

**Summary report from the workshop
'Changing the world and Changing Ourselves', 3 June 2015**



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

Institute for Human Security and Social Change

Summary report from the workshop 'Changing the world and Changing Ourselves', 3 June 2015

On 3 June 2015, representatives from ACFID, NGOs, DFAT, universities and consultancies (see attendance list in annex 1) met at Donkey Wheel House in Melbourne to discuss how international development NGOs (INGOs) might adapt to a changing global environment. The workshop was co-hosted by ACFID and the Latrobe University Institute for Human Security and Social Change and facilitated by Chris Roche and Linda Kelly. The workshop was introduced by Chris Adams, ACFID Growth and Effectiveness Manager, as an opportunity to reimagine the roles that INGOs and others could play in relation to new forms of social justice action driven by new actors and new narratives and to agree ways forward, including addressing the questions posed in the background paper to the workshop. **1. Challenges for international development actors in a changing global environment**

Background: As discussed in a background paper (see annex 2) prepared for the workshop by the Institute for Human Security and Social Change, political, social and economic trends across developed and developing countries are having significant impacts on the lives of people around the world. These include: the intensification of collective action problems that demand trans-boundary action; the social and economic impacts of inequality, particularly gender inequality; changing demographics; geo-political shifts; and the continued spread of technology and innovation. These shifts have significant implications for how development agencies respond. At the least, agencies like INGOs must adjust to changes in the way development is financed: Official Development Assistance (ODA) fluctuates while resources mobilised within developing countries and from the private sector play a growing role.

Presentations: Four participants discussed how the changing global and national context is influencing their development practice and how they see the roles of INGOs changing in future. *Kathryn Gilbert and Jo Spratt* discussed their experience establishing professional reflection forums in Melbourne, noting the importance of creating space for development practitioners to reflect on how their work aligns with their development values. *Paul Nichols* explained WaterAid's initiatives to adapt its business model, seeking to engage funders and the domestic audience in a more transformative way. He noted that we cannot change our role as development practitioners if we can't fund our work. *Michael Bergmann* explored DFAT's role as an actor for development and social justice in relation to other agencies. He noted that arguably part of DFAT's natural skill set is engaging with complexity and uncertainty, but it also wants to build its capacity to support innovation and broker development relationships.

Group discussions: In small groups, participants identified the following challenges for INGOs:

- Addressing complexity/collective action problems
- Working collaboratively and maintaining respect for each other in a competitive funding environment;
- Balancing developmental and institutional imperatives within our organisations whilst staying true to our values
- Working towards a progressive agenda in a less-progressive Australian environment where public/political support for aid and NGOs is declining ;
- Linking our work in Australia with our work internationally to support global solidarity;
- Identifying who we need to build networks with, if we're working "beyond aid" and want to effect broad-scale change;
- Financing our role as advocates, brokers etc. rather than simply as service providers
- Identifying how to collaborate with those raising funds in innovative ways and in so doing reframing conversations and engagement with traditional funders and with supporters who are often treated as 'consumers';
- Changing our institutions/organisations so that they enable rather than hinder progressive change.
- Seeking impact through activism while professionalising;
- Identifying civil society's voice in a changing environment;
- Making choices about piloting ideas, working in niche areas and taking initiatives to scale.

2. Strategies for responding to these challenges

The small groups next discussed **how the sector might respond** to the challenges identified:

- Articulate and communicate a powerful vision of the world we want/the change we want to create/transformational change
- We need to be sure of our values as individuals and institutions and how they relate to the changing political economy, and ensure they frame our work and communications.
- We need to collaborate more and compete less; ensure that our values/developmental objectives take precedence over institutional survival/maintaining organisations /protecting brands
- We need to shift power, engage/mobilise our domestic constituencies as activists not just as donors/consumers, build social movements and focus on systemic change,
- We need to stop trying to "fix" development ourselves; instead we should be supporting local actors to lead their own change, while we also work with them to address systemic issues.
- We need to reinvigorate, expand, deepen, strengthen our development community/ecosystem in Australia, maintaining camaraderie and looking for more innovative ways to operate, such as through social enterprises;
- We need to let go of old ways, embrace entrepreneurialism, take risks, innovate/pilot, deliver scalable solutions and demonstrate and communicate that we are making a difference
- We need to develop new business models which are not just about raising and disbursing funds. We need to develop new frameworks, systems, metrics and cultures which enable us to play new roles and contribute to systemic change.

