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CONCLUSIONS

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Introduction

This book seeks to provide significant contributions to the debate on needed changes in North–South collaborations concerning power, control, accountabilities, and colonial mindsets and help catalyze innovation. The book has aimed to provide ideas for reimagining CSO collaborations from the perspective of 'starting from the South', exploring the roles, relations, and processes shaping CSO collaborations in development. First, focusing on roles, who does what in CSO collaborations was reimagined, starting from the perspectives and agency of Southern CSOs. Second, exploring relations, the questions of who matters and how were addressed, with an attempt to move beyond the North–South binary. Third, focusing on processes, the nature of new collaborations if leadership from the South were more prevalent was considered. The five sections of the book have provided reimaginings from different angles: (1) how Southern CSOs could reclaim the lead, (2) how the North–South dyad could be displaced, (3) what Southern-centred questions emerge, (4) what kinds of new roles Northern actors could assume, and (5) what the new starting points for CSO collaborations could be. This chapter returns to the questions posed in the introductory chapter, reflects on the answers to these provided by the individual chapters, and reviews the main insights emerging from the five sections of the book. The chapter also presents overall conclusions and suggestions for research and practice on how to move towards 'starting from the South'.

Reimagining roles, relations, and processes

The chapters of this book touch on widely relevant elements of CSO collaborations in development, broadly conceived, addressing the domains of advocacy, service delivery, and capacity development. Similarly, the chapters consider

broadly relevant aspects of development programmes, such as agenda setting; strategizing; the production and usage of various forms of knowledge, skills, and relations; and the building of legitimacy.

Notwithstanding this broadness, when it comes to roles, the chapters consistently argue that Southern CSOs are positioned to shape development in context-specific ways. The chapters 'start from the South', in that they view, analyse, and reimagine collaboration from within Southern settings and portray Southern CSOs as drivers of development acting from their own contextually relevant knowledge on issues, strategies, legitimacy, relational capital, and perspectives. The situatedness of development in Southern contexts and the capacity of Southern CSOs to relate to these contexts make these CSOs capable of leading development, as the chapters argue. To start with roles then: Southern CSOs' agency in realizing their existing and potential leadership is stressed throughout the book. The chapters also emphasize the relevance of diversity among CSOs and their different roles, including social movements, individual activists, community-based organizations, professional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the domestic level, and international NGOs (INGOs). However, typically, the chapters assign leading positions to organizations taking up roles closest to the people they work with and focusing on domestic constituencies. Here, collaboration is also mostly conceived with a domestic focus, drawing attention to the roles of different CSOs within the same country setting, which has thus far received little attention in debates on CSO collaboration. These debates tend to be skewed towards global processes around internationally defined issues, with a prominent role for large INGOs. CSO roles are defined through their interactions with allies, their constituencies, and various other actors including the state and other domestic CSOs, as well as INGOs and Northern CSOs, which constitute only one form of relevant other. The chapters in this book thus relativize the prominent role of INGOs and Northern CSOs in development; some do see the role of such organizations as potentially highly relevant – but on new terms. INGOs and Northern CSOs and INGOs are called on to adjust – following the leadership of Southern CSOs and taking up supporting roles based on that lead, such as facilitating, linking, training, funding, and translating. The capacities, resources, and power of INGOs and Northern CSOs are seen as relevant in many ways. They can bring in much-needed support that otherwise would not come through – for domestically sensitive topics, for example. With their high levels of prestige, these types of organizations can help amplify local voices. By providing funding, they can facilitate the growth and flourishing of Southern CSOs. Given the centrality of contextually embedded CSOs in development, Broadly speaking, most of the chapters in this book call on international CSOs to take more supporting roles, carefully geared towards the agendas defined by Southern CSOs, and to accept Southern CSOs' leadership. It must be acknowledged here that the degree and nature of such support will depend at least partly on civic space – there are many contexts today where international civil society is delegitimized, especially when it comes to advocacy and sensitive topics. In short, reimagined roles

involve contextually embedded Southern leadership, diversity in roles, and a repositioning of INGOs and Northern CSOs in supporting roles.

