

# Power, Conundrum and CBOs

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# Why CBOs? (and other local presence)



# CBOs – The giant jelly and custard

“M&E of civil society is like trying to nail a pudding to a wall.” (Heinrich 2001)

Community Organisations are:

- fluid
- highly responsive and opportunistic
- strategically vague
- loose and organic

Context:

The South African  
funder-financed  
state-encouraged  
service-providing  
CBO

Let's say that  
development is the more equitable  
distribution of power

# Power games of money

Community organisations begin without financial resources: they use time and relationships

They reach a ceiling. Their clients' needs are wider than their resources. They feel a need for money.

They enter the power games of funding.

# Power games of systems

Who has power over ...

WHAT ARE  
CRITERIA FOR  
SUCCESS?  
(PLANNING)

WHEN TO SET  
CRITERIA FOR  
SUCCESS?  
(PREDICTION)

HOW TO  
MEASURE  
SUCCESS?  
(INDICATORS)

**CAPACITY DEFINED:**  
FAMILIARITY WITH SYSTEMS AND TOOLS THAT ARE  
DESIGNED BY, AT THE CONVENIENCE OF,  
EXTERNAL INTERESTS

# Power games of format

## Written account:

When the organisation was started she was working with the A Club. She was the only one who disclose her status. She realize the people who are living with HIV are not in favour. She was young by that time. So the project started by two people living with AIDS and one affected. Then the organisation was born.

## What was said:

*“I was working for OFAA, doing door-to-door and schools and peer education. I was the only woman who had disclosed her HIV status – and one day they told me “we are doing you a favour talking to you and employing you”. I realised that people living with HIV are not supported. I organised a meeting with the youth, and explained my problem. A 16-year old suggested “Why not start a support group for HIV and AIDS where they can talk about it?” I went all out and was very passionate.”*

# Written “*Communication*” .... Huh??

If written communication rules, then ...  
a lack of formal education and literacy = ‘uneducation’  
a lack of english fluency = ‘incapacity’

Negations devised by the schooled and the wealthy,  
strongly perpetuated by the ‘uneducated’ and the poor.

Rules fundamental to the gap between rich and poor

**DEVELOPMENT THAT USES LITERACY  
AS A BARRIER TO ACCESS  
IS REINFORCING THE STATUS QUO**

# Adding up the power points: Who wins the game ...

**Power is gained** when an organisation is funded:

Recognition

Credibility

Additional services

More sustainable and manageable staffing

Different circle of influence (?)

# Adding up the power points: Who wins the game ...

**Power is lost when** capable, intelligent, locally knowledgeable development practitioners to spend their time:

- Attempting to invent indicators;
- Grappling with the fine distinctions between outcome and purpose;
- Writing reports that have little relevance to them, and do not communicate effectively;
- Treating the wealthy as client, rather than the poor.

# So? Alternative mechanisms ..

- **Systems that compliment organisations' skills**  
(metaphor, images, verbal communication)
- **Organisations' criteria for success**  
(stories of impact, success means ...)
- **Achievements and lessons based on evidence**  
(learn about real impact rather than using the crystal ball)

**BUT !**

# If only it were that easy ...

## CONUNDRUM 1 - Facilitator subjectivity

Facilitator values start to formulate criteria.

How do we resolve facilitator subjectivity, without resorting to externally designed objectivity and generalisation to the point of irrelevance?

# CONUNDRUM 2 – Who's capacity path?

## **Organisational vs Funder priorities for capacity –**

No organisation in our study considered financial systems or governance structures to be key organisational competencies

Where are the compromises between funders' due diligence checklist and an organisation self-realising its own capacity path?

COM

**Real demand of community  
development .....**

**which has no buying power**

**Evaluation is  
responsible for  
choosing who goes  
through the little  
square door.**

**Supply of CBOs offering  
services**

Demand of  
funding  
agencies:  
Limited to their  
distribution  
capacity

# CONUNDRUM 3 – Power and judgement in a buyers' market

**Development evaluation is placed into contradiction:**

Evaluation is power.

We have no choice but to judge,  
and our power to judge reinforces power imbalances,  
where development should be redistributing power.

As development evaluation practitioners:  
How do we make funding judgements,  
without diminishing power by standing in judgement?

# What challenges to our context are HUGE?

The world system where money is  
power

**Fundamental shifts in global  
belief:**

- Service and knowledge are  
power.

**Better global systems of  
distribution:**

- “There’s enough food to feed  
the world”



# What is in the hands of ordinary development evaluators?

- **Systems that compliment organisations' skills**  
(metaphor, images, verbal communication)
- **Organisations' criteria for success**  
(stories of impact, success means ...)
- **Achievements and lessons based on evidence**  
(real time evidence)

# Development cautionary ...



Thank you