- We need to recognise that different organisations will pursue different pathways through the global context, and balance pragmatism and idealism in different ways, but that we can stay linked by common values.

Participants suggested a number of **strategies to pursue** these changes in how we do business:

- Develop new ways to engage our constituencies, not just as donors/consumers;
- Examine our values, how they inform our work and whether we're skilled to do that work;
- Consider the balance between professionalisation and activism in seeking to have impact;
- Investigate options to work through social enterprise and innovation;
- Maintain our humility about what we do, as bigger is not necessarily better;
- Articulate unity in our endeavours, i.e. use *us, we, ours* instead of *I, me, theirs*;
- Rediscover our purpose and vision as a social movement;
- Develop the skills/capacities necessary to support progressive social change
- Consider moving from program management to ecosystem based social movements;
- Acknowledge finance as a crucial enabler and explore alternative financing/funding models;
- Acknowledge that different people will choose to pursue our common values in different ways.

3. Taking action

Participants next discussed **what actions we could take**, as individuals, NGOs, consultants and academics, to support the shift towards new ways of working.

Those talking about the role of **individual development practitioners** talked about: how we maintain inspiration and purpose over the course of our careers; how we reflect, stay open and seek out new ways of understanding and working in order to contribute to change; how we equip ourselves to work in new and effective ways; and how we define our audience and partners in changing ways.

Participants proposed key steps as including:

- **self-reflection** and **opening ourselves to risk and learning**;
- using **social media to engage and communicate**; and
- **working with “non-development” people** to advance our goals in new ways.

Participants reflecting on the role of **NGOs** talked about: how we make time in and between organisations to talk about strategic issues; how we maintain and draw on our network to raise a louder collective voice and how we talk in ways government will listen; how we generate common understanding of aid and development issues between organisations while accepting diversity; how we ensure we are close to the constituents we say we represent; how we change our funding models; and how we skill ourselves and a mindset that supports adaptive capacity. Participants proposed key steps as:

- reframing public narrative/discourse with a focus on risk taking, movement building and systemic change
- redefining the roles/value-add of NGOs – individually and collectively - in the future
- **articulating a compelling case for change**; including through making visible the gap between rhetoric and practice at all levels;
- **Infusing innovation** into our work by:
 - Identifying, connecting, enabling, supporting change agents who are operating both within and between our agencies;

- **Identifying agencies that are early adopters/adapters** both from within and outside the sector;
- bringing early adopter/change agents together to work out how to make the shifts needed; the opportunities for and challenges in making these shifts, the structures/capabilities/ways of working/resources that are required, the change pathways that can be followed etc.;
- **capturing and sharing learning from early adapters and others' work, including through drawing out case studies;**
- using the learning to inform broader discussions with other agencies on critical issues and/or to inform a research agenda;
- working with the early adopters and other experts to develop frameworks, guidelines and tools. These tools should enable/support change in areas such as governance, managing multiple accountabilities, learning and adaptation, culture, performance metrics, MEL frameworks, funding models etc.;
- supporting sharing and use of these frameworks, guidelines and tools by others; and
- **mentoring the next generation** of early adopters.

The **development consultants** in the group talked about: how we can see ourselves as *connectors* of people and organisations; how we can support shared learning and help change practice across the sector; how we can lead changes in thinking and create legitimacy for ideas and people who disrupt traditional thinking; how we can give others confidence to pursue change and how we challenge who defines the change that is needed; and how we maintain our own energy, inspiration and ability to take risks. Key steps to take would include:

- **Self-reflection;**
- **Opening ourselves to ideas and learning** to enable us to engage in robust debates;
- **Discuss with ACFID how it involves different actors** in developing its policies and directions for the sector.

The **university representatives** in the group talked about: the tensions in university incentive structures between pure academic research and applied research which can involve development practitioners; the lack of a recognised 'development studies' discipline or research sector in Australia with strong links / peak groups between academics and schools in different universities; how universities can teach the next generation of development practitioners and how we can engage better with international students from developing countries; how we can engage development practitioners in asking hard questions about evidence and ways of working; how we can support shared learning across the sector. Key steps to take would include:

- **Using the ACFID-University network to coordinate** meet-ups between network members (academics, practitioners and consultants) who are interested in development research;
- **Identify 'champions' in universities** who can help break down research/administrative silos, make connections across the sector and shape development research that follows stronger ethics guidelines;
- **Encourage ACFID to use the ACFID-University network** to identify issues for advocacy and galvanise a range of multi-disciplinary experts / practitioners around them.
- **Encourage more research partnerships** between academics and NGOs who are interested in innovation and action research, which can inform broader sector practice.

