



Global Communities of Change From Control to Engagement

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Draft**

1. Introduction

In the process of writing a new strategic plan for the period 2011-2015, Cordaid launched the Global Communities of Change (GCoC) concept. This concept is not fundamentally new in the sense that Cordaid does not have the ambition to revolutionize the development world or the aid system. The Global Community of Change concept is primarily an idea, a way of looking at development, an instrument aimed at increasing the effectiveness of Cordaid's interventions. The concept is also meant to assist Cordaid in becoming a change agent, making the sharpest possible choices and decisions with regards to what issues is Cordaid going to tackle, on what grounds, why and with whom. This document aims at clarifying the concept of GCoC and yet will inevitably elicit numerous questions from all stakeholders. For that matter, this paper illustrates the GCoC idea: it will constantly need revising to be true to its major characteristics: be demand driven, context sensitive and issue based. We hope this document will shed light on the motivation as to why Cordaid initiated this process and will be the object of fruitful and maybe even heated discussions with all stakeholders.

2. The changing context

Development in the context of a globalizing world has been mainly constructed and "managed" by outside forces. Communities are increasingly entangled in a dichotomy between what is often referred to as modernity and tradition, where relationships between elderly and young, women and men, ethnic and religious groups are under stress. The rise of new economic powers, as China and India, migration patterns, the accumulation and interconnectedness of the different crises that have broken out these past few years, are yet another reminder that the North-South divide is irrelevant, especially for the development sector. What happens "here" has an impact on what plays out "there" and vice versa. The elite in numerous developing countries are more concerned with their wellbeing in conformity with Western welfare standards than with poverty alleviation in their own countries. Walls have to be torn apart in communities throughout the world as well as in the North. India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons while communities live without electricity, water, proper health and education. Political and economic power relations are rapidly shifting. Development and globalization are interrelated; while globalization can reinforce poverty linked to exclusion patterns, globalization offers opportunities to tackle poverty, especially in terms of communication, and linking agendas. Based on this analysis, effective development cooperation calls for a coherent and comprehensive "package." Our effectiveness as a strategic financing agency for social change lies in the realisation that many of the current world crises are interconnected and require a global vision and approach to tackle them effectively.

GCoC derive from another vision of development cooperation. Development cooperation, as social phenomenon resulting from the end of colonization where Northern countries imposed their neo-colonial agenda upon recently independent nations, has never been valid. This model perpetuated uneven power relations and unfair (re)distribution of resources. In our vision, development cooperation is first and foremost a matter of cooperation, engagement with others, and forging sustained relationships premised on an overlapping change agenda. Within the GCoC concept, there is no place for development as it has been practiced the past decades. "Development" per se is a "failed" notion. The GCoC idea puts the emphasis on cooperation rather on development, building alliances, finding, and not choosing, stakeholders to join forces in the pursuance of an overlapping change agenda. Basically, the technocratic vision of development cooperation based on short term results captured in a logframe whereby a Northern actor, as enlightened as it may be, holds on to *all levels of decision making* in terms of financing, agenda setting and lobby activities is not only morally wrong, it is not sustainable. Within the GCoC idea, Cordaid funds are not only "from" Cordaid and "for" the poor, but in conformity with the Catholic social principles of global common good, preferential option for the poor, subsidiarity and sustainability, funds generated by Cordaid are part of the common good and decision making regarding destination of the funds should be made at GCoC level.

Within this context, the aid "system" is also changing. The overall effectiveness of development actors is being questioned. The critique is not only directed at bilateral or multilateral actors, NGO's are also increasingly being criticised: NGO's lack legitimacy, their track record is poor, their overhead costs are high, they are detached from the grassroots, they are focussing on the elite, etc. Cordaid understands the critique and agrees with some of it. However, the design of the GCoC is not meant to answer all the above mentioned critique. It is the result of a reflection whereby Cordaid realised that the current aid system, with its overemphasis on short term results, one on one relationships, and a false sense of control over results to be delivered, makes it difficult for Cordaid to fulfil its mission of shifting power

relations. Cordaid is conscious of the fact that “stepping out” of the current aid system is not an easy task, but we are committed to the change process and are convinced that though engaging with all relevant stakeholders, the GCoC concept will take root and grow. Within a GCoC setting, the emphasis is put on engaging with other actors as well as with emancipation processes rather than on controlling these same processes. Within the GCoC setting, actors from different countries, regions, and backgrounds will work, based on their specific skills, at the realisation of a common change objective. Introducing the GCoC idea reinforces our vision that development as such cannot be imposed by outside influence. It aims at instilling a civic driven change lens in all of Cordaid interventions, and at “detaching” ourselves from the aid industry to regain contact with the original purpose of civil society as countervailing power and social engineer.