When it comes to relations, the embeddedness of CSOs in relations within their own contexts is shown to be a crucial resource for shaping action and navigating questions of legitimacy and effectiveness, which are largely defined by domestic relations. CSOs' domestic relations with constituencies, state agencies, and other non-state actors of various kinds are thus brought to the fore. The chapters draw attention to these relations, illustrating their prime importance for the survival of organizations and the success of their endeavours. The chapters also indicate the high demand for organizational capacities and resources associated with managing these relations and reimagine relations with INGOs and Northern CSOs as based on recognition of Southern CSOs' resources and capacities and the validity of their perspectives as starting points for collaboration. INGOs, to the extent they will be involved, are asked to act as facilitators and investors, furthering the leadership of Southern CSOs to contribute to development in their own contexts. In a few chapters, interdependence between CSOs is stressed, given their exchange of various resources. In one chapter, independence from INGOs and Northern CSOs is stressed as a viable and logical option, considering the resources that can be mobilized and the heavy price that must be paid without this independence, in terms of pandering to INGOs' and Northern CSOs' requirements and assumptions. The book thus aims to shift attention to how CSOs' relations with various actors at the domestic level shape locally owned development. However, some chapters also show that domestic CSO relations can mimic and reproduce the inequalities and disempowerment frequently associated with North–South CSO collaborations. Connected with the emphasis on starting out from Southern contexts is the message that relations are to be built on new terms. These terms evoke mutuality and include aspects such as recognition, trust, solidarity, connectedness, respect, sharing, transparency, reciprocity, interdependence, networking and acknowledgment of the multiple relations CSOs have.

Processes shaping the reimagined collaborations similarly shift attention away from linear North–South relations defined through contractual relations and towards processes of development influenced by conditions and dynamics in Southern contexts. Collaboration processes need to facilitate relating effectively to these contexts. Processes such as knowledge production and management, strategy development, and building organizational legitimacy are defined within Southern contexts. Collaboration should facilitate such processes and work towards strengthening the role of Southern CSOs in leading these processes within their contexts. Connected with this emphasis on centring process on Southern contexts, identified elements of good collaborative processes again evoke mutuality. They are reimagined to help grow meaningful collaboration together and include aspects such as reflexivity, learning, co-creation, exchange, negotiation, connecting diversities, building assets and linking up with what is there.

Plural vantage points

The main message of this book thus revolves around the notion of starting collaboration from contextually grounded Southern CSO leadership, which can grow with mutuality as a guiding principle. With the five sections approaching this idea from different angles, each offering specific ways in which our thinking on roles, relations, and processes in civil society collaborations in development can be approached. Each section of the book presents analyses of varied aspects and provides practical recommendations rooted in these analyses. The sections all offer opportunities for the fundamental reorientation of CSO collaborations in development.

The first section, 'Reclaiming the lead', emphasizes the basic point that Southern CSO leadership can be reclaimed based on what Southern CSOs offer, with implications for Northern-based actors (e.g. CSOs and researchers), who are asked to relate to Southern CSOs from a more facilitating, supportive stance, rooted in the recognition of Southern CSOs' agency, capacities, and resources. The chapters in this section show how collaborations can be practically rooted in the lived experiences of Southern communities and CSOs, highlighting the key role of acknowledging, mobilizing, and working with contextual knowledge while doing justice to constraining conditions.

The second section, 'Displacing the North–South dyad', shifts attention from this dyad to a wider orientation on CSO collaborations, emphasizing different types of roles, relations, and processes of exchange, interaction, and interdependence. The chapters in this section highlight the multiplicity of CSO relations, legitimacy requirements, and resources being exchanged, thus expanding our understanding of key aspects of CSO collaborations in development.

