

Shifting the power?

Sharing a practice & a vision on Southern Leadership

1. Intro

Policy decisions of Woord en Daad (WD) about partnership are and were always strongly fed by a continuous dialogue with our southern partners. From the very beginning in the 1970s WD has had the philosophy of working through local partners. Reasons for this were the belief that local people know and shape their context best, and the low-cost philosophy of WD (total overhead less than 10%). From one-to-one relations with partners, from the '90s WD started working in alliances of partners and executing projects in consortia with (local) civil society actors, companies and knowledge institutes which brought southern stakes and voices explicitly on a shared table. From 2015 on WD also started working on public private partnerships (PPPs), in which we sought to align more explicitly with southern public policies and -actors. Key words in our current policy plan (2021-2025) '*reach far, be near*' are co-creation, added value and adaptive programming. We feel an urge to work 'horizontally', seeking complementarity (rather than hierarchy) and effectiveness for a joint mission. This most recent step led us in 2021 to work on multi-actor partnerships for system change. In this move we are seeking to support southern 'drivers at the steering wheel' as we move from projects to partnerships: from a primary focus on project progress, to a focus on how an intervention can influence system behaviour.

2. Where exactly is the power?

The development-chain is often **vertical**, putting complementarity under pressure. 'Why is it that in the current international development cooperation system, Northern CSOs end-up being the most powerful in most partnerships for development?', Partos is asking itself in a Dream paper, 2022.

As WD we believe that all people are our fellow creatures of God and hence equal and unique. People (and thus partners) are independent in their choices and mutually dependent in collaboration. We also believe in co-responsibility: we feel a responsibility for ourselves, our neighbour and creation in general, and we treat human beings, resources and the environment with care (stewardship). We work from compassion close to and alongside people who suffer.

This perspective assumes complementarity rather than hierarchy. We believe that in our work we have something valuable to offer to each other as partners from N/S. We collaborate based on added value. So for us the question is not to 'shift the power', but rather to discuss how we can improve on the effectiveness of our joint mission: it is about sharing power. For WD, power is in the ability to 1) set agendas & develop own strategies, 2) determine partner choice & partnership practices 3) influence and/or determine funding guidelines and criteria and 4) have a clear say in business development.

3. A practical agenda for sharing power

For each of these abilities, a shared power balance is the ideal in which each partner (N/S) adds value in the process of collaboration. In a power assessment tool we have specified the 4 abilities into 15 aspects which can be scored (by N/S) by way of reflection. The different perceptions that are made visible through the tool offer an agenda for dialogue and possibly change.

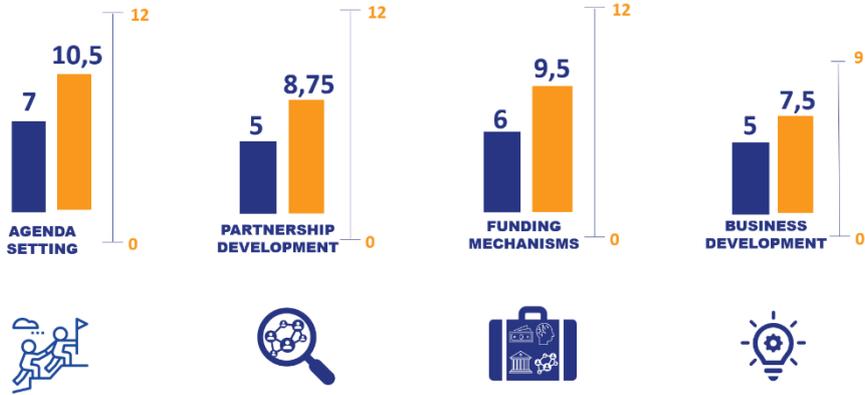
A first round of assessment was done halfway 2022¹. Interestingly the Southern partners scored the actual collaboration higher on shared power than WD. WD seems to be self-critical but will continue the conversation with the Southern partners to learn how to be best complementary to each other.

¹ While more organizations responded, only 5 organizations actually filled it scoring on all 15 aspects, which is rather limited, yet it provides an indication.

