Paris, Power and CBOs
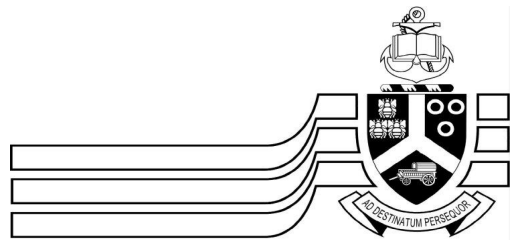
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in partnership with

The AIDS Consortium

University of Pretoria

touch one, reach many

IDEAS Global Assembly 2009
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MANAGE
FOR
RESULTS

OWNERSHIP:
PARTNER'S
AGENDA

**Paris Declaration
on AID
Effectiveness**

DONOR
HARMONISATION

ALIGNMENT:
With PARTNER AGENDA
and PARTNER SYSTEMS

MUTUAL
ACCOUNTABILITY

Dancing with the pudding

"Development is contradictory, ambiguous and obtuse"
(Kaplan 2000)

"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

- complex accountability relationships

Not much concrete with which to align

"angels fly because they take themselves lightly"

What is unParisian in CBO evaluation:

WHO SETS
THE CRITERIA
FOR
SUCCESS?

WHEN TO SET
CRITERIA FOR
SUCCESS:
PREDICTING
CRITERIA /
INDICATORS

HOW HEAVY ARE External systems, processes and criteria?

POWER=MONEY

FUNDERS'
DEMANDS

DEFINING
"CAPACITY" IN
TERMS OF
EXTERNALLY
CONVENIENT
CONTEXTS AND
SYSTEMS

MONEY=POWER

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.

Both gaining the power of money held,

and selling their power for money begged.

DEVELOPMENT= POWER DISTRIBUTION

power gained and POWER LOST

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

- Attempting to invent indicators to appease imposed, externally designed systems;

- Grappling with the fine distinctions between outcome and purpose;

- Writing reports that have little relevance to them, and do not communicate effectively;

- Trying to look good to funders

- Treating the wealthy as client, rather than the poor.

What happens to my sense of being powerful and influential when this is how I spend my day as so-called leader?

Written "communication" .... Eh?

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.*"

Who's game is this?

In a system where written communication rules, effectively,
a lack of formal education and literacy equate to 'uneducation',
and a lack of ability in English literacy as 'incapacity'.

These are negations devised by the schooled and the wealthy,
strongly perpetuated by the 'uneducated' and the poor.

And are fundamental to the widening gap between rich and poor

DEVELOPMENT THAT REINFORCES LITERACY AS A
BARRIER TO RIGHTS

IS REINFORCING THE STATUS QUO

So?

Development evaluation has an ethical imperative to build power

Which means that funder:CBO relationships should:

- Allow organisation-centred systems to emerge to meet the need – (less of external definitions and drivers of 'capacity')

- Facilitate discussions on what success means in context – (stories of impact – what does success mean here?)

- Look for achievements and lessons based on evidence – (reviewing impact rather than predicting indicators).

- Communicate through speaking and images and metaphor – (make the effort to drop written reporting)

BUT !

If only it were that easy

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?

Organisational vs Funder criteria – 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?

Real demand of community development ….. Which has no buying power

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

Demand of funding agencies: capacity and financing ceilings

Supply of CBOs offering services

Power and Judgement in a buyers' market

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

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.

Where does that leave development evaluation practitioners?

The world system, money is power, is in direct opposition to power equity and development.

Paris is not a set of bureaucratic requirements.
It is a fundamental shift in belief.
Service and knowledge are power.
"Street wise" meets "school smarts".

Paris in CBOs :

i)   replacing written communication with visual and verbal media;

ii) using images and metaphor;

iii) placing influence over criteria and process into the CBO.

Thank you