12 augustus 2021

Dear partners, friends and colleagues,

It’s been half a year since the start of the programs focused on Strengthening Civil Society. We – the Ministry, civil society organisations, international development partners - need to continually reflect on sharing decision-making power in these partnerships. The question that I’d like to ask is how effective we are in involving young people in the work we do.

Today is International Youth Day! In my experience, one way of changing power dynamics is by engaging youth as a partner. Young people should be able to meaningfully participate in policy-making. For example, youth-led organisation can
work on the implementation of programmes, or we can work with young people during monitoring and evaluation.

This means we need to give more space, influence and agency to young people. This is the right and just thing to do, especially in Africa where in many countries more than 70% of the population is under 30. It will also make programmes more geared towards the specific challenges and opportunities of young people and therefore more geared towards the reality on the ground.

Last year, the Netherlands launched the Youth at Heart strategy, aimed at improving prospects for young people through education and work, and specifically bridging the gap between the skills young people learn and the jobs that are available. Meanwhile we focus on Meaningful Youth Participation and increasingly aim to work with young people as partners and leaders. In this spirit we organised the Youth at Heart virtual forum; in cooperation with our international partners, private sector, civil society organisations and young people. The Youth at Heart Principles were launched and are a call to action for all of us: invest in the prospects of young people and work with them!

As a Ministry and as a sector we still have some way to go, but there’s a movement and a momentum to more actively involve young people as partners and leaders. I hope you are part of that movement! Between you, there are many great examples of meaningfully engaging young people and I’m looking forward to reading those: the next newsletter will focus on youth engagement, so please share your ideas, reflections and stories.

This newsletter will focus on the topic of sharing the power. I hope this newsletter can inspire you with pieces on power, ownership and partnership: starting with a contribution by the Leading from the South alliance, continued with the Love Alliance, and followed with a reflection on the first dialogue session and on a linking and learning session of partnerships in Uganda.

I wish you all a happy International Youth Day and I look forward to seeing your stories and reflections on youth engagement.

Kind regards,

Tijmen Rooseboom, Dutch Ambassador for Youth, Education, and Work

Twitter: @tijmenrooseboom
Instagram: @tijmenrooseboom
In the spotlight: Leading from the South

Leading from the South (LFS) is a feminist philanthropic fund and alliance, conceptualised and managed by four leading women’s funds: African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF), Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS), International Indigenous Women’s Forum (FIMI) / AYNI Fund (AYNI), and Women’s Fund Asia (WFA). LFS is part of the wider Strengthening Civil Society policy framework supports women’s rights activism and lobbying efforts by women’s organisations, movements and networks at the regional, national, and grassroots levels in the Global South. In this article, Luz Aquilante, executive director of FMS, takes you into resourcing feminist activism in a pandemic context.

The world has witnessed an unprecedented crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It hasn’t been just a health issue. It has been a deep shock to socio-economic structures, exacerbating social and gender inequalities. As a feminist fund that supports women, LBTSIQ+ people and their organisations in their activisms towards gender equality (through grants, and knowledge and networking opportunities), this emergency has taught us several lessons.

One is that the defence of human rights and gender justice was still not only valid, but even more critical and urgent. And that preconditions for activism radically changed, posing new challenges that lead to prioritizing new strategies. Those related to violence prevention, health care, basic needs’ assistance, and self and collective care of human rights defenders gained centre-stage without relegating others, such as advocacy and monitoring of public policies in the emergency.
Another lesson is that the answer to this uncertain context is flexibility. We were able to react rapidly because women’s funds have historically advocated and practiced a flexible scheme of grant making. We have a close and daily relationship based on trust with the activists, and plan from a dynamic perspective. Being flexible is political and strategic as it enables activists to exercise autonomy in decision-making and make the best possible use of resources by adapting effectively to changing political, social and economic scenarios.

After all, we have faced the challenge to think about how Leading from the South (LFS) could collaborate to create better preconditions for activism. The guiding question was: What activism is necessary and possible given COVID-19? We have worked closer to the organisations we support in order to collectively find answers, assuming that flexibility, empathy and permanent dialogue were required to respond to new realities and guarantee the sustainability of the feminist movements and their agenda to transform societies.

Keeping up with our partners: Love Alliance
My name is Naroesha Jagessar and as the Love Alliance partnership coordinator I am excited and proud to be part of the largest Dutch programme aimed at improving the SRHR of key populations and people living with HIV, in particular sex workers, LGBTIQ+ persons, and people who use drugs.

These communities are the hardest hit by the HIV epidemic due to stigmatization, discrimination, criminalization and reduced access to SRH/HIV services. As a result, they are 25-35 times more vulnerable to acquiring HIV than other groups and account for 65% of new HIV infections globally. Yet only 2% of global HIV financing addresses their needs and even less goes directly to their community-led organisations.

The Love Alliance wants to change this! To ensure that all people are empowered to make well informed, autonomous choices about their bodies and their SRH without fears and barriers, we offer a modern and collaborative response to the current challenges faced by key populations. We build on past experiences and use innovative approaches to shift the power to the Global South and foster sustainable community-led responses that truly address their self-identified needs.

