Power Shift Lab 2.0
Towards more legitimate and impactful governance

Date: 10–12 March 2020
Location: Weiberwirtschaft, Anklamer Straße 38, 10115 Berlin, Germany

The International Civil Society Centre will deliver its second Power Shift Lab to strengthen international civil society organisations’ (ICSOs) impact by moving towards a more effective and legitimate distribution of powers, roles and responsibilities in their governance, specifically by strengthening the voices of the communities they serve.

International civil society organisations lack inclusive governance models
Power imbalances within and between Northern and Southern, but also large and small, rich and resource-scarce entities of ICSOs stand in the way of these organisations achieving their missions and mandates. To improve the livelihoods of people by delivering inclusive programmes and taking solid resource-allocation decisions, ICSOs need to shift power to these communities. However, “traditional” governance models which are process-heavy and geared towards donor accountability, limit the engagement of communities from engaging in decision-making processes. ICSOs are also often organised in a parent-subsidiary operation model whereby a resource-rich entity controls implementing branches and partner organisations in the Global South. This is exacerbated by donor-driven, project-based operational models which prevent processes of inclusive resource allocation and prioritisation.¹

ICSOs can spearhead power shifts in governance to the people they serve
ICSOs represent the bulk of international humanitarian and development assistance, human rights and social justice work. Despite trends of direct funding to national CSOs and significant ‘localisation’ efforts², these well-established players will continue to be effective service providers and social change makers for years to come. Even more, much-needed global solidarity between rich and poor, privileged and marginalised people, can be facilitated and amplified by strong international actors which represent the best of all intentions.

The International Civil Society Centre (‘the Centre’) in conjunction with Conner Advisory conducted a first Power Shift Lab in September 2018 to address this appetite towards more legitimate and global governance. ICSO leaders from the Global North and South reviewed the inter-relationship of the ‘Golden Triangle: Power Dynamics, Organisational Intent and Governance Reform’. They found that they are in a much better position to assess adequate governance models and necessary reforms if they know the power dynamics inside and around their organisations, and how they help or hinder their strategic intent.

¹ More information on dimensions of Power Shift can be found in the presentation “Radical Powershift” delivered by PACT on 21 February 2019. Webinar - Presentation can be shared upon request.  
² Localisation has become an official agenda latest at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit: See, https://startnetwork.org/resource/localisation-aid-are-igos-walking-talk
A few ICSOs, such as PACT (through a radical ownership model including a shareholder council) or Plan International (through a community’s engagement tool), have started putting the people they serve at the top or centre of their governance models in an almost revolutionary way, whilst others are seeking more evolutionary approaches. This moves towards an ambitious aim, but is faced with significant challenges caused by organisational culture, open or hidden power structures and established business models. Building on the implementation successes (and failures) after the first Lab, the Centre will explore the questions of how to overcome these barriers and lead the necessary power shifts.

How to lead the Power Shift
Many ICSOs report that their reform efforts fall short of achieving their intended purposes, particularly when it comes to including partners and people they work with in their governance processes. The 2020 Lab will address the ‘how to’ dimension and help address real live questions on strengthening ICSOs’ impact by moving towards a more effective and legitimate distribution of powers, roles and responsibilities in organisational governance, specifically by strengthening the voices of beneficiaries. In order to achieve this objective, the project will consist of two key components:

1) Golden Triangle Analysis (December - January 2019)
Participants will conduct an up-to-date analysis of the interrelationships between power, governance and organisational intent in their own contexts. The Centre will correspond with all participating organisations in advance of the meeting to provide a framework for this analysis and aggregate participants’ inputs. We will refer back to the plans developed during the first Lab in 2018, and work with new participants on their experiences addressing power dimensions.

2) Power Shift Lab on 10–12 March 2020 in Berlin
Building on the advance analysis, the Lab will:
- identify the current status of the ‘golden triangle’ in the different organisations;
- develop a picture of more effective/legitimate power and governance structures;
- help strategise revolutionary vs. evolutionary approaches;
- explore how to address the most crucial dimensions of power shift, such as overcoming barriers, improving accountability and engaging with the right people;
- allow for deep dives into dimensions that are most relevant for the respective organisations (such as the organisational intent, how power dynamics have shifted, how governance consists of more than just structures);
- develop or strengthen strategies to drive the power shift.

Deliverables
The project will:
- develop concepts for a more appropriate and effective distribution of roles, responsibilities, oversight and powers among all major stakeholders, specifically empowering those who are supposed to benefit from ICSOs’ work;
- analyse new approaches to ICSO governance that secure decision-making processes which provide a better balance between those providing resources and those implementing and benefiting from them;
- sharpen the skills of participating ICSO leaders to empower them to turn their governance into a more legitimate and effective leadership tool for their organisations;
- broaden best practices for ICSOs in reconciling the principles of democratic and effective governance;
• provide tools and concepts needed to build a robust plan for implementing the desired shifts in power, roles and responsibilities and governance processes;
• assure a sustainable community of learning with Lab participants (and their organisations) via webinars, and potentially develop guidelines for the broader civil society sector.

Lab Participants
Attendees at the Lab will be (Deputy) CEOs, Senior Leaders in charge of governance and Board Members. Each participating organisation will bring at least one senior leader from the organisation and at least one peer from a partner, implementing organisation or chapter from the Global South. We also seek donor involvement and experiences from outside the sector.

Meeting Details
The Power Shift Lab will take place on 10–12 March 2020 in Berlin. Participation will be by invitation only. Each participating organisation should bring at least one senior leader from the organisation and at least one senior leader from a partner or implementing organisation or chapter, ideally from the Global South.

The participation fee will be € 2,500 for each organisation. The fee will cover two participants. Additional participants will be charged € 1,000. Travel and accommodation are not included.

Registration for the Power Shift Lab will close on 31 January 2020. Organisations that register and pay the participation fees before 08 January will receive a discount of 10%. Shareholders and full Core Supporters of the Centre receive a discount of 20% acknowledging their annual core support.

Draft Program
The below are the preliminary agenda objectives for this upcoming executive-level workshop

Day 1:
• Reconnecting the last year’s cohort members with one another and with the inter-relationships between intent/power/governance
• Enrolling the new members to the cohort and creating a common framework for the discussions
• Sharing recent experiences and lessons learned by each organisation as they have implemented (or anticipate implementing) needed power shifts and governance reforms

Day 2:
• Introducing and applying a change execution framework to successfully implementing major shifts and reforms
• Providing in-depth education on and tools for successfully executing the desired power shifts and governance reforms to include:
  o Creating effective narratives that clarify the why, what, how and when of the required changes
  o Identifying key stakeholders whose support will be critical (as well as developing a picture of those individuals or groups who are likely to oppose the changes)
  o Developing plans for building commitment across these key groups (and dealing with likely resistance)

Day 3:
• Completing and sharing concrete plans using the newly acquired change execution knowledge and tools that will be carried back to their respective organisations