

Transfer of Knowledge not funds

Most INGO's are structured to facilitate the transfer of funds. Grant agreements, partnership agreements and MOU's with local CSOs give an emphasis to managing the funds that will be transferred; the accountability mechanisms needed to report on the use of those funds and the requirements on the local organisation to have sufficient organisational processes in place to satisfy due diligence to manage these funds.

Decisions on how these resources should be dispensed may be discussed and joint programme results agreed as equal partners but the reporting on the delivery of those results and expenditure goes from the local CSO to the INGO. Accountability is 'upwards'. Though some INGO's have in place equally strong accountability to users or participants in their programmes, this is not always the case.

Such a hierarchical model means that strategic decisions are located with the outsider rather than located fully inside the country. The power is experienced as away from the direct context in which it has impact.

Family for Every Child (Family) was established on a different premise. Knowledge rather than funds were seen as the mechanism for achieving change. The generation and transfer of knowledge was the currency of the agreement between the local CSO and the international alliance.

As a consequence the power dynamics shifted. The knowledge of sustainable solutions that were embedded in the national political, social, economic, cultural and technological realities lay with the local CSO. The alliance secretariat could bring knowledge from the international setting and other members of the alliance could bring knowledge from other national contexts. However if that local understanding is recognised as powerful then the power lies with the local CSO to bring about long term change.

The organisational design needed to be completely different to enable the transfer of this local knowledge to other countries and to influence at regional and international levels rather than the flow of money from the INGO to the local CSO or within the organisation from funding members to delivery members of a federation.

Beyond southern voices to Local CSO leadership

The current focus of some INGO's is to shift towards more 'southern voices' in the organisation for greater legitimacy and authenticity. Family chose to move to local CSO leadership.

This meant that decision making on strategic priorities, analysis of information, development of policy and allocation of resources that would all traditionally ultimately sit in the Head Office of an INGO had to be located with the local CSOs.

For Family the local CSOs needed to be the ultimate decision-makers this is achieved in two ways. Firstly, by composition, only local CSOs are members of the Alliance. Secondly, by governance structure, the membership is convened as an Assembly of members for decision-making.

The Assembly of members elect trustees to the Board. The Board is responsible for delivery of the mission. The Board reports back to the Assembly and seeks guidance from the Assembly. The Assembly agrees thematic priorities.

These two aspects ensure that the Alliance is led by local CSOs.

Power sharing rather than handing over power

The perception of many local CSOs is that power lies with donors and agencies that contract them to deliver services. The language of INGO's is often about "the handing over of power". However, there is a danger that this framing implies that either one group or the other has the power. Family chose not to follow this 'either or' binary model.

The Family model is based on a different premise – that is the distribution of power and power sharing. Decision making is about what knowledge is valuable, what knowledge needs to be disseminated and how that knowledge should be disseminated to achieve wider change. This is a collective and shared decision-making process. The Assembly of members provides the forum for these discussions and the members on the Board produce a strategy and oversee a plan to deliver this collective decision-making. Resource decisions are made across the membership through working groups.

Not top down or bottom up

The discourse is often of top down or bottom up programming both of which assume a hierarchical structure.

To achieve distributed power Family chose to be a network structure rather than a more classic hierarchy. A network by definition is not centralised and does not have a hierarchical flow of interactions. A network is based on decisions being made in multiple parts of the system. Knowledge and ideas bubble up from multiple nodes of the network and collaboration can be in multiple places engaging different organisations.

The structure is horizontal rather than vertical.

However, the structure on its own is not sufficient Family also developed values and operating principles that supported collaborative ways of working and the distribution of power. For example the subsidiarity principle, the practice of reciprocity and solidarity and participatory decision-making.

In who's name

Often power is experienced through ownership and recognition. This is evidenced by which organisational brand is on the outputs of a project, who lays claim to the results. For many local CSOs they feel that they do the work, understand the context, challenges and changes achieved. However, because the INGO or donor agency has paid for or contracted the work, it is the donor agency who brands and reports on the results. At worst the local CSO may not even be referenced or acknowledged as a 'local partner' let alone

as a co-owner of the results.