The third section, 'Southern-centred questions', shifts the attention from international CSO relations to different questions, centring on the dynamics among Southern CSOs and others in their contexts (e.g. other CSOs, constituencies, and the state). The chapters in this section argue for recentring legitimacy relations to focus on communities and constituencies; explore domestic CSO collaborations; present African CSOs' perspectives, roles, challenges, and opportunities around the desired shift of power; conceptualize Southern CSO roles as independent and home-grown; and zoom in on the centrality of trust to the gifting practices of local communities, as something that can be built and harnessed for financing development projects and programmes. These chapters thereby propose a reorientation of what relations matter and relativize the relevance of INGOs and Northern CSOs by viewing their roles in a wider, contextually defined frame.

The fourth section, 'Learning new roles for the North', focuses on what the recentring this book proposes implies for INGOs' and Northern CSOs' roles. While chapters in other sections of this book also discuss this question, here, specific assumptions and starting points commonly shaping these CSOs' roles are brought to light, and alternatives are suggested for knowledge management,

power sharing/shifting, and programming. The chapters in this section show what 'starting from the South' will require in practice, emphasizing shifting mindsets and fundamentally reorienting Northern roles, relations, and processes. Openness to different interpretations and priorities while developing more horizontal forms of learning and facilitating rather than leading roles are important here, as is an expanded understanding of power that includes 'power to' and 'power with'.

The fifth section, 'New starting points for collaboration', provides inspiration for imagining new ways of collaborating, offering different principles and approaches that may support making CSO collaborations more oriented towards Southern contexts and more Southern-led. The chapters in this section primarily reconsider the foundations of CSO relations, mostly moving away from formal dimensions and addressing the roles and intricacies of the informal, focusing on elements like recognition of multiple identities, lived experiences and agency, the relational dimensions of autonomy, and the role of personal and trust-based relations.

'Starting from the South': a transformative stance

The chapters and sections of this book recentre the shaping of CSO collaborations, directing attention to the various contexts that we refer to as the Global South. Rather than linking with previous approaches to reimagining civil society collaborations, which have mostly been situated within the aid system, seeking to change it, the chapters in this book take a transformative stance. They relativize international collaboration at a fundamental level, asking INGOs, Northern CSOs, and their donors to follow the lead of Southern CSOs, with their contextually geared perspectives, resources, capacities, and ways of working. INGOs and Northern CSOs are to provide support from a stance of recognition of these elements, while also shifting focus to different, wider sets of relations that are, again, contextually defined.

This book thus addresses the need for reimagining of the roles of INGOs, which are mostly Northern-based. These roles are currently thoroughly shaped by management-centred approaches sustained by control over funding and entrenched mindsets and practices. Thus far, the debate on reimagining CSO collaborations in development is highly concerned with shifting and sharing this control. The question of what is to become of INGOs and Northern CSOs, with a 'fundermediary' role of passing funds to other actors through building and managing multi-country programmes as their main function (Sriskandarajah, 2015), has not previously been directly addressed.

One of the editors of this volume, who regularly interacts with INGOs and Northern CSOs on the subjects of Southern ownership and leadership, often finds staff members struggling for ways to imagine how to transfer leadership to the South. The questions raised often concern management and accountability

for funding. How can programmes be managed? How can the funds spent be accounted for? How can the risks involved be managed? Accountabilities associated with the fundermediary role are a main area of attention. Less openly discussed are concerns around the loss of organizational relevance and the loss of jobs, which sometimes come up in more personal conversations. Often, therefore, the questions and concerns are negatively framed, with reference to the existing system. How can a new system fit the requirements we are facing? Fundamental structures and assumptions shaping the aid system set up around the principles of management and control remain firmly in place. How to change roles, relations, and processes in fundamental ways can indeed be hard to imagine. Longstanding starting points that shape these three elements, arguably, are losing their self-evident primacy, but there are no new starting points on which to anchor the imagined transformed system. The new foundations that would be needed are not there yet. Many changes that have been worked on thus far – theoretically, and sometimes also in practice – such as 'giving' ownership to Southern CSOs (Sander, 2021), imagining or working towards adaptive management (Gutheil, 2021), or addressing questions of epistemological justice (Icaza & Vázquez, 2013) do not truly question INGOs' and Northern CSOs' fundermediary role, the programming prerogative that comes with it, or the centrality of the North–South dyad above other types of relations. It is this foundation that is addressed in this book by the different chapters and the book as a whole, with the message that emerges from the collection of chapters together and our situating them in the existing broader debates in practice and theory.