Cordaid is conscious of the changes occurring in the aid environment and the challenges they present. The legitimacy argument used against civil society whereby civil society’s right to intervene in public matters is being questioned because of its absence of representation power is being partially solved when working through the GCoC concept. Strongly influenced by an international solidarity agenda, inspired by the values deriving from the Catholic social teaching, and working through and within global communities of change whereby Southern and Northern change agendas overlap, will reinforce Cordaid legitimacy and effectiveness. Some Northern agencies deal with the effectiveness – legitimacy issue by investing in existing networks, while others choose to decentralise their operations. New fund delegation mechanisms provide an incentive for some Northern actors to establish operations in the South. Cordaid purposely refuses to “go South” with the hidden agenda of accessing funding.

Furthermore, although using Northern civil society to reach out to Southern civil society has proven effective until now, this financing model will eventually be outdated. It is our opinion that, eventually, more funds should be directly accessible to Southern counterparts (or groups hereof) without passing through a Northern intermediary. While Southern partners often appreciate our relationships based on trust and mutual respect, the opportunity should be seized to rethink our role as Northern civil society actors, especially concerning the added value of our role as donor. Cordaid will for the years to come still have funds available to combat poverty and injustice. However, funding will be channelled through GCoC where decision making will be shared. Last, the Catholic identity of Cordaid also played a role in embracing the GCoC concept. Religious networks and institutions throughout the world, but especially in Africa, have existed long before nation states were created. Working at a commonly defined change agenda through, and with these institutions and other like minded actors within a GCoC confirms Cordaid vision of development.

3. Cordaid vision and values, how do they relate to Global Communities of Change?

Cordaid strongly believes that development is essentially about change in human and in power relations. The overarching values that guide Cordaid interventions and are at the basis of Cordaid relationships with partners originate from the Catholic Social Teaching of *subsidiarity*, *preferential option for the poor*, *global common good* and *sustainability*. Other values of accountability, transparency, openness, mutual respect, human dignity, diversity are also at the core of the mission of Cordaid as civil society organisation rooted in the Netherlands yet committed to solidarity and social change internationally. Our legitimacy to “intervene” outside of the Netherlands is derived from our imbedding in various (Catholic) networks based on shared values, and a shared agenda. In that light, Global Communities of Change hold a dual component of being *locally rooted* as well as being connected to the *international agenda* in order to find comprehensive and long lasting solutions to global issues.

In Cordaid vision, poverty is the result of exclusion and marginalisation which calls for a bundling of forces through emancipation processes wherein those who are excluded define their agenda and set out their home grown strategies. External actors cannot force “the excluded” to rally around an emancipation cause. Emancipation processes have to be rooted in their context, nurture their own leaders, set their own agenda in order to be able to “fight their own fight.” What external agents, such as Cordaid, can do is, out of solidarity, connect to and support these emancipation processes morally and financially, through joint lobby and advocacy, linking agendas, and ensuring the voice of the groups at the heart of these emancipation processes are being heard at international levels.

4. Cordaid vision on civil society; the role of civil society and how does that relate to Global Communities of Change¹

Civil society is an expression of citizen power of association to pursue a goal of societal relevance, and based on social commitment. Civil society can take the form of self organised community based association, a youth camp, a football association to a professional NGO. Civil society is thus not uniform and fills different roles. Traditional roles attributed to civil society are generating the social basis for a democratic state, promoting political accountability, producing social trust, creating alternatives, and engaging the state for rights and citizenship. The political role of civil society involves representation, advocacy, empowerment of the poor and protection of human rights. Civil society has the capacity to innovate and share knowledge, fills gaps by working in activities or geographical areas and populations ignored by governments due to limited capacity or political will. Civil society builds bridges between donors, governments, and the ultimate beneficiaries of aid and mobilises resources through fundraising or volunteerism. Civil society is constantly evolving; it does not only exist to enter a space left over by the market or the state, it enters any space deemed relevant to make its claim be heard. Civil society is to be found everywhere, in every country, and has always played a role in development matters. In Cordaid vision, without a strong and vibrant civil society, “development” cannot happen.

