, Indonesia, Southeast Asia Hub: Digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence and Civil Society, Southeast Asia.
On Day 3, the participants in Indonesia focused on digitalisation, artificial intelligence and the civil society sector in Southeast Asia. Some key points from the discussion were:

- The need to work together – and with multiple stakeholders - to **better understand the ethics, risks and opportunities with artificial intelligence**,
- The need to include the voices, needs and data of women in decision-making to maximise the social mission of artificial intelligence (AI), and these conversations need to happen proactively now rather than only reactively later,
- Citizens are trusting tech companies more than government with their data, but need to support to understand the importance of data privacy and digital literacy,
- The potential of artificial intelligence to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and support activism and sustainable environment initiatives in Indonesia.

Organisations such as [Yayasan Plan International Indonesia](#) and [SOS Children's Villages Indonesia](#) expressed interest in exploring collaboration to enhance their understanding of how artificial intelligence can support their work. From exploring how to engage their network and shape the future of work to understanding how artificial intelligence and big data can help develop digital campaigns.

Day 4 - Global Hub, Virtual: De-concentrating Data and Digitalisation
Day 4 highlighted that how we collect and generate, then aggregate, store and use data and the governance rights which exist over data and each step in this process is critical, including for frontier technologies. **But half the time, the data isn't there or represented** – either because of the 50% of the world's population who are still unconnected and can't be online or producing it, because it is kept in corporate data stores for extractive, commercial purposes rather than social ones, or because there are political reasons not to collect it or otherwise suppress it.

But civil society organisations need to be **very careful when deciding whether or not, and how, to fill data gaps**, as groups or individuals may be made more vulnerable by that data being available on them, or the process of collecting it might expose them to significant risk. In both their advocacy work influencing others, and their own programming, civil society organisations should both **champion privacy by design and make the principle of data minimisation central** to their work – evaluating their whole organisational 'data universe' carefully identifying and collecting only the data which is needed, and only keeping it for as long as is needed for their services.

Civil society has a critical role to play in demystifying emerging or frontier technologies and **challenging big tech narratives about their 'magic'**, promoting alternative discourse around 'game changers' which will impact or disrupt social processes – especially where this leads to further threats or increased risk or vulnerability – and promoting ethical good practice

examples. Civil society organisations need to **build stronger networks and work much more closely with expert tech/rights CSOs, academia and researchers** to do this.

A broader section of civil society organisations also need to get more comfortable and build their capacity to engage with information and communications technology laws and champion rights-based approaches, and engage in innovative multi-stakeholder collaborative forums with policymakers, tech companies and researchers to design trusted, human-centred tech policies.

Civil society practitioners do not all need to learn to be coders, but we do need to establish a **basic understanding of emerging technological developments, and their implications for digital rights and equity** and especially where new disparities are being created. This basic understanding and knowledge should be democratised and established across all parts of an organisation, not just people working in or on technology.

Algorithms are 'opinions embedded in code', fashioned in the image of their creators and reducing human complexities and political and sociocultural realities. International civil society organisations need to look beyond the technology with the humility to **see through to the hyperlocal actors who live these realities**. And work alongside them to ensure that their implications for rights and security are properly understood right at the start and **sound the alarm on the adverse social harms and outcomes of unproven technologies**, so that these are not just written off later on as 'unintended consequences'.

Calls to action which international civil society organisations can join or help promote are:

- [<A+> Alliance for Inclusive Algorithms](#) a global and a multidisciplinary feminist coalition of academics, activists and technologists prototyping the future of AI. Call to Action on decolonising tech and creating new models of equality and systems change. Click [here](#) for more information and click here to [Submit your Paper.](#)
- [Connecthumanity.fund](#) is rallying philanthropic organisations, investors, governments, civil society leaders, and international experts to build a community of practice around the shared goal of connecting the 3.6 billion unconnected people in the world. Click [here](#) for more information.
- TechSoup's [Hive Mind](#) is a cutting-edge online harbour and community of practice gathering activists, trainers, journalists, CSOs, teachers, university students, and a wider community interested in learning more about improving media literacy skills online countering disinformation, digital safety and security, and creating positive narratives. Click [here](#) for more information.
- [Civic Tech Innovation Network (CTIN)](#) is a Community of Practice and action learning network for people with an interest and commitment to leveraging the nexus between technology and civic activism. Click [here](#) for more information.

Day 5 – Global Hub, Virtual: Decolonising Aid and Organisational Structures
Day 5 began with a call to critically examine our attitudes in our working culture and development narratives and language if we want to dismantle colonial vestiges in the development sector. Participatory approaches, consultations and constant re-examination of power in our decision-making processes as well as centering care and solidarity can be key ingredients for re-thinking and designing our sector.

