

Shifting the power through organisational development



Online, 23 March 2022

Introduction

Shifting the power is not easy. It requires changed mindsets, behaviours and partnership practices from both individuals and organisations. Over the last 30 years, INTRAC has witnessed many positive examples of transferring power and agency to partners in the global South. But as we look ahead we know there is a great deal more work to be done. We are still a very long way from equitable partnerships. We know that OD needs to play a key role in making this shift a reality.

On March 23, 2022, INTRAC hosted an online event under the title "shifting the power through organisational development". This event formed a part of the celebrations of INTRAC's 30th anniversary. Over 140 participants from around the world joined the 90-minute discussion. This document presents extracts from each part of the event, and provides links to other resources on the intersection between OD and the #shifthe power movement.

Event agenda

- Welcome and opening remarks from Peter Sargent, INTRAC interim Chief Executive
- Four brief talks:
 - Rick James on localising consultancy to shift the power
 - Angela Zamaere on integrating organisational development in partnerships to shift the power
 - Nancy Akanbombire on feminist organisational development
 - Lucy Morris on digital organisational development
- Q&A session with questions from attendees for the panel
- Breakout for discussion in groups
- Summary and closing remarks from Smruti Patel, Co-Director of Global Mentoring Initiative

Speakers and hosts



Rick James (INTRAC)
Localising consultancy to shift the power

Angela Zamaere
Integrating OD in partnerships to shift the power



Nancy Akanbombire
Feminist OD

Lucy Morris (INTRAC)
Digital OD



Peter Sargent (INTRAC)
Host and introduction

Smruti Patel (INTRAC)
Summary and closing remarks



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[Click for a playlist of highlight videos](#)

Welcome and opening remarks

INTRAC's interim Chief Executive Peter Sargent welcomed everyone to the session, and introduced its two goals:

- To explore key issues in organisational development through the lens of shifting the power for civil society organisations
- To help mark INTRAC's 30th anniversary, and to share the enduring passion that INTRAC has for strengthening civil society



"We know that a growing movement of people is really challenging the traditional top down nature in the ways of working and decision making within international development aid and philanthropy. We know this as the shift of power movement."



Read Peter Sargent's blogs on the 30th anniversary of INTRAC, from [December 2021](#) and [April 2022](#).

Short talk 1 of 4: localising consultancy to shift the power

Looking back on 30 years of INTRAC, one of the things that makes me most proud is the efforts that we've put into localising OD consultancy. For me it started 25 years ago in Malawi, where I went to work and train a team of young Malawians to provide OD services to the emerging civil society there. Since then, INTRAC has done face to face training programmes for OD consultants from all over the world.

I think good practice for capacity strengthening requires a quality supply of national consultants who know the context, speak the language and who are on hand to provide ongoing support. Three recent studies by foundations show that this is a critical bottleneck. To me, OD is about more than changing organisations - it is about changing the system.

International consultants flying in is unsustainable on so many levels. We must look for people with a real commitment to serving civil society. What we want to embed in our future work is what we call "[consulting with soul](#)". As we celebrate 30 years of INTRAC, I would like one day to be able to look back and say that we inspired a generation of local OD consultants who really catalyse change in civil society around the world.



Read Rick James' blog, "[We can't shift the power without localising consultancy](#)" (February 2022).

Peter Sargent
(INTRAC)

Host and introduction



Peter Sargent became interim Chief Executive of INTRAC in January 2021. Much of his 20+ years of experience in the international development sector has been in senior leadership roles. He was previously Chief Operating Officer at United Purpose, and has also worked as a consultant.

Rick James (INTRAC)

Principal Consultant



Rick James is an organisational change specialist who has worked with INTRAC since shortly after it was set up in 1991, and is also a Senior Teaching Fellow at Bayes Business School (formerly Cass), City, University of London.



"OD is about changing individual organisations, but it's also about changing the ecosystem, the supply and the accessibility of of national consultants to the civil society sector."



Watch the "[consulting with soul](#)" video (2017).

Short talk 2 of 4: integrating OD in partnerships to shift the power

I was one of the first cohort of INTRAC OD trainees in Malawi. This training and practice, which happened 25 years ago, transformed me as a person and as a practitioner.

In 2014, we at All We Can engaged Rick at INTRAC to help us think through how we could do development differently, putting partners - and crucially partnership - at the very heart of all that we do. Seven years later, we can proudly say that we are led by the priorities and development agendas of our partners, and the communities they serve.