By emphasizing 'starting from the South', the book calls for starting civil society collaborations from the capacities, understandings, resources, and perspectives held by Southern CSOs within their own contexts. It also offers first steps towards reimagining roles for Southern CSOs as leaders, showing how this leadership is contextually rooted for CSOs in the Global South, taking no evident heed of 'capacity development' as administered by INGOs. At the same time, many chapters present INGOs and Northern CSOs as relevant or potentially relevant. The book thus also offers first steps towards reimagining roles for INGOs and Northern CSOs grounded not in their programming prerogative but in their capacity to offer support and to invest, following the lead of the Global South because of recognition of the validity of Southern leadership and the need to offer support that is context-specific and thus flexible and diverse.

We present an imagining of collaborations that works from knowing how different actors matter to a change process in different ways. This imagining is open-ended and rooted in recognition of what each organization stands for and brings to the collaboration. Such collaborations must also be based in meaningful connections linking capacities, perspectives, and goals. This signals a move away from managerial perspectives that may be rooted in the best of intentions and energized by laudable objectives but tend to come with constraints. Managerial approaches are centred on alignment with predefined agendas and understandings. They require that Southern CSOs exhibit a readiness to comply with international frameworks and 'tools' that they must work with to shore up

collaborations. With such approaches, Southern CSOs must also ensure that all spending is accounted for and that all activities are in line with what the donors were promised, working towards documenting prespecified outcomes.

Ultimately, then, while the task of reimagining collaboration among CSOs in development may seem enormous, there is also a simplicity to the idea of moving away from complex multi-country programming, at least in the eyes of the authors of the different chapters in this book. 'How can we help?' is the question to be asked by INGOs and Northern CSOs, accepting that Southern CSOs are already agents, whose efforts others may be able to support with various resources, knowledges, relations, and capacities. How to find the freedom to provide these kinds of assistance is a more complicated question, and this may well be where INGOs and Northern CSOs (and maybe also Southern-based CSOs working with institutional donors) will face the most significant challenges. These organizations, too, are enmeshed in a system that keeps them in a constrained position, making them work as managers at the expense of their roles as change agents, even though they are likely much more driven by a will to contribute to change than by a desire to manage funding streams. Indeed, although it is generally Southern CSOs whose enforced mission drift is problematized, others in the development system also appear to suffer under the present system, with so much of their attention going towards procedurally oriented tasks. Donors are a crucial part of this system, and any transformation will have to take shape in close coordination with them.

An agenda for research and practice

Drawing on the analyses presented in the different chapters in this book, as well as our reflections on them, we have identified a range of questions for research and practice that require further exploration, research, design, and experimentation concerning reimagining civil society collaborations in development. Research and the work of practitioners are integrated here, as they will need to feed into each other to advance the fundamental transformations called for in this book. Here, we present these remaining issues as six overarching themes.

Towards Southern-led CSO collaborations

There is a need for further research that focuses on how the changes and transformations CSOs seek could be supported through different types of collaborations. This research should consider more thematic and strategic aspects instead of the management questions that have thus far dominated both research and policy agendas. The insights and recommendations emerging from the various chapters in this volume, and this concluding one, could provide valuable entry points for the needed research pursuits.