Besides, all partners N/S see plenty of room to score better towards shared power. We herewith have an agenda for dialogue and action.

Southern Leadership
Assessment WD

WHAT WD THINKS
WHAT PARTNERS THINK



Agenda setting and strategy development		Funding mechanisms	
1	Co-creation and joint planning	9	Conscious dialogue on financial flows and system resources
2	Community leadership	10	All resources count in negotiating roles and risks
3	Community lobby to donor	11	Jointly financing
4	Amplify local change leadership	12	Longterm funding horizons
Partnership development and -practices		Business development	
5	Joint partner selection proces	13	Facilitating thought leadership
6	Mutual exploration process for partnership	14	South guide North for embedment in local programmes
7	Drafting of partnership agreements	15	Integrate learning from global portfolio
8	Southern chair and end user representation in Mngt		

4. Sharing power, what for..?

In more and more partnerships we pursue system change: addressing root causes of poverty, and seeking change at multiple levels at the same time. This includes national-level government policies, sector-level services, community-level attitudes, personal-level skills and knowledge, and power dynamics between the various actors. We seek to effect such changes on the basis of the values we cherish: *value-based* system change. To be in a position to do this effectively, we strive to become part of (or create) broad partnerships with organisations with an influence on the system. Working with suitable local partners is crucial, because system change requires legitimacy and scaling potential. This translates to partners (public, civic, private) with recognised mandates, proven influence, and access to resources in the system – be it money, knowledge, capacity, contacts etc.

To mobilise and empower these partnerships, a complementary role for Southern organisations is to provide thought leadership. A *thought leader* could be an organisation (or an individual) that is exceptionally experienced and successful within its given marketplace or sector, and offers strategic sector guidance. Southern thought leadership for broad partnerships can take different shapes. For public actors: envisioning new or adjusted policies, cross-cutting institutional collaboration or long term financing. For private actors: rolling-out new business cases and active advocacy for an enabling private environment. For civic actors: leading large-scale informal and attitudinal change. For public-

private partnerships: initiate a strategy for institutional strengthening and improving sector services.

5. Sharing power: the challenge

Southern leadership defines a way of working in which southern partners are the agents of change complemented by Northern counterparts. However, within a 'development chain', there are conditions that make the complementary roles a challenge at times. Power aspects in the current set-up need balancing to pursue the vision together with southern partners.

The challenge we see for Southern organisations:

Prioritise to **represent** the poor, unreached and voiceless at the tables where strategy is developed, and decisions are made. In the area of partnership practices, emerging issues on grassroots level and end-user feedback need better and more structural space.

Take space for setting agenda's in providing more **strategic guidance** for systemic changes in their context. Analyse and point out sector-wide trends from context knowledge, and facilitate optimal linkages and embedment in the Southern formal and informal context.

Access, align and complement **existing resources** in the system, including knowledge, legitimacy, networks, value base and money – and including local fundraising. Herewith bring more balance in the roles and risks in a partnership, and create Southern voice.

The challenge we see for Northern organisations:

Play a **broker** role towards broad partnerships, linking the global and the local. As an external party above local stakes, drawing stakeholders in for a joint vision and strategy to tackle key societal challenges. But careful not to occupy the southern seat in agenda setting.

Facilitate **shared decision-making** with our partners in business development and implementation. In the vertically organised development chain have a 'bias for the South', create space for partners to develop Southern vision and strategy and listen intently.

Advocate for Southern stakes in the international agenda's among Northern policymakers and donors. Using policy analysis, creating space for Southern voices and drawing attention for more explicit financing strategies that can facilitate system change.

Finally, a challenge for both N/S: Southern organisations are used for a long time to play an implementing role for Northern organisations, and are challenged to meet donor requirements of Northern government institutions. As a constituency organisation who is part of the capillaries of society, partners are asking us to facilitate organisational development to transit to a Southern lead role. The same question comes often times from other Southern organisations in our networks. Hence, **Institution building** of public, civil and private actors in the global South becomes a crucial strategy in a movement towards more complementary roles and shared power.