Finally, the whole group discussed how **ACFID** might support change in the sector. Some of the key ideas were:

- **Convene and broker conversations** and exchanges between those in the sector, including reaching out and creating opportunities for **conversations with people and groups outside** of the ACFID family
- **Actively push boundaries and hold and create safe spaces** for the evolving conversation;
- Assist in **reframing the public discourse** about aid, development and international cooperation;
- **Work with ‘early adopters’ of change to develop models, pathways, frameworks, tools etc.** and engage with organisations at board/governance levels too;
- Support or collaborate in research and capture and share learning at all levels of organisations;
- Develop skills/capacities which enable new ways of working.

4. Summary

The following points are the key insights from workshop participants against the four questions posed in the background paper for the workshop, as drawn out from the record of discussions by the Institute for Social Change.

A. What will the Identities, Structures & Roles of change agents need to look like in 10-15 years’ time?

- They will be different and diverse
- We need to expand/strengthen the eco-system rather than focus only on individual agencies’ capabilities. We need to expand our horizons and alliances, working with others who are located in different places in the eco-system and, recognising their different skills, insights and drivers, create opportunities to work together on shared goals;
- We need to engage people and collaborators “outside development”
- We need to frame public discourse in ways that help others engage critically with more nuanced understandings of development and social change.

2. Who is going to lead and drive these changes, and how?

- Leadership will be needed at all levels and across the sector from individual through to cross-organisational.
- We need to overcome competition and silos for the benefit of the collective good.
- We need to exercise this leadership now, in terms of learning and starting to work in more adaptive and collaborative ways, rather than waiting.
- We need to consider how our funding models enable or discourage more collaborative, adaptive ways for working, and work with our funders to create space to work differently.

3. What capabilities, capacities and personnel will be needed?

We will need personnel with the following capabilities and capacities:

- Understanding how change happens
- Willingness to take risks/be entrepreneurial
- Navigating/responding to complexity/uncertainty in programming
- Values-based capacity for self-reflection and learning from past practice;
- Connecting to, working with, and learning from others both nationally and transnationally, including those outside the sector;
- Convening, brokering and creating safe spaces for exchanges and mutual learning;
- Managing multiple accountabilities – up/down/across; functional and strategic
- Thinking and working politically - Identifying and interpreting political, social and economic changes in our operating environments (global & domestic) and adapting our work in response;
- Developing innovative ideas, piloting, learning, adapting, taking to scale; translating innovations into frameworks/guidelines/tools that can be used and shared;
- Developing new sources of funding, or new ways of sharing resources, to support our work.

4. What are the key areas of Knowledge and Learning which are needed to support this?

- Exploring case studies and models of innovative approaches and early adoption;
- Developing the frameworks, models and tools which enable transformative rather than transactional approaches to development
- Assessing how to reframe the public discourse around movement-building and social justice;
- Developing better knowledge of how other types of actors (e.g. social enterprises, private sector, government, philanthropic organisations, universities) are expanding, funding and designing their engagement in development and social change;
- How to raise/disburse money for a transformational agenda;
- How to strengthen our influence as a sector, in cooperation with like-minded actors in other sectors, rather than working as individual organisations in a competitive manner.

Participants at the Workshop: Changing the World, Changing ourselves”.