However, although this book offers such entry points for further research on 'starting from the South', more should be done to support donors and well-resourced INGOs and Northern CSOs in dealing with the question of how

to let go of old practices and adopt new ones. Taking the example of multi-country programming as discussed in Chapter 17, INGOs and Northern CSOs have been encouraged to shift from a project approach to a programme approach to avoid fragmentation of their activities and to achieve greater impact. However, although the adoption of programme approaches has built stronger coherence from the point of view of INGOs and Northern CSO, it has also introduced new challenges to be addressed. Programmes are designed on the basis of principles and understandings of how change comes about that have limited space for contextualization. They are also often developed before 'Southern partners' are brought in to fit the programme goals. How to start collaboration from Southern organizations rather than beginning with predefined, large-scale Northern programming is an open question that will require further research, process design, and experimentation to identify new solutions. The same can be said about the notions of capacity and capacity development. Questions of whose capacities are to be brought in, how this should be done, to strengthen whom, and for what purpose deserve to be rethought and redesigned, exploring these issues from Southern perspectives and with an acknowledgement of existing capacities.

The insights and claims in this book also come with fundamental challenges on other fronts. As the authors in this book claim, other questions, such as what constitutes a 'good' partner and how to assess whether organizations are leaders in their own contexts when determining which Southern CSOs to work with by playing supporting roles, need more scrutiny. While some CSOs may be in a position to lead, the question of how to validate such claims remains unresolved. Questions of who and what they lead, by what (and whose) standards, and towards what goals become urgent when the criteria of fitting into Northern CSO programmes and goals are no longer prioritized.

Similarly, while the book has sought to imagine what 'starting from the South' could look like, it is important to realize that the drivers and motivations of INGOs and Northern CSOs may often not fall in line with these possibilities. The INGOs and Northern CSOs appearing in the chapters in this book mostly have at least some level of interest in more equal collaboration. However, some INGOs and Northern CSOs may have strong economic and ideological reasons for maintaining control over certain issues and areas in the South, to the extent of competing with each other. In such situations, there is not much impetus to change practices to move in the direction of Southern leadership. Moreover, relinquishing their grip on the conception, design, execution, management, and control of development would run counter to the interests and perceptions of good practices held by many, including back donors. This book's theme and goal did not include examining the complex dynamics between INGOs/Northern CSOs and their donors or how these can be addressed in the reimagined collaborations. Answering these questions, however, is crucial to the transformations called for throughout this book. In the complex global power dynamics of building alliances for control and influence in general, INGOs and Northern CSOs may also

be part of an agenda seeking to maintain the influence of Northern economic or ideological hegemony over the South.

Questions of what parts of civil society to support and with what risks are also relevant here. In some contexts, INGOs and Northern CSOs supporting certain Southern CSOs as embedded in their own course of development will be highly problematic and deemed undesirable. An example can be seen in the context of the global war on terrorism and the securitization of CSO development. After the 9/11 events, Northern nations took an active interest in shaping advocacy to de-escalate extremism across nations suspected to be providing a nurturing environment for ideas and actions that would eventually pose threats to Northern nations. Under these circumstances, some Northern CSOs aligned their advocacy efforts in certain Southern contexts with Northern states' security aims, as a strategy to increase global security (Howell, 2014). In such situations, supporting the agency of Southern CSOs would likely be questioned on the grounds that Southern CSOs may be influenced by extremist views, potentially contributing to the radicalization of local populations; thus, supporting their agency would be supporting what has been called 'uncivil society' (Glasius, 2010). The broader point here is that questions of how agendas may collide and the implications of this for collaboration may come up regularly for INGOs, Northern CSOs, and donors who are serious about 'starting from the South'. Clearly, this requires careful reflection on whose agendas should be leading and on what grounds this should be decided.

Embeddedness in Southern contexts

Answering the call of the chapters of this book to work with Southern CSOs as leaders in their own contexts requires in-depth knowledge and close engagement from INGOs and Northern CSOs. There are, then, more questions, given that relinquishing multi-country programming on decontextualized terms means working from, and understanding of, diversity. How can INGOs and Northern CSOs identify the diverse organizations with which to work, and how can they justify working with the varied understandings, perspectives, and objectives of these CSOs? How can INGOs and Northern CSOs define their new role as just one node in a wide set of relations rather than a leading organization that 'has a programme'? Addressing these questions will require reflection and a redesign of organizational identities and roles, in close interaction with Southern CSOs.