A distinction can also be made between aided (obtaining funding from external actors) and unaided civil society (does not depend on funding to function). Cordaid as part of the aided civil society (relatively large budget, high dependence on government funding) is in the process of reconnecting to the fundamental civil society functions mentioned above. Cordaid will distant itself from prescriptive models conceived by market (efficiency) or government actors (bureaucracy). Cordaid will instil civic agency, and civic driven change in its distinctive political agenda while engaging with others, state and market actors alike. Engagement will be aimed at bringing civic agency and social change agenda to the debate, instead of serving as a government sub contractor.

Traditionally, Cordaid’s vision of civil society was balancing between *service delivery* and *voice promotion*. In the health sector for instance, Cordaid has supported for decades church initiated health services ensuring that marginalised populations and excluded identity based groups receive proper care in the absence of a functioning public health system. In that light, the focus was not only on improving marginalised groups’ access to health care. The improvement of health care services, from a quality and access standpoint, was linked to the stimulation of the self organisations capacity of patient associations, of people living with HIV-Aids to demand better care, and affordable medicine from government authorities. Improvements of health standards will not be effective nor sustainable if the structures at the basis of inequality have not been tackled, and if health is not instrumental to strengthening communities resilience and improving bargaining power.

Historically, Cordaid has supported numerous partners involved in delivering basic and social services to minority and identity based groups in reconstruction or conflict settings, where mainstream development actors were failing or unwilling to reach out to them. Reaching out to identity based groups suffering from exclusion, providing services and connecting the service delivery component to strengthening the voice and resilience of marginalised groups has always been at the core of Cordaid mission although it has never been an easy task. Emancipation processes are essentially a political struggle that is not easily fought from a distance. The GCoC idea makes it easier for Cordaid and other like minded actors to engage with identity based and emancipation groups, as well as to combine the service delivery element with the voice promotion function through the lens of changing power relations. As already written, Cordaid strongly believes that development is essentially about fundamental changes in power relations at household, community, regional, national and international level. Although power relations have increasingly become part of the context analysis, Cordaid has not always been able to properly translate the power relations element in its daily work; in choices of issues, partners, actors, lobby trajectories, etc. GCoC offers an opportunity for Cordaid to ensure changing power relations is properly embedded at all levels of Cordaid interventions.

¹ Drawn from Intrac conference paper on civil society held in December 2008 in The Netherlands (available from Intrac website).

5. Cordaid and its role within Global Communities of Change

Cordaid will bring a range of assets in the GCoC based on the role we are expected to play in a GCoC. The role of Cordaid will be responsive to and thus co-determined by the needs expressed by the actors working within the GCoC, based on added value and the type of assets needed to bring the change agenda forward. The role Cordaid will play will most likely be in line with the role we have traditionally played the past decades, i.e. financing, linking and learning, lobbying, brokering. For example, in one GCoC our role may be predominantly bringing funds “into” the GCoC and acting as broker, while in the other community, most funds may be offered by another actor and opening doors for joint lobby at various international fora may be expected from Cordaid. The role Cordaid will not be uniform.

6. The Global Communities of Change concept

GCoC is basically about people (citizens, individuals) and organisations (all types) working together in the pursuance of a social change agenda. Therefore, the 3 defining components of a community of change are

1) A group of individuals and organisations: NGO’s-CBO’s, social movements, religious institutions and networks, donor institutions, companies, multilateral institutions, think tanks, knowledge centers, finding each other and working together. All these organisations do not “form” a community per se. Some have direct contacts, others just know indirectly of one another, yet they work at different activities that are crucial in achieving a common goal. Some will be more involved than others in the GCoC, depending on the context and the issue and how it matches their vision and mission. Others may join in for particular activities. The main issue is to identify **all** the actors, individuals, and institutions that are relevant and need to be “engaged” to bring the change agenda further. The composition of the GCoC is a very difficult if not impossible endeavour; no-one has the power decide who is in and who is out. Relationships are built, partnerships are forged, and in the process it will become clear where does the overlap lie. It is to be decided which rules will be guiding the various sets of relationships that will be built within the GCoC. Organisations may join and leave as they wish. The issue and the change agenda is the focus. Working within a GCoC setting does not automatically lead to the creation of a formal structure. “Natural leading” agents (the strategic partners) will play a convening / facilitating role on a need basis. The GCoC will not be a monolithic block seeking agreement on every single issue before taking action. GCoC is about finding enough commonalities in the change agenda to take action; it is about exchanging information, documentation, and informing each other.

