

Sharing Power, Strengthening Accountability: Changes needed for civil society to remain relevant and resilient in a post-COVID19 world



The COVID-19 pandemic has not just changed our daily routines, it has altered entire systems of living and working that we had assumed were indispensable to modern society. While civil society has responded through an inspiring array of efforts - ranging from the provision of essential services to the pursuit of responsive policy outcomes - the pandemic has also exposed the extreme fragility of our own operating systems. The degree to which we commit ourselves to achieving these reforms will determine our future relevance and resilience as a sector.

#1: FLEXIBLE, CORE FUNDING IS THE NORM, NOT EXCEPTION

The availability of flexible and reserve funding to sustain core operational costs will conclusively determine which organisations will survive the adverse economic effects of the crises. While it is heartening to see a wide range of donor organisations engage with this [principles](#) as an immediate response to the pandemic, we need to systematically increase levels of international investment in local organisations from the global south. [Four years](#) after the international community committed to the 'localisation agenda', the percentage of official development assistance (ODA) directly reaching the southern civil society remains at the same level: less than 1 percent. This means that while community organisations - who are best placed to provide a sustained response to complex crises like the COVID-19 pandemic - are pitifully under-resourced. Resource flows to southern civil society can no longer be an afterthought for the global development community.

#2: SYSTEMS FOR INCLUSION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION ARE UNIVERSALLY APPLIED

It is remarkable in these circumstances that local organisations from the global south have been the first to embrace the [COVID-19 Social Security Protocol](#), developed in line with the ILO's COVID-19 policy framework. The Protocol requires organisations to deliberate a 6-point framework to protect their workers and adopt time-bound, context-specific measures. The fact that current list of 200 signatories includes only one major international organisation is deeply disturbing. For one, it seriously undermines the loud assertions to effect radical inclusion and equity in the workplace that we made a few years ago. Women make up nearly 70 percent of the workforce in our sector and are heavily under-represented in its leadership. In a context of shrinking resources, they will be the first to lose their livelihoods, while having a painfully small say in the decisions that their organisations will make in order to tide this crisis. We must be bolder in adopting the social security measures that we are demanding from governments and businesses. Without the solid foundations of trust and authenticity, our organisations are not equipped to withstand the formidable challenges that all agencies - large and small - will need to respond to in coming years.

#3: TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IS MARKER AGAINST WHICH WE MEASURE OUR EFFORTS

Failures in governance and accountability have been all too evident in global and national responses to the pandemic. Civil society must significantly upscale strategies to put human rights at the heart of public interventions. We need a serious and systematic effort to [dismantle systems](#) that perpetuate cycles of poverty, discrimination and violence. This includes rethinking how our economies are structured and ensuring sustainable means of production and consumption that allow for the regeneration of natural resources. Our most important indicator of shared progress must be the transformations needed to make the world fit for future generations.

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