Considering the wide spectrum of roles and relations in CSO collaborations in development, the diverse types of CSOs that may collaborate productively with each other and with other societal actors (e.g. the media, academia, the private sector, and allies within the government) in a given context also need more attention. Although numerous alliances including a variety of actors exist, they have rarely been documented or evaluated for wider sharing and learning, and research on this is scant. To illustrate: while there is a wide literature on transnational advocacy networks of CSOs, the literature on subnational, national and

regional advocacy networks is minimal, making it hard to establish the nature and relevance of such collaborations in specific domains and contexts.

While there should be a shift in focus towards the Southern sides of collaborations, romanticizing the South and the 'local' should be avoided. Instead, a realistic understanding by both Northern and Southern actors should be promoted. For instance, the implications of the prevalent patron–client networks and diverse social obligations emerging in diverse contexts (Lorch, 2017) should be identified and subjected to reflection. CSOs, at any level and in any context, are part and parcel of the existing social fabric. For example, CSOs are sometimes established by local economic and political elites and thus may be used to increase political support (e.g. to drive contestation in general elections). Additionally, some CSOs can function as extensions of authoritarian states, seeking to control the manifestations of citizens' engagement in criticizing the regime in power. Therefore, analyses and understanding of the societal and political constellations are required for research or practice in any context, as 'starting from the South' means departing from the existing social dynamics in each location, which, for diverse reasons, some CSOs seek to maintain, whereas others aim for change and transformation.

Questions of legitimacy

A number of chapters in this book discuss questions of legitimacy. There is a particular need for further analysis and conceptualization of legitimacy in the context of collaborations that start from the South. Questions such as who has legitimacy, based on whose evaluation, and which criteria should be used to determine this, need to be addressed. For example, Southern CSOs have often advocated for legitimacy and the subsidiarity principle (that decisions should be taken at the most local level possible), arguing that they are Southern-embedded and consequently legitimized to act on behalf of local communities. However, the limited research available identifies an important tension here, indicating that Southern CSOs' relations with communities vary in degree, nature, and quality (Katyaini et al., 2021) and suggesting that such CSOs may align with donor demands rather than really representing the people and having the legitimacy among them that they claim to have (Elbers et al., 2021). Several questions have been posed by governments, local communities, and scholars: Are professionalized Southern CSOs 'external agents'? Do they represent local communities? How embedded are they, and how different are they from INGOs and Northern CSOs in terms of strategies of implementation? Who is being represented, and in what sense? Who is excluded? (Katyaini et al., 2021). Despite such questions of legitimacy, Southern CSOs typically demonstrate superior contextual understandings and relations compared with their Northern collaborators and can thus claim a legitimacy rooted in local knowledge and embeddedness. Understanding the issues surrounding how different sources of legitimacy come into play, for whom, and for what will require further research and engagement in practice.

In the current architecture of collaboration, however, the legitimacy of Southern CSOs in the eyes of their potential collaborators is in large part determined by their ability to build strategies and programmes in line with programme needs, their capacity to manage finances, and their competence in monitoring and evaluation – in other words, being professional NGOs. In efforts to address the foundations of CSOs' legitimacy, close attention should be paid to the CSOs' relations and interactions with the people they work with and the constituencies and values they claim to represent. There is a need for new approaches to viewing CSOs and their roles that take relations within a context as the foundation for their place in shaping development. Reflection, research, and design regarding ways to understand, assess, support, and work with these relations through programming can help equip CSOs to build and acknowledge legitimate roles that start from the South. This pursuit can also equip Southern and Northern CSOs, INGOs, and donors to establish understandings and standards for seeking collaboration on this basis (cf. van Wessel et al., 2020).