2) Collaborate – work together

Collaboration is key, as is engagement. Actors work together based on assets and core competencies they bring to the table. The driving force behind the concept is complementarity: some actors will be implementing projects, others will facilitate the process, conduct lobby activities, exchange information, network.

3) At a change agenda

The change agenda is the binding element. Ideally, all actors define together a common theory of change, or a change agenda. In practice, most actors have a written (or hidden) change agenda. The main point is to highlight the overlap, and make explicit what are the commonalities of how the issue will be tackled, what are the elements, the actors, the interventions strategies, the time frame, the means at the disposition of the actors working within the GCoC.

6.1. GCoC in a nutshell (see figure 1 en 2)

- ❖ A “community” *without borders* i.e. (without geographical boundaries)
- ❖ *Demand* driven (context is leading)
- ❖ *Locally* grounded (with a strong connection to an international agenda)
- ❖ *Issue* based (to be tackled by actors within the GCoC)
- ❖ About *engagement* (goes beyond one on one partnerships)
- ❖ *Change* agenda (the glue binding all actors)

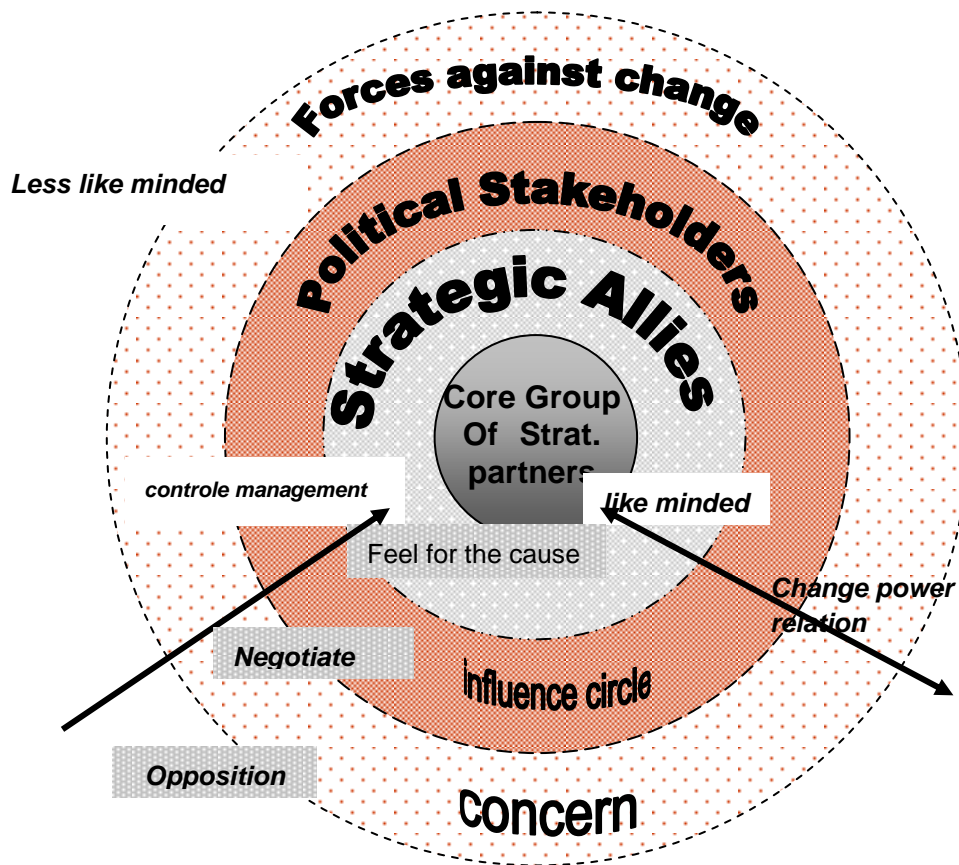


Figure 1 shows the analytical context of the GCoC; different circles reflecting the different layers of actors and their commitment/engagement in the change agenda being pursued. The core group of partners/actors can be considered as the “motor” of the change agenda, based on their experience, expertise, track record, mission and vision, natural leadership or combination of one of the above. The core group is in the position to lead discussions among the strategic partners and strategic allies, make the links with strategic stakeholders, prepare the common agenda, and bring dynamics in the “community.” Strategic allies, a layer higher, are like minded, support the change agenda, and are sympathetic to the cause. There is a certain degree of overlap in the overall vision even if their core business and core mission may not be identical. Political (and economic) stakeholders are key actors that have to be engaged; they may not be sharing much of the agenda, but it is important to bring the GCoC agenda to their attention. Engagement with these stakeholders will rarely take the form of a partnership and will most likely not involve funds. However, engaging them to influence their agenda and gain their sympathy is crucial. Forces against the change agenda, the last layer, have to be identified and engaged with. Engagement is meant to break their resistance by bringing them on board (based on strong and convincing arguments) or ensuring their resistance does not undermine the social change process that actors within the GCoC are actively pursuing. This element of engaging “negative” forces is relatively new and illustrative of the new engagement model that is at the core of the GCoC concept. Whereas in the past, typical developmental partnerships were one on one, and premised on the idea that both actors were able to bring about change, the GCoC engagement model forces Cordaid and others to identify all actors that play a role (positive or negative) in the change agenda process, and design tailor made engagement strategies with every single actor. Overcoming resistance, being persistent, committed and convincing based on strong arguments, and if need be, engage the “forces of resistance” with hostile tactics will be part of the engagement modalities at the disposition of the GCoC. The era of a one size fits all partnership modality with a diverse range of actors has come to an end.

