Call for contributions for an edited book on Southern-led programming of CSO development collaboration

We are looking for contributions for an edited volume tentatively titled: “Starting from the South: Reimagining programming in development collaboration of civil society organizations” to be proposed for the Routledge series of Explorations in Development Studies.

Aspired changes in development co-operation in general and in the collaboration of civil society organizations (CSOs) in particular are subject to ongoing critical debate. Issues such as transformation, inclusive development, changing civic space and localization are central when it comes to critical explorations of partnerships between CSOs from the global South and global North.

The need for contextualization of development initiatives in support of civil society and engagement with ongoing local processes within the existing environments are increasingly seen as the cornerstones of supporting civil societies in global South. Many donors that provide funding for civil society initiatives emphasize contextualization and local ownership of programmes. At the same time, they continue to emphasize programming by Northern development CSOs and channel funds through them rather than allocating them directly for organizations in the global South. In practice, Northern development NGOs are thus encouraged to maintain positions of leadership and control, often working through programmes that are supposed to work across countries and involve programme-level theories of change that they seek to implement with their local partners in diverse contexts. Therefore, the CSOs, in global North and South, have to deal with multiple, often conflicting, demands and aims of achieving local ownership are far-off.

Seeing the problems involved, there are signs that the development sector is open to change. The ongoing debates of participation, ownership and partnership have all made visible and challenged the prevailing power relations. Solutions such as directly funding Southern CSOs rather than through Northern CSOs, and changes in the governance structures of CSO collaborations to make them increasingly equal, are being experimented with. However, often the aspired changes remain more at the level of rhetoric and normative prescriptions. Consequently, there is a need to reimagine South-North collaborations, and translate these imaginings into practical ways of working together in development; ways that make the most of the strengths of both Southern and Northern CSOs.

In this book, we want to shift the debate on CSOs in development towards resolving the question how to collaborate differently, and provide knowledge for donors and CSOs that can concretely advance Southern leadership by ‘starting from the South’. In this approach, we see roles for diverse CSOs—both Southern and Northern—and donors, in complementary relations and collaborations that develop from the global South to the North rather than the other way around. We aim to step away from the common practice of programme development led by Northern actors and subsequently identifying suitable partners in the global South ready to meet their requirements. Instead, we explore CSOs and their collaborations from the starting point that Southern CSOs are agents seeking to act from their own understandings and agendas of what is possible and desirable. CSOs are often expert navigators of their own contexts and frequently embedded in multiple relations shaping their roles. Their Northern (donor) partner is just one of these relations.

This book intends to identify practical alternatives and ways of “learning to do differently” both within the existing institutional frameworks and in attempts to transform them, exploring the ways in which “Starting from the South” could be conceptualized further and translated into practice. Such learning requires reflection and changes not only in individual and organizational action, but also in institutional norms and practices. Moreover, a wealth of unlearning and forgetting of the existing, often institutionalized, ways of doing things is needed. Accounts on diverse ways of learning and unlearning
are much welcomed. Reflections of the effects of the recent Covid-19 pandemic on the roles and practices in CSO collaborations are also appreciated.

We encourage contributions from the academics and practitioners from the global South. As usual, the publication is subject to a positive result of the external review commissioned by Routledge, and each chapter needs to meet the standards of an academic publisher.

The contributions should address the following broad themes:

1) **Contextualized notions of civil society and civil society organizations**

   Research has shown the problematics related to the Western origins and definitions of the notions of “civil society” and “organization” in North-South CSO collaborations, that often privilege professionalized NGOs able and willing to meet Northern requirements. We seek for contributions that would challenge, contextualize and re-define these concepts, and provide analysis of what are good and appropriate ways of organizing and the characteristics of a “good organization” when it comes to sphere of civil society and the activities aimed towards “development”.

   We expect these contributions to relate to the historical societal contexts, as well as the intertwined needs and interests of organizations and the populations they are situated in or working with. The contributions can, for instance, challenge the typical distinctions between advocacy, service delivery and capacity building roles, or explore the development role of informal organizations, individual leaders and social movements rather than professionalized, formal CSOs.

2) **Case studies on learning and unlearning related to “starting from the South”**: 

   o Collaborations where Northern CSOs have started by supporting existing networks and ongoing processes rather than introducing a “new” project.
   o CSO programming developed and conducted mainly by Southern CSOs in collaboration with Northern CSOs.
   o Experimentations of doing differently in North-South collaborations that involve higher acknowledgement and leadership of Southern CSOs (e.g. engagement with diversities in understandings and agendas or ways of valuing and using different forms of knowledge).
   o Analysis of the role of donors in facilitating and shaping such experimentations.

   The case studies should describe the nature, background and triggers for “doing differently”, as well as the successful moments and challenges encountered. The reflections could focus on the practical change in roles of different actors as well as the implications for the power dynamics and the ways in which North-South collaborations (incl. key dimensions like programme development, accountability and reporting) are perceived and organized. The case studies can, but not necessarily will, explicitly address the notions of learning and unlearning. Studies can focus on CSOs as such, but given the key role of donors in making “starting from the South” possible, studies (also) addressing the role of donors will be appreciated.

3) **Conceptual and practical “re-imaginations” of what should be done differently and how**

   Rather than providing examples of existing practices, contributions can also provide imaginations and suggestions for new ways of CSO programming and collaboration. These contributions can focus on changing practices in existing institutional frameworks, or propose more fundamental transformations concerning the current understandings of
the notions of “civil society”, “development” and the division between “global South and North”.

For inspiration and background, we would encourage you to have a look on the following report:


Editors:

Margit van Wessel, Wageningen University & Research, the Netherlands
Tiina Kontinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Justice Bawole, the University of Ghana Business School, Ghana

Submission of abstracts:

The potential contributors are welcome to provide an abstract of their intended chapter of max. 800 words. The abstract should describe the background, conceptualization and empirical base of the planned chapter, as well as provide some tentative ideas for findings and core arguments. In addition, list of 3-7 main references used should be provided.

The abstracts are sent the latest on the 1st November 2020 in editors’ emails:

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The theme of the proposed book is based on the intersection of the previous and ongoing research of the editors, who all have been working extensively on the themes of development NGOs, civil society and citizenship from perspectives on ethnography, organization theory and management. The book has been especially inspired by recent research led by Margit van Wessel on Southern CSO roles and leadership in collaboration, and ongoing research led by Tiina Kontinen on hybridity in civil society organizations.

Planned timeline of the book:

- Call for contributions 10th August 2020
- Deadline for submission of abstracts 1st November 2020
- Decisions on the acceptance by the 4th December 2020
- Submission of the book proposal to Routledge December 2020
- Authors’ workshop on the chapter drafts June 2021
- Submission of the final chapters November 2021
- Publication in the first half of 2022