

Edited chat transcript of “**Building ecosystems to enable civil society to thrive**” (14/05/2025)

00:36:14 **Lucy Morris - INTRAC:** Congrats on the award Ashley!

00:37:29 **Emma Haegeman - SDDirect:** Agree on the partnerships. SDDirect and Plan IUK has developed an equitable partnerships toolkit that might be of interest. We use this at the start of any partnership to discuss ways of working, level of ambition, principles.

Link: [Building Equitable Partnerships: Tools with Guidance](#) (Plan International and Social Development Direct)

00:46:36 **Sian Pilkington (CIVICUS):** Just sharing a little more about the CIVICUS NMGM Innovation Awards mentioned earlier

Link: [Announcing the 2024/25 Nelson Mandela-Graça Machel Innovation Awardees!](#) (CIVICUS LinkedIn post)

00:47:09 **Rachel Houghton:** Good to see use, and further development, of Partnership Brokers Association and The Partnering Initiative's resources in this toolkit.

- Link: [Partnership Brokers](#)
- Link: [The Partnering Initiative](#)

[**Emma Haegeman Reply to Emma Haegeman**] Given what came out of FCDO yesterday - a clear deprioritisation of gender (and education), we need to think about how we can support civil society (and especially those directly under attack like WROs and OPDs) so that the sector is inclusive and that there is representation of different people and groups.

00:50:29 **Isabella Jean:** Local resource mobilization and financial sustainability is still an option for local entities who are diversifying their revenue sources and launching viable social enterprises. I recently worked on a strategy for a non-profit in East Africa transitioning from a grant-dependent non-profit to a social enterprise. But groups focused primarily on human rights, labor rights, accountability (or citizen watch groups) have less options and are often working with less resources.

Soren Asboe, CISU/Denmark reply to Isabella Jean: Is the strategy public available?

[**Isabella Jean** *Reply to Soren Asboe*] Not yet, but I hope it will be shared later this year. The organization is also planning to revive and encourage the return to traditional (centuries-old) local resource mobilization models. E.g. waqf, a traditional Islamic social finance mechanism that creates a community endowment for communal use in perpetuity. All over the Islamic world, schools, hospitals, roads and other communal assets have been built using waqfs. Some waqf that started 100+ years ago are now multi-million dollar companies with endowment at their core. Fascinating story: Oxford University's endowment was inspired by a waqf.

Link: [How Waqf Endowments Built The Foundation of Muslim Society with Maulana Tahir Talati](#) (YouTube video from The Thinking Muslim)

01:05:30 **Lucy Morris - INTRAC:** INTRAC's been running training to strengthen the supply of OD consultants in Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya - they're having their final reflection workshop this week and here are some pics from the workshop.

Link: [How Waqf Endowments Built The Foundation of Muslim Society with Maulana Tahir Talati](#) (YouTube video from The Thinking Muslim)

01:05:35 **Emma Haegeman - SDDirect:** Agree. One thing we are trialing on our programmes (if they continue!) and Helpdesks is a mentorship model so we pair a senior local consultant with a younger less experienced/known local consultant to build up the younger generation and facilitate those opportunities. This includes in TL roles.

Shubha Chacko (she/her) *reply to Emma Haegeman:* This is a good idea.

01:17:32 **Rob Bowden:** I agree with Ashley that there is a crisis of imagination. It would be great to have greater exchange around radical imagination rather than knowledge (often derived from the very systems that need to be reimagined).

01:18:19 **Isabella Jean:** Agree on using platforms helping to connect orgs, practitioners & advisors! A few good examples: in my home country, Armenia, a group of social entrepreneurs launched a platform to connect local initiatives, Diaspora members (skills sharing) and individual giving.

Link: [ReArmenia website](#)

01:19:57 **Isabella Jean:** Adeso had launched Kuja to connect change makers, funders and individuals

Link: [Kuja website](#)

01:20:34 **Lucy Morris - INTRAC:** Really value your point about imagination Ashley, and how it's a lost art. This article also spoke to me:

Link: ["What if we could uncanceled the future? When Luigi Vitali interviewed me for Dust Magazine"](#)

01:24:37 **Isabella Jean:** Another example: Philanthropy in Ukraine platform connects verified Ukrainian CSOs, funders (individual & institutional) and conducts research and training on

Link: [Philanthropy in Ukraine website](#) (note: in Ukrainian, but can be translated by your browser)

01:30:09 **Anwar Muhammad - PIN:** Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy is an excellent example of corporate philanthropy and indigenous philanthropy promotion in Pakistan and using NGO and INGO certificate program for quality and sustainability!

Link: [Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy Website](#)

01:37:10 **Rachel Houghton:** The challenge is that INGOs use the rhetoric of transformation, including talking about themselves as convenors, brokers and amplifiers, as BJ suggests. But they are not addressing the mindset (and skillset) shifts needed to work in this way. And neither do they understand how to really engage in equitable partnerships based on complementarity and alignment. The skills needed are what people often refer to as 'soft skills', but they are far from soft! And it's about all of us finding our way back to our humanity in how we engage with others - and would like to be engaged with.

01:40:47 **Isabella Jean replies:** Rachel, agree. The reality is far from "convening, facilitating, amplifying" - more closer to just "project management" and "enforcement of risk and compliance regime" 😊

01:42:08 **Rachel Houghton replies:** @Isabella Jean Yep! They're using the language of networks and networking, actually. Without any accompanying change processes to enable this to happen.

01:40:06 **Rob Bowden replies:** I think this comes from a failure to value 'learning' as a fundamental part of what they should be doing. This stems in my experience from the professionalisation of the sector and associated expectations.

01:43:29 **Daniel Willcox replies:** This report co-written by Menjadi and Planet Indonesia is very relevant on the role of INGOs/intermediaries (and what they say they do vs the support local organisations actually receive!)

Link: ["From Transactional to Relational: Guidelines for Equitable Intermediaries in Indonesia"](#)

01:45:18 **Isabella Jean** *replies*: And that's why I have to disagree with one of the speakers earlier - some INGOs are ripe for closure and should devolve (not "spend down" but transfer resources to support local CSO infrastructure (either local CSOs, social enterprises, community philanthropy, local entity that can be a fiscal sponsor for others). Some good examples in exit strategy case studies I've done in Bosnia and Georgia

01:45:38 **Paul Rees-Thomas** *replies*: Agree. Over projectisation and overblown management, not evolving away from direct delivery, and not moving faster (and investing in) towards genuine and 'skilled' brokerage of partnership and collaboration.

01:47:23 Violeta Vajda, Hungary and Romania: We did not hear anything about the ecosystem in political environments where civil society is at risk of being destroyed. Today's news from Hungary for example is this [link below]. I strongly suggest a future event about this subject.

Link: ["Hungary ruling party drafts bill to crack down on foreign-funded organisations"](#) (Reuters)

01:45:38 **Richard Allen** *replies*: Totally agree - from my perspective in the neighbouring western Balkans, this is the most challenging aspect of our work. would be great to have an event on this.

01:53:49 **Kate Newman - INTRAC**: Thank you all for a great discussion, I said it would be interesting, and it really has been!

01:57:23 **Rini Murwahyuni**: I'm part of the local consultants network trained by INTRAC on Consulting with Soul in Indonesia. Building collective efforts takes time, in the meantime I believe individually we practice and share this important principle in our works. It's a baby step, but we commit to continue doing it. Thanks INTRAC!

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- This transcript has been edited for clarity and to capture key points and links.