With this model in mind, it becomes clear that engaging with “negative” forces entails risks that Cordaid and other actors working in the context of the GCoC will have to face and analyse to mitigate their negative impact. Cordaid is fully conscious of the fact that bringing about change is not a neutral process. Negotiating, arguing, bringing the change agenda further based on a convincing narrative will

be a new task members of the GCoC will have to perform. Conflicting (sub) agendas from actors within the GCoC are bound to arise and will have to be dealt with. Given the fact that one of the inspirations of the GCoC concept is the civic driven change agenda, GCoC actors will inevitably disagree, and sometimes even clash, which is not necessarily a negative feature of the GCoC. Strategies may not always be fitting and will need revision, which means negotiation and finding common grounds. The change agenda may have to be amended; some actors may become more radical than others which may lead to conflict. It is our conviction that these conflicts are inevitable and can even be turned into positive energy if the focus on what has to be achieved (the issue that needs to be tackled) remains clear.

6.2. What GCoC is not:

- *A new one size fits all model*: it is on the contrary highly context driven
- *A way to impress the government*: Cordaid is committed to the change agenda, even if it entails a shift in its role and looking at development from a different perspective. Nevertheless, Cordaid does not work in a vacuum, and is conscious of the critique directed at Northern NGOs. Once again, the GCoC idea is not meant to be the answer to the critique targeted at the development sector. It is an instrument to improve “developmental” practice.
- *A new partner consultation methodology*; working with(in) GCoC is about agenda sharing, true joint decision-making, and joint designing of goals and results. It also leads to a loss of control, and a radical shift in assumptions: there is no guarantee for success. Learning from one’s failure and improving one’s practice are important elements of the GCoC.
- *An entity you can fully control, plan and manage*; on the contrary; every GCoC is unique, flexible and determines its own course of action. It searches for answers instead of planning solutions.
- *A community based development model* where Cordaid would play a traditional donor role. Within GCoC, Cordaid is one of the (many) actors involved in the change agenda.
- *A community with clear geographic boundaries*. “Communities” within a GCoC don’t have clear boundaries. They are not attached to a village, or a region. GCoC are first and foremost about a common space where local and global meet one another. GCoC also contain a virtual element: new information technologies will be used as platform for information exchange.

It is not our intention to contend that GCoC are the panacea for successful development or contain all the answers to increasingly complex change processes. Working through GCoC enables Cordaid to **really** put in practice all the principles that have been guiding our interventions these past few years, and even go beyond, i.e. let go of the control we thought we had over the development processes we were supporting through our partners. The GCoC idea allows us to test our assumptions, dare to fail and learn from our mistakes, adopt a research action approach as to obtain elements of answers of what works well, where, and why.