Organisations and initiatives outside the civil society sector are also attempting to dismantle racist and colonial power structures. The Bukavu Series (Click here for more information) puts the limelight on how academics in the Global South are often treated as mere "data collection robots", taking on the significant risks of carrying out research with no participation in the decision-making around it. Colloqate (Click here for more information) in the U.S. challenges how public spaces are occupied and puts forward architectural design that can break perpetual racist power structures. And Welcoming Cities (Click here for more information) in Australia sets a benchmark for building inclusivity into public institutions, particularly the inclusion of First Peoples. **Parallels are struggling to address harmful practices across different sectors were striking and inspiring at the same time as we should and can actively learn from each other.**

Some key points from the discussion were:

- The call for trust in youth organisations and the willingness of donors to invest in core funding to enable grassroots CSOs
- The call for participatory grant-making, involving those at the point of intended impact in the decision making on distribution of funds
- As intermediary organisations we shall re-examine – together with our finance and compliance colleagues – how much bureaucracy and burden we can strip down and change our framing of risk (Click here to listen to the podcast on reframing risk) when working with grassroots organisations and movements
- The call to be brave and try out new funding modalities or incremental changes in managing those to push the needle - the quest for an immediate perfect solution will slow us down collectively – let's rather learn collectively from our mistakes
- **We can change the fundraising narrative: Positive and negative funding appeals raise the same amount of money, (click here for more information) but positive appeals inspired efficacy or the feeling that one can make a difference – a feeling associated with higher engagement.**

One of the **parallel workshops focused on equitable partnerships**, and featured the 'Pledge for Change' Initiative of Adeso and others, following the rather disappointing progress of the Charter for Change from the 2016 WHS. Responding to the overriding demand on the sector to work differently, a more equitable and inclusive decision making is required, including more

deliberate core funding commitments to local civil society. The PfC will be published early next year and is expecting broad buy in from ICSOs and funders.

Calls to action which international CSOs can join or help promote are:

- Rights CoLab advances human rights by fostering collaboration among experts across the fields of civil society, technology, business, and finance. Fill out the Google form to express interest in engaging with the 'RINGO' project. Click here for more information Rights CoLab RINGO.
- "Stopping As Success: Locally Led Transitions in Development" (SAS+): a project that seeks to learn how to facilitate responsible development transitions from international to local actors. Click here for more information.

Day 6 – Global Hub, Virtual: Embracing New Power
Day 6 explored how civil society engages with new power actors, concepts and approaches. In the introductory session, Jeremy Heimans, co-author of the book 'New Power' (click here to check out the book) described some of the major features of new (vs. old) power, and **how power models and power values shape civil society (as much as commercial) organisations.** A quick poll brought about the interesting fact that the majority of civil society organisations see themselves as embracing new power values, but being stuck in old power models (hierarchical, linear). The audience was encouraged to have internal discussions with their staff around such notions.
The World YWCA, the Family for Every Child and Peace Direct shared fascinating examples on engaging new power actors, how deep engagement with their constituencies challenged questions around legitimacy and led to reflections on power of their organisations, own expectations, the difficulty of giving up control and the need to consider (and change) linear paths of thinking and decision making.

Some key points from the discussions were:

- The call for a serious assessment of what it means to be locally led
- Honest and valuable reflections about organisational realities vs. political ambitions.

The later afternoon provided the opportunity to discuss in smaller workshop-type meetings. The topics ranged from 'Healing in solidarity' to 'Balancing accountability and commitment' and 'Bringing New Power to progressive digital organisations. Participants appreciated the open and frank exchanges in smaller groups for good learning.

The closing of the conference included a conversation between the ICSCentre ED Wolfgang Jamann and Stella Agara of 'YouLead Africa'. They touched upon the many facets of power discussions that happened over the past two weeks, both in regional contexts and around cutting-edge themes in digital power shift, sector decolonisation and organisational changes and

partner relationships. Both speakers were equally excited about the strong dynamic of the power shift movements in the sector, and have noted **a focus on the 'how' rather than the 'why',** with many fascinating examples how civil society is transforming the aid, social justice and development sector. Many good ideas await scaling up, but systems change seems in the making.

Calls to action which international CSOs can join or help promote are:

- Purposeful is a feminist hub for girls activism, rooted in Africa and working all around the world. Listen to the Global Perspectives 2021 podcast here: Reframing risk: new visions for trust in financial management. For more information about Purposeful, click here.
- CIVICUS Grassroots Revolution and the Shift The Power UK Funders Collective are strategic streams of work aimed at improving funder relations, ways of work and power dynamics with grassroots activists and movements left behind, marginalised and most impacted by structural inequities. Listen here to the Global Perspectives 2021 podcast: How to co-create a grassroots solidarity revolution. For information on Civicus Grassroots Revolution, click here.

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