Participant	Role	Organisation
1. Ms Rhonda Chapman	Board Member, Program Advisory Committee	WaterAid Australia
2. Dr Jane Hutchison		Murdoch University - School of Management and Governance
3. Ms Joan Johnson	Consultant	
4. Mr Alex Mathieson	Associate Director Strategy	Oxfam Australia
5. Janelle Richards	People & Culture Director	CBM Australia
6. Ms Denise Cauchi	Director	Diaspora Action Australia
7. Ms Katherine Gilbert		Monash University
8. Tim Budge	Director	Tribal Strategies
9. Mrs Irene Guijt		
10. Ms Julie Mundy		Marie Stopes International Australia
11. Professor Mark Moran	Chair of Development Effectiveness	University of Queensland - Institute for Social Science Research
12. Mr Tony Milne	Executive Officer	Make Poverty History
13. Mr Michael Bergmann	Director of NGO Policy	DFAT(Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)
14. Mrs Yeshe Smith		La Trobe University - Institute of Human Security and Social Change
15. Beatrice Iezzi		The Fred Hollows Foundation
16. Ms Chrisanta Muli	Lead Research Advisor	Oxfam Australia
17. Ms Rebecca Spratt	Senior Advisor, Policy and Learning	Plan International Australia
18. Mr Paul Nichols	CEO	WaterAid Australia
19. Ms Jan Cossar		Strategy Matters
20. Ms Annette Madvig	Program Officer	La Trobe University - Institute of Human Security and Social Change
21. Dr Tim Thornton	Lecturer	La Trobe University - Institute of Human Security and Social Change
22. Juliet Willetts	Associate Professor, Research Director	UTS - Institute for Sustainable Futures
24. Ms Joanna Spratt	Student	Australian National University
25. Ms Kate MacMaster	Learning and Development Coordinator	Australian Council for International Development
26. Alice Ridge		Australian Council for International Development
27. Mr Robert Power	Head of Centre for International Health	Burnet Institute
28. Ms Annabel Dulhunty		Caritas Australia
29. Mr Chris Adams	Growth and Effectiveness Manager	Australian Council for International Development
30. Dr Gillian Fletcher	Research Fellow	La Trobe University - Institute of Human Security and Social Change

Annex 1 Attendance List

31. Ms Gaye Wealthy	Director People & Culture	Plan International Australia
32. Matthew Morris		
33. Marty Pritchard		TEAR Australia
34. Mr Archie Law	Executive Director	ActionAid Australia
35. Ms Annabel Brown	Development Effectiveness Advisor	Consultant
36. Ms Sophie Green	Support Services Administrator	Australian Council for International Development
37. Ms Bronwen Harvey	Learning & Development Officer	Australian Council for International Development
38. Ms Beth Sargent	Advocacy Advisor - Humanitarian Coordinator	Australian Council for International Development
39. Ms Sarah Burrows		Australian Council for International Development

ACFID Workshop Discussion Starter, Chris Roche 21 May 2015

This short discussion starter has been prepared for the ACFID workshop '*Changing the world and Changing Ourselves*' being held on June 3rd. It does not seek to repeat all of the rich analysis that has been produced on the subject of the Future of International NGOs in recent years, but to summarise some of the main points in order for the discussion to avoid reinventing the wheel.

A. Mega-trends and Drivers of Change

There are a large number of recent papers on the Future of INGOs (see references and links at the end of the paper) that have been written in the last few years. All have tried to map out what some of the major trends or challenges facing NGOs are. We summarise here some of the commonly identified ones.

1. **The rise of 'One World' collective action problems i.e. problems that are global and demand trans-national action.** The most commonly cited is **climate change** and its likely effects, but **poverty and inequality, migration, conflict and violence**, and other ways we are overstepping planetary boundaries are also arguably of a similar nature. The lack of effective and democratic structures above the nation state level is seen by some as a critical obstacle to addressing these concerns¹. The 'universal' nature of the proposed SDGs is seen by some as a recognition of this.
2. The **threat of inequality** in general and **gender inequality in particular**, not least because of the way that this undermines the social relations and reproduction upon which economies and societies are based.
3. **Changing demographics** including **aging populations, urbanisation**, shifts in the **location of income poverty, migration patterns** (including the possibility of climate change refugees) and changes in the make-up of the global population.
4. **Geo-political shifts** including the movement of the World's economic centre of gravity east, a more polycentric world, the enhanced power of multinational companies vis-à-vis nation states etc., and a **southern drift** of diseases of the 'north' to the 'developing world'.
5. **Technology and Innovation** including in particular: communication technologies allied to social processes; medical and nano-technology; and biological breakthroughs. More profound, or what might be argued transformative, social and institutional innovations seem less commonly mentioned.
6. **Official Development Assistance in a state of flux:** there are more players including the private sector and BRICs; there is declining importance of ODA vs domestic resources, remittances and investment; and there has been backlash and reaction in some donor countries, including Australia, to aid.

¹ For a summary of a recent book on Global Democratic Theory and why NGOs should care see <http://practiceforchange.org/2015/04/29/why-should-international-ngos-care-about-global-democratic-theory/>

B. Changing Understanding of Development

Allied to this understanding of key trends which are relevant to International NGOs has been a growing (or renewed perhaps) interest in asking some fundamental questions about the nature of the development process in the last few years. Some of the more prominent examples include:

- **Doing Development Differently**

Which promotes the importance of locally driven problem resolution through iterative and adaptive processes².