Family is made up of fully independent organisations they chose to participate in the alliance and each agency will decide their level of engagement over any given period. Only the work that is done as the alliance is branded as Family for Every Child and any member who has contributed will be fully acknowledged and their brand included on any products.

Which CSO in the civil space

Another aspect of the power dynamic at play is the shift towards federated models where INGO's are 'localising' their national programmes and setting up branded national CSOs. This enables the organisation to follow the trend towards decentralised funding through donors like the EU and funders seeking to fund directly in-country rather than via a 'northern agency'. It also enables national level fundraising.

On the other side of the coin INGO's have spent the last 30 odd years 'capacity building local CSOs'. This emerging trend of the INGO national fundraising mechanism can result in directly competing for funds and influence with the very national CSOs they previously supported. They create a glass ceiling in country for indigenous CSOs as the localised agencies have more resources and international credibility that enables them to garner support and gain access to decision makers invading the civic space of local CSOs. The risk is that funds that were intended for local/national CSOs are actually going to INGO's at a national level.

Family therefore supports national CSOs in developing their convening power and ability to hold their own government to account with the support of an international mechanism but not to the detriment of indigenous CSOs. The national CSO is the lead agency in country, including often the lead agency on funding proposals.

There is also the issue of the international space and who is invited in and on what terms. Often the international consultation, influencing space is dominated by technical specialist from international secretariats and Head Offices with what can feel like token representation from national organisations. The national voice tends to be just that the national or 'southern' voice rather than an equal voice able to speak about international issues just from a different starting point.

Family tries to address this by ensuring that local CSOs are the external representatives of the alliance they are therefore leaders of indigenous organisations representing an international organisation in international fora.

Deliberately global

Often International organisations have funding partners drawn from resource rich parts of the globe and delivery partners where resources are constrained. Also national CSOs in all parts of the world tend not to be engaged in working internationally and informing international practice and policy. Some INGO's may have a programme in their main country of registration but often don't have national advocacy as part of their agenda. This risks saying that those governments in the 'global South' need to change but not those in the 'global North' except as it relates to International Development. Yet we know that a much wider selection of Government policies can have significant impact beyond the

national borders such as defence, trade and immigration decisions.

The SDG's support the need for all governments to consider the role they have to play in achieving social justice and international organisations need to be able to gather evidence and hold all national governments to account both for their impact at a national but also at an international level either intended or unintended.

To address this Family decided to establish itself as a global organisation in that all members are practitioners and drawn from every region of the globe as equal and similar partners. We believe that change needs to happen across the globe, that we operate in a multipolar world rather than the 'global North, global South' paradigm.

Planning and measuring

Classic strategic planning and monitoring and evaluation support a hierarchical model and work best with a more centralised approach. To achieve distributed decision-making setting strategy and planning had to be approached differently in Family. Ways of working were developed to support a more research and development approach which supported an emerging strategy to evolve from different parts of the network with only very top-line strategic direction set at the outset. Evaluation methodologies had to be developed that captured what had been achieved rather than accessing whether the plan had been delivered. Having a universal or common objectives which all members worked towards would have constrained innovation instead diversity was encouraged and areas of commonality evolved or didn't.

Key Lessons Learnt

- **Scale of Change needed:** For Family the starting point was to look at governance and power differently what we learnt was this meant everything needed to change. Though we didn't know it at the time we probably elected for Penny Lawrence's Unbound model.
- **Reflection** – it is difficult to create something different and not find old perspectives creep in. There is a need for regular reflection and constructive challenge to make sure you keep moving forward
- **Funding** - Since this doesn't fit the classic project model of development, financing is a challenge
- **Diversity** – it is important that one social norm doesn't dominate and to genuinely deliver on enabling multiple perspectives and equitable participation.
- **Local CSO's value the model** – since 2011 only 5 organisations have left and many more wish to join. The members invest significant unremunerated time into the Alliance.
- **High tolerance for risk and uncertainty** – by necessity there has been a lot of testing and refining. Staff in particular need to very comfortable with a highly dynamic working environment.

Learn more about what we do and how we work at www.familyforeverychild.org, or follow us on Twitter @FFEveryChild.