New starting points for collaboration

If the role of INGOs and Northern CSOs is not first and foremost to manage multi-country programmes, what is their relevance? There is a need for research that helps these powerful organizations with strong capacities in multiple areas to define their added value in different types of domains and arenas and for various types of organizations and objectives, as well as to determine how that added value can best be put to use. Further, it is important to overcome ingrained organizational understandings and practices around knowledge to capitalize more on Southern-based knowledge through incorporating acknowledgement, documentation, sharing, learning, and upscaling in ways that break through the limitations of the North–South dyad. Uncovering how to achieve such outcomes and how diverse Southern knowledges can inform wider civil society learning and practice may be important new research areas.

There is disagreement within this book and beyond on the question of whether the needed transformations are about 'shifting' or 'sharing' power. However, rejecting the power of INGOs and Northern CSOs as coercion would reflect a flat conceptualization of power as a zero-sum game and coercion as its only expression. Other understandings of power allow for more complex approaches, with power potentially supporting and enabling (see e.g. Gaventa, 2021; Haugaard, 2012). Taking this latter type of perspective provides a richer set of futures to explore. Research can help INGOs and Northern CSOs to identify what they bring to the table in collaborations, beyond the prerogative and capacity to manage. These organizations may have valuable strengths that could be used to support Southern CSOs in moving forward with their self-identified needs and goals. Relatedly, as discussed in some of the book's chapters, the power of INGOs and Northern CSOs lies not only or primarily in their control over the Southern CSOs they work with. They can also be seen as important companions

or allies who can support and complement using their complementary strengths on various fronts. They can also help promote certain issues, such as human rights in contexts where civic space for local CSOs is restricted or where funding for political roles for specific causes or groups could not otherwise be obtained. More in-depth research is needed on Southern views and experiences regarding new, more complementary, and facilitating roles for INGOs and Northern CSOs in collaborations. Such work will also facilitate the efforts of INGOs and Northern CSOs to reshape their roles in ways that engage CSOs in the Global South on more equal terms or, as the chapters in this book advocate, to take up supporting and facilitating roles while also capitalizing on their own power, motivation, and capacities. The challenge of incorporating and harnessing these varied strengths, however, requires working together with donors, who must be ready to experiment with alternatives.

Although ongoing discussions among INGOs and Northern CSOs consider the necessity of transforming collaborations and addressing the prevalent relations and privileges, including themes such as decolonization and racism, to date, little research examining the premises of such critical theoretical discussions has been carried out on CSO collaborations. Scholarly contributions to the field since the late 1980s largely address a narrow range of issues related to partnership, power, and accountability. More understanding of mechanisms related to race and white privilege within collaborations and more thorough explorations of decolonization are needed. Investigating the new roles mentioned above may open up, diversify, and brighten current critical debates on CSO collaborations by introducing constructive, future-oriented approaches and practices.

Research on and a redesign of accountability questions and mechanisms within the development system are also needed to address the hegemony of a reporting culture focusing on monitoring and evaluation centred on upward accountability on imposed terms. Some INGOs and other actors have experimented with alternative ways of accounting and reporting, especially when it comes to non-financial accountability. More research is needed on these alternative accountability practices and on how financial accountability could function – for instance, in situations where public aid funding is allocated directly to Southern CSOs.

The value of comparative advantage

Another area of interest that requires additional evidence is the supposed comparative advantage of adopting a Southern-led approach in CSO collaboration. While North–South, South–South, and other variants of the relations between and among Northern and Southern CSOs may be emotionally and morally satisfying in a variety of ways, it is important to research whether, when, and how Northern-led and/or Southern-led approaches offer comparative advantages when it comes to the changes and transformations CSOs seek to achieve. This would include research into the comparative advantages of collaborations between CSOs beyond the North–South dyad, including thus far understudied domestic and transnational alliances, such as those involving diasporas, social movements,

and other actors not fitting the image of the conventional, professionalized NGO. While there have been many analyses of the successes and failures of Northern-led approaches, more research is needed on the achievements – however defined – of Southern-led initiatives. Identifying what works and uncovering why it works in terms of Southern leadership may inspire many CSO practitioners in the North and the South who are seeking to reimagine how to shape their futures.