- **Leadership and Collective Action and Thinking and Working Politically**

Which outlines the importance of local leadership, politics and power relations in addressing collective action problems³. The role of social movements and women's movements in particular are increasingly recognised as being critical in promoting transformational change.

- **Complexity & Uncertainty**

Which recognises the unknowability of much of the development process in advance, the interdependence of domains often considered separately, and the importance of testing solutions in an emergent manner⁴.

- **Results, Evidence and Learning**

Which puts greater emphasis on rigorous assessment of 'what works' and the use of this 'evidence' to provide feedback and adjust action. How this is done, and the effects it produces is contested⁵.

These overlapping and sometimes contradictory 'schools of thought' and research are maybe the most influential amongst some of the aid agencies of the rich world currently, and maybe more so amongst academics and commentators.

However it should also be recognised that a) it is clear that some of these ideas and proposals are arguably not possible in the current environments and structures of official aid agencies⁶, b) that other more radical thinking which contests the notion of 'development' at a more fundamental level is certainly available but remains relatively marginal in terms of mainstream policy debates.

² See <http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com/>

³ See <http://www.dlprog.org/publications/from-political-economy-to-political-analysis.php>

⁴ See <http://www.cgdev.org/media/implications-complexity-development-owen-barder>

⁵ See <http://bigpushforward.net/>

⁶ See for example Carothers and de Gramont (2012) '[Development Aid Confronts Politics: The Almost Revolution](#)'.

C. How could or should INGOs and other development actors adapt to this Changing Environment?

So what are the implications for International NGOs and other actors? What could they be doing to respond and in order to remain relevant? Below are a number of proposals or recommendations that have been made:

- **Move ‘Beyond Aid’** not only in terms of what is done, but how development issues are communicated and how money is raised.
- **Develop Systems and Complexity Thinking** and the culture and structure to work in this way, including appropriately revised governance, structures, and learning & accountability processes which can cope with uncertainty and bolster resilience.
- **Develop evolved forms of Humanitarian response and co-operation**, including investment in disaster risk reduction, more accountable responses and making greater efforts to truly ‘internationalise’ what is seen to be a largely ‘western’ and politicised enterprise. This might mean working more closely with diaspora populations, and in partnership with non-western faith groups and organisations.
- **Think laterally about Influencing and Leveraging.** This might incorporate, in addition to classic advocacy and campaigning, more emphasis on spotting and disseminating innovation, a greater emphasis on a ‘witness’ role and the use of legal mechanisms to establish precedent, or partnering with mass media and social media outlets to help shape global norms.
- **Promote deep and transformative Innovation/Disruption:** including deciding if you want to be an ‘active disruptor’, an ‘opportunistic navigator’, or a ‘conservative survivor’.
- **Think about nurturing the ‘ecosystem’ of change agents & their collaboration on ‘Global Public Goods’ by building new bridges and connections with unusual alliances.** This includes supporting the diversity and range of individuals, agencies, coalitions and networks and creating or amplifying the links between them as necessary.
- **Bringing it all back home** and rooting oneself more firmly in the fabric of our own civil societies in order to sustain ourselves, enhance legitimacy, and lever greater impact by greater involvement in domestic politics and how this in turn shapes international policy.

D. Four Questions this gives rise to:

1. What will the Identities, Structures & Roles of change agents need to look like in 10-15 years' time?

- Aid agencies or Social Change agents?
- Active disruptors; opportunistic navigators; or conservative survivors?
- Unitary, Federations, or Networks?
- New Hybrid entities?

2. Who is going to lead and drive these changes, and how?

- Senior managers and boards?
- Internal change agents?
- External competitors and on-line platforms?
- Networks of allies?

3. What capabilities, capacities and personnel will be needed?

- Adaptive or Transformative Leadership?
- Thinking and Working Politically including on gender and power relations?
- Partnership and Brokering?
- Coalition and Alliance Building?
- Knowledge and Thought creation and curation?
- Inter-cultural understanding?
- Complexity Thinking & Programming?

4. What are the key areas of Knowledge and Learning which are needed to support this?

- How transformative activities are designed, implemented, measured and accounted for, as well as funded. As Michael Edwards argues '[a]nd that takes NGOs into some difficult but very exciting territory concerning new approaches to knowledge and evaluation';
- How transnational constituencies and coalitions for change might be harnessed to address global public goods and democratic deficits;
- How social movements, women's organisations, informal coalitions and progressive social change can best be supported.
- How non-western systems of knowledge, understanding and activism might be more centrally brought to bear.

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