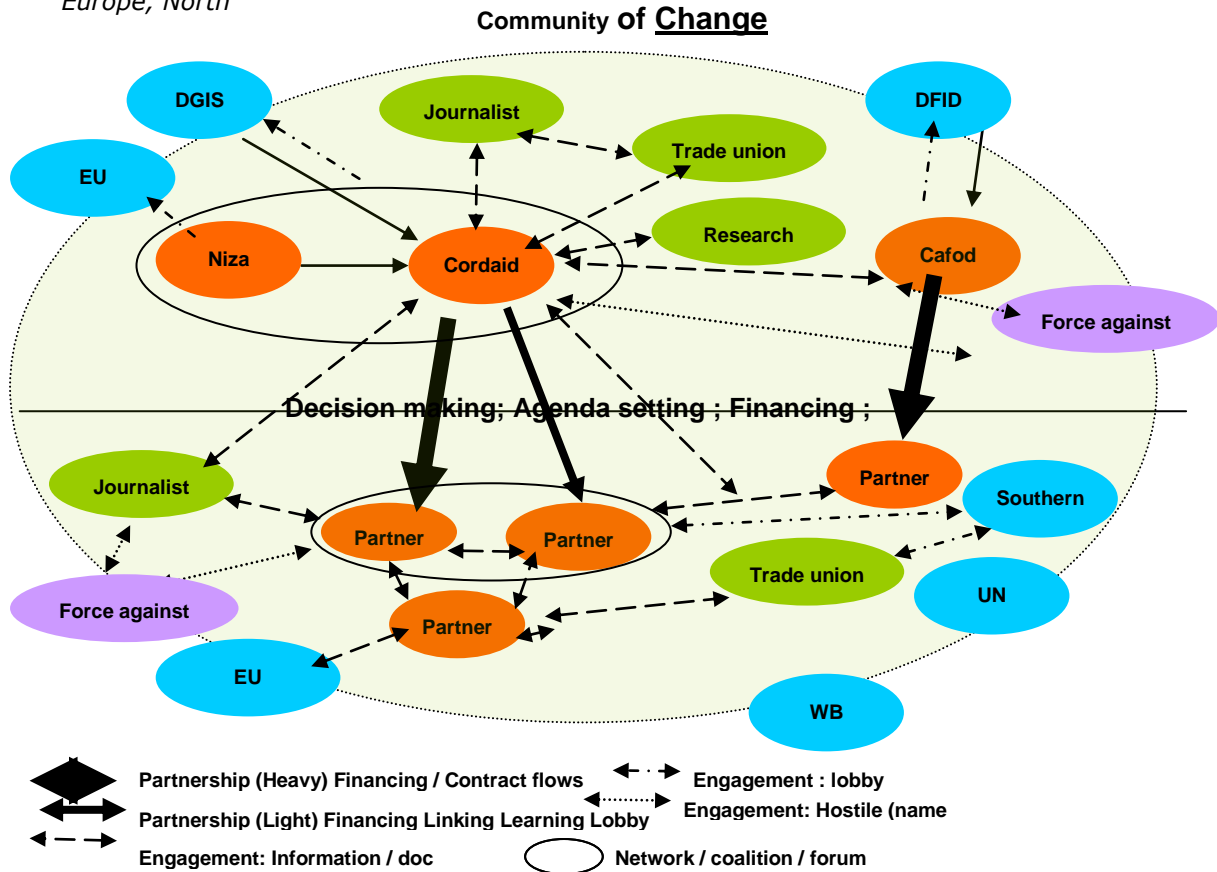


Figure 2 shows that global communities of change are fluid. The light green circle represents the space entered, i.e. the GCoC. It indicates the wide range of actors working within a community of change at a particular change agenda: Northern networks, Southern networks, donors, other civil society agents, etc. It shows that relationships pre exist the inception of the GCoC. There is no defining moment leading to the “creation” of a GCoC. The colors represent the different type of actors: in red the traditional development actors (i.e. NGO’s and CBO’s), green other forces of civil society, blue the traditional donors, and purple the potential forces against the change agenda. The arrows show the different types of engagement, from long term partnerships (heavy black arrow), to light engagement with or without funds, to hostile engagement (naming and shaming, when it comes to lobbying against bad business practices, for instance). Again, GCoC is about having a full understanding of the issue to be tackled, at all levels, about making an adequate and comprehensive context analysis, designing a change agenda, doing a mapping of all relevant actors and engaging them. Cordaid commits itself first and foremost to the change agenda, then to the actors. Another crucial element emerging from the picture is that decision making regarding agenda setting, financing and or lobbying does not lie (anymore) in the hands of Cordaid.