Further research is also required to understand the conditions under which a particular approach to CSO collaboration has the greatest impact. Ideally, democratic states provide the critical conditions under which 'starting from the South' can provide comparative advantages and Southern CSOs can act on the basis of their goals and interests. However, CSOs face challenges in both autocratic/hybrid and democratic states, with conditions described as shrinking or squeezing civic space (Buyse, 2018). CSOs are increasingly controlled by states, and burdensome bureaucratic demands with the constant threat of de-registration, the freezing of bank accounts, or direct harassment limit Southern CSOs' agency. While some governments in developing countries crack down on INGOs/Northern CSOs and Southern CSOs receiving support from INGOs/Northern CSOs, others respect or are at least more tolerant of INGOs and Northern CSOs. This may depend both on the regime and on the topic being covered. Therefore, again, a contextual understanding of the conditions under which 'starting from the South' will have the strongest impact and of what kinds of roles INGOs and Northern CSOs can assume in restricted circumstances is needed.

Towards the pluriverse

Opening up CSO collaborations to diversity means being open to a multitude of knowledges and imaginings of how to live and relate in this world – what Escobar (2011, 2018) has called the 'pluriverse'. Moving towards a pluriverse in shaping CSO collaboration would not only mean decolonizing in the sense of abandoning mindsets and practices of domination; it would also mean opening up to the possibilities that may come with the discovery of new knowledges and new ways of coming together. We are presently quite far from such a state. While decolonization has entered the vocabularies of INGOs and Northern CSOs, there is still little research on efforts to decolonize CSO collaborations, let alone on opening up to the pluriverse in shaping these collaborations.

Relatedly, much of the current critical analysis on power in CSO collaborations is still conducted and published by scholars at universities in the Global North. The contributions are often based on longer or shorter periods of 'fieldwork' with CSOs in the Global South for projects often commissioned by INGOs or Northern CSOs and largely conceived outside the research site. We hope this book and the agenda for research and practice we have elaborated here will encourage researchers and CSO practitioners from the Global South to increasingly engage in critical theorizing and empirical analysis. This may help to break the pattern of INGOs and Northern CSOs, accompanied by Northern researchers, being the most vocal and silencing voices from the South.

Exploration and development of new approaches that 'start from the South' will be much helped by research grounded in contextually rooted perspectives, with researchers with deep contextual understandings and relations in leading roles – and recognized as such by others in positions that allow them to provide support. Drawing on the idea of pluriversality, to identify how 'translations' between the multiple worlds in the pluriverse can take place in practice, more research should be done on clashes and dialogues between the diverse epistemologies in the context of civil society collaborations (Escobar, 2018, p. 83).

However, putting forward a pluriversal research agenda will require further fundamental changes in how the world is understood and categorized. Academic researchers, whether they are located in the Global North or in the Global South, typically draw on epistemologies and categorizations that have evolved in Western theory. This is also the case in this book, as most of the chapters draw from theories discussed in mainstream Western social science. Obviously, a foundational concept of the book, 'civil society organization', is itself based on the current 'epistemic table of the modern social sciences' (Escobar, 2018, p. 84), where civil society is one of the main concepts discussed in relation to modernization and the evolution of the modern state. Therefore, drafting an agenda for pluriversal research on civil society collaborations may be an episte-mological impossibility. Rather, new research agendas with new conceptualiza-tions of constellations of people in their relations with others, nature, and the spiritual – which acknowledge forms and aspects that have often been ignored in Western epistemologies and hence in Northern approaches to collaborations – are needed to enable both CSO collaborations and academic research to 'start from the South'. This epistemological shift towards Southern theorizing (Connell, 2007) or the de-Westernization of investigations (Mignolo, 2021) will be a challenging future agenda for the authors of this book and others interested in relations and dialogues among peoples, organizations, and worldviews from what we call the Global North and the Global South.

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