So how do we do this? The Love Alliance teams up mostly African and community-led partners with extensive experience advocating for the rights of key populations (AFE, GALZ, GNP+, ISDAO, SANPUD, Sisonke, UHAI-EASHRI, and Aidsfonds). We use a participatory approach for our planning, advocacy and grant-making. All eight partners have an equal vote in the board and jointly decide on all planning and strategic matters. They are assisted by a strong and diverse advisory team of seven local independent activists (including youth voices!) who advise the Board and hold us accountable to our promises. In addition, our grants (which seek to engage over a hundred local and regional community-led advocacy partners) are selected by independent regional grant committees consisting of local representatives of the communities we serve.

These are just some examples of our transformative way of working in which we will unite and amplify the voices of our communities to become a powerful platform for change! Visit our Love Alliance webpage to learn more about us or hear from our Alliance partners themselves in short videos about who we are, what we do and aim to achieve, and what the Love Alliance means to them!
First strengthening civil society dialogue: It’s a wrap!

On the 17th of June the first Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) Online Dialogues took place with over 180 participants from all over the world, connected by their shared work under the SCS Policy Framework. Participants from the diverse SCS partnerships, VOICE, Leading from the South, ICNL, Civicus, Partos and the MFA together addressed the question: How can we approach the challenges and opportunities of local ownership and shifting power dynamics?

The session led to an open conversation and participants shared a range of ideas and concrete steps for action in areas such as funding, inclusive decision making and program design. It reaffirmed the need to continue this conversation and underlined the importance of making concrete plans and steps to foster local ownership in monitoring and evaluation to help learn and keep track of progress. As was said by one of our partners:

“... local ownership means that the programs [...] are implemented in a manner that suits that local context of that particular country. This helps to bring sustainability [...] involvement of local organizations in the formulation and during implementation.”
Additionally, this led to a series of conversation about the importance of recognizing the intrinsic power of local organizations. Participants noted that the notion of shifting power implied that local organizations had no initial influence over their environments. However, the #ShiftThePower, ideally, promotes far more than that. It is a phrase that established the need for local ownership, for international and northern organizations to respect and understand the expertise local and southern organizations have, and to cooperate on a complementary basis. An overview of the collected input was shared with all partners after the session, and we encourage colleagues at all levels of the Ministry and our civil society partners to reflect collectively on the session’s outcomes and continue the conversation.

This Dialogue highlighted that these exchanges and deepening of our shared understanding and knowledge of our work are a meaningful contribution to partnerships and fostering cross-learning. The SCS Dialogues are part of the broader SCS Learning Agenda and include a course on civil society, a research trajectory, podcasts and newsletters. Effectiveness of our partnerships and projects is contingent on open communication and learning. We hope the bi-annual SCS Dialogue Sessions will foster this. The Dialogue team is already preparing the next session, currently scheduled for November this year. Stay tuned and we look forward to seeing you all again.
Boot camp Partnerships in Uganda

_In January 2021, 25 strategic partnership programmes started in Uganda. Challenged by the constraints of COVID-19, the Embassy (EKN) in Kampala organized online and hybrid events to boost alignment and collaboration between all programs active in the country - both the partnerships co-ordinated regionally and internationally and the country-level programmes. In February, the Embassy organized a boot camp with the 15 strategic partnerships on SRHR and/or gender._

The boot camp was a hybrid meeting with 15 face-to-face representatives from the partnerships and about 50 online participants. The online participation enabled inclusive participation of all Ugandan organizations and representatives from the Global Alliances. Brainstorm sessions were held in small groups, to capture as many opinions as possible.

The sessions in the boot camp covered overlaps, differences and complementarities in the Strategic Partnership programs; shared ambitions and conditions for collaboration; and exploring commitments. Two distinctive sessions were added; a session on mainstreaming disabilities, which enabled an entry point
for broader discussion on mainstreaming; and a session with pitches from Ugandan private companies (f.e. media, ICT, female entrepreneurship) to inspire and stimulate collaboration with the Ugandan private sector.

For participants, the boot camp was an eye-opener, learning about the number of SRHR and Gender partnership programmes in Uganda and the commonalities in their Theories of Change. Participants appreciated the necessity to explore alignment and collaboration to increase the collective impact of all strategic partnerships in Uganda.

The boot camp was timely as many organizations were in the midst of specifying and finalizing their country specific ToCs and work plans. At the end of the meeting, all consortia and the embassy shared commitments on collaboration for the years to come. A platform of representatives of the partnerships has started to further operationalize these commitments into specific actions. Furthermore, following the boot camp, several representatives of the partnership programmes organized bilateral meetings to discuss their respective programmes and possibilities for collaboration.
Diversity and inclusion – a letter from the Ministry

Dear partners,

Stimulating diversity and inclusion at the workplace should be high on the agenda of each employer.

Sign the Diversity Charter and show that your organisation is serious about committing to more diversity and inclusion in your organisation! The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of the signatories and invites its Dutch civil society partners to do the same.