We provide flexible and unrestricted funding to cover both partner programmes as well as their organisation development. We commit to these partnerships for up to 15 years, and aim to leave partners resilient and in a stronger place and when we find them. We aim to make a positive contribution as a partner and a critical friend for their journey. In some years, we found that partners spend more on their OD and organisational sustainability activities than on community projects. Because for us at All We Can, capacity development is an end in itself and not just a means to an end.

Short talk 3 of 4: feminist OD

I am reflecting on OD and shifting the power from a feminist angle, and I couldn't erase the fact that this all starts with our processes, and shifts in our own processes and in our own approaches. There is some internal work to be done before the bigger shift happens.

Feminist OD basically applies feminist principles into approaches and practices. It asks, how is power interrogated in our processes and in our OD approaches, creating consultancies, going into our communities and the people that we work with? As feminists, we place patriarchy at the centre of analysis, how that unfolds and manifests and kind of replicates the various forms of inequalities within our spaces, within our approaches, and within our methods.

I think that what is important in terms of feminist approaches, or feminist OD is our ability to examine and question power within our processes, and our ability to subvert what is considered normal. Rick also says something around "singing the same song". I think that we have been singing the same song for a long time. This whole theme about shifting power is complicated. But I think that it all starts with the individual, how we are intentional about our own unconscious biases, how these biases sometimes indirectly support the existing power dynamics in our organisations. We have to be diverse and very intersectional in our OD practices.

We are learning, but there is also some unlearning to be done. We have been singing the same song, but it is time to sing it differently.

Angela Zamaere
Smith

All We Can



Angela Zamaere Smith has over 20 years of experience in international development and began her career in Malawi. She is currently Director of Programmes and Partnerships at [All We Can](#).



Read Angela's blog for All We Can, "[post-colonial development](#)" (2019).

Nancy Akanbombire



Nancy Akanbombire is a programmes and capacity building specialist with strong background in monitoring and evaluation and learning. She has over nine years' experience in gender and development, research, policy analysis, and participatory community engagement.

Short talk 4 of 4: digital OD

Whilst acknowledging all of the pain and the suffering that the pandemic continues to cause, it's also fair to say that the last few years have done more for developments in digital OD than ever before. One of the really positive benefits of that new digital landscape is a more fertile environment for shifting the power within international development and humanitarian response.

In 1990, around half a percent of people were online. Today, over 30 years later, nearly half the world's population is online. In some countries, there are much lower levels of Internet use than in others. Increasingly, citizens expect to be able to access services online. And this is really significant for the shifting the power movement. This is because its ultimate goal is not just to shift more decision-making, more funding, and more power to national NGOs - but also to shift more decision-making and control to those communities most impacted by issues such as poverty, racial injustice and climate change.

Digital OD, in part, means helping more established organisations such as Red Cross and Red Crescent movement members to remain relevant and responsive to community's needs through a process of digital transformation. This involves shifting the skills, the software, the hardware - but also the culture of an organisation and that means shifting the power internally.

We must be conscious that the digital divide remains, and digital OD can unintentionally reinforce and amplify existing inequalities. But despite all these challenges, opportunities for more open accountable and collaborative ways of working, and for shifting the path through digital OD, continue to grow.

Summing up and closing remarks

We've had some really interesting discussions and what strikes me is that it keeps coming back to people. It's about individuals who can make a difference individually, and who can help others to make a difference. What both Angela and Nancy were saying is that unless we reflect individually on our own power first, it is very hard to shift other forms of power. You have to really make sure you understand where you're coming from, and then go from that space to being able to help others.

The second thing that really stood out to me is time - that all of this takes time, and can't be done overnight. There is a lot of emphasis on funding, and how actually it is money that makes power dynamics, but we also heard about other aspects. Rick talked about commitment, and an individual's sense of calling. We also heard about language, and how a term like "capacity sharing", may be better even than "capacity strengthening".

The other thing that really stood out to me is this idea of "singing the same song". As time goes by I wonder if we are singing the song slightly differently. The baby steps that are being taken are really important.

Lucy Morris
(INTRAC)

Principal Consultant



Lucy Morris is an organisational change specialist with over 20 years' experience and an INTRAC Principal Consultant. She has worked in the not-for-profit sector in humanitarian and development contexts both in the UK and overseas, including at senior management level.



Read Lucy's blog with Sosena Lemma, "[Shifting the power while strengthening the resilience of CSOs in Ethiopia](#)" (January 2022).

Smruti Patel
(INTRAC)

Trustee



Smruti Patel is a member of INTRAC's Board of Trustees and Co-Director of [Global Mentoring Initiative](#). She has been working in the development and humanitarian sector for 25 years.



"Overall, when we think about power we must reflect personally. It is people who make the difference. Systems are made of people."