The Diversity Charter is a declaration of intent that focuses on employers from the public and the private sector. By signing the Charter, your organisation commits to self-formulated goals to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace. You can commit to multiple dimensions of diversity, including cultural, ethnic & religious background, gender, age, LGBTI and individuals with disabilities or chronic illness. Ultimately, it is about transcending differences in order to see and utilize the talents of each individual. The Diversity Charter is part of a European network of Charters in 23 countries. By signing the Charter you gain access to this movement which includes more than 10,000 companies. More information can be found on:
In its regular dialogues with its Dutch partners, the Ministry looks forward to put adherence to the Charter and how it can benefit your organisation on the agenda.

Communication Update

- **International Youth Day 2021, today on August 12th:** International Youth Day 2021 focuses on the UN Food Systems Summit. We encourage everyone to communicate about IYD by putting a spotlight on a Youth Champion (or organization). You can reshare articles that @MinBZ, @DutchMFA and @IGG_NL will share in August on the YouthAtHeart Website.

  Please use the main hashtags #YouthAtHeart, #UNFSS2021 and/or refer to @DutchMFA, @MinBZ, @tijmenrooseboom, @FoodSystems in your posts.

- **Keeping up with the partners:** As civil society and civic freedoms are under pressure worldwide, it’s time to let the world know what’s going on and how your work makes a difference. We would like to invite you to take the
public on a story-telling journey on your steps made and small and large victories during the coming years. Take for instance the public along on the steps you made to build a partnership or share perspectives of people with or for whom you work. To raise extra awareness on your impact under the partnerships and the pivotal role of civil society, we are launching a new hashtag for our communication channels: #KeepingUpWithOurPartners.

Are you willing to shine on our socials? Please share (1) an Instagram- or twitter-text and (2) rights-free visual material on your steps made, challenges faced and successes achieved to powerofvoices@minbuza.nl.

Check it out

Media:

- Policy officer and Advanced Master of International Development student Teba Al-Samarai together with her fellow-student Jara Bakx bring in bright perspectives with a blog about neo-colonialism in development cooperation, with a roadmap to decolonize it. Read it here on the website of the Radboud Centre for Social Sciences.
- Have you heard that the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) unanimously adopted the OECD/DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance? It is an important milestone, as the first international standard directed to strengthen civil society and protect civic space. Each DAC member country will be responsible for the implementation of the recommendation, making it an important commitment to strengthen donor coherence as well. It offers important guidelines applicable to all civil society supporters, check it out here! As co-chair and active member of the DAC Community of Practice drafting the document, DSO is curious to hear how the instrument could be useful to your setting. Please contact us.
- Did you miss out on the fifth World Café organized by Vice Versa and Wilde Ganzen? Look back on the fascinating conversation led by Ama van Dantzig about the future of development cooperation and more equality between Northern and Southern players with (deputy) Directors-General for International Cooperation Kitty van der Heijden and Birgitta Tazelaar, Charles Kojo Vandyck, and Rachael Mwikali. Check it out via this YouTube link and by reading the report.
• Want to experience the connection between art and activism? Take a look at the She Decides virtual Art Gallery that celebrates 25 years of the historic Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Check it out here!
• Excited about linking research, policy, and practice? Share-Net encourages (post)graduate students, research interns, and young professionals to submit an abstract on sexual and reproductive health and rights, or gender equality and women’s empowerment. Abstracts can be submitted in multiple languages. Find the call for abstracts here. Abstract submission deadline: Tuesday, the 31st of August 2021.
• Do you want to improve diversity, be a better male ally for women, or generally acquire new knowledge and skills? Check out the toolbox developed by the Brussels Binder, with toolkits on gender balance, diversity, network building, male allies and more.

Events:

• On September 10th, Partos’ Community of Practice Shift-the-Power will organise a webinar on system change for more effective partnerships. Interested? Register here! To start identifying and addressing power in partnerships, take a look at the Power Awareness Tool.
• On September 30th, DSO together with Partos, organizes a webinar on learning for all partners and staff of the Ministry involved in the Strengthening Civil Society policy implementation. Amongst others, the outcomes of the learning survey of last Spring will be presented. Invitations will follow by e-mail.
• Check out the call for the “Collaborative Innovations Award” by Partos. The Award celebrates collaborations in international civil society partnerships that creatively dealt with complex challenges in development cooperation. The innovations will be put in the spotlight at the Partos Innovation Festival on October 8th. The ‘call for innovation’ is open until the 15th of August.
• This autumn (October/November), in collaboration with MDF, DSO will organize the first edition of a Basic Course Strengthening Civil Society for Lobby & Advocacy. Participation is open to staff members of our partner CSOs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The course consists of three self-paced e-learning modules and three live online exchanges between course participants. Together the course should take not more than 9 hours of your time. It is particularly relevant for staff who are for the first time engaging with the Strengthening Civil Society policy framework and facilitation is provided both in English and French. If you are interested to participate in this course, kindly share your motivation using this link. If you
are interested to contribute to the course content please contact Irene Abdi through SCS-MEL@minbuza.nl.

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