6.3. Global Communities of Change: another vision of partnership

Cordaid has always believed in the strength of communities to find solutions for the issues they are facing. Engaging with partners has so far been the best and most effective channel to stimulate development based on the societal vision embraced by Cordaid in 2006. Even though Cordaid has always engaged with partners in different ways, all partnerships are governed by the same overarching principles. Furthermore, stating partnerships principles does not suffice, regardless of how relevant these principles are. Transparency, equality, openness, and ownership to name a few, are meaningless if not jointly defined. Working through GCoC is the acknowledgement that while one on one relationships may be necessary in some cases, they are often not sufficient to achieve social change and break inequality patterns.

Cordaid strives to broaden its relationships modalities by introducing the wider concept of engaging, and putting it at the forefront of our interventions. Partnerships are one engaging modality. Within the engaging model, a wide diversity of interaction, based on the particularity of all the actors involved, is

made possible, as is negative engagement (i.e. naming and shaming). Engagement is a la carte, based on the needs and the particularity of the issue to be tackled. The commonality remains the willingness and commitment to address a particular issue. GCoC moves from “enlightened” partnerships to joint agenda setting, shared responsibilities and decision making in multi actor and multi stakeholder settings.

6.4. Global Communities of change and Accountability

Accountability is crucial for the nurturing of or involvement in a global community of change. Openness about who are all actors involved, what can be expected from them, transparency and fluidity in information sharing is a prerequisite. Actors involved in a GCoC will have to decide on the accountability principles (and possibly mechanisms) that best fit the needs of the GCoC.

6.5. Global Communities of change and Ownership

Decision-making cannot be exclusively placed in the North. As long as decisions, as well informed as they may be, still firmly remain in the hands of one Northern actor, we will fail in achieving social change. Nevertheless, it does not mean Cordaid does not have the rights to its opinion. Cordaid will engage in a dialogue, discuss, negotiate with actors part of a GCoC to decide on best decision making mechanisms regarding agenda setting, financing, as to meet the needs of the GCoC.

Working within a GCoC breaks the donor – recipient relationship pattern. It reinforces the idea that power is diffuse, and not static. Within this framework, Cordaid does not decide to “share” the power with others, which is an expression of power. Cordaid is in the process of changing radically the way it is working. Cordaid wants to share the risks, the responsibilities, the agenda and the decision-making regarding all matters relevant to the GCoC, including the funding. Within the GCoC, tailor made financing modalities as well as monitoring and evaluation system will have to be developed.

7. Operationalisation of the concept. Can it be done? If so how?

Operationalizing the GCoC concept is not an easy task. How can Cordaid operationalize an idea, an instrument designed to help a “Northern” development actor make the switch to becoming a change agent. There is an internal and an external element attached to the operationalisation process. Internally, operationalizing the GCoC concept is more about entering a learning process about what works, where, why and assessing to what extent which elements that work can be used in other contexts. It is an action research oriented methodology, meant to test hypothesis, an instrument to sharpen our choices. GCoC are a way to look at issues from a change perspective first. Once again, the actors are secondary and subordinated to the goal, i.e. the change agenda to be pursued. GCoC are about trying, testing, and daring taking risks, being innovative, having a Civic Driven Change lens in our work. On the one hand, it is a matter of doing it! In the process, Cordaid commits itself to sharpen the analytical skills of its staff, deepen the understanding and knowledge of specific issues that need to be tackled, and developing new sets of procedures and systems to ensure proper implementation of the new diverse engagement modalities.

Externally, GCoC calls for engagement. It calls for engagement with all actors, engaging with them in the change process. Every single action Cordaid undertakes must contribute to the change process. Working within a GCoC means sitting at the table with different actors, talking, engaging, looking for commonalities, finding the overlap, making choices and answering the following questions: which issue are “we” going to tackle? what change agenda are “we” pursuing? what strategies are we going to implement? how are we going to do it? who are the actors that HAVE to be involved? who and where are the forces of resistance? how are we going to engage them?

8. Conclusion: Changes in Continuity

Global Communities of Change, or engaging for change, can be considered as the continuation of what Cordaid has been working the past few years. Cordaid gradually moved from project funding, to organisation funding, to program funding; in that light, the concept of Global Communities of change is not new and confirms Cordaid’s idea that change can best be initiated through the bundling of forces. Nevertheless, the GCoC concept contains a few innovative and radical elements that will structurally and fundamentally alter the way “development work” is being done through joint agenda setting, and shared responsibility.

The GCoC concept is a work in progress; it is ambitious and at the same time humble. The ambition of Cordaid is to be the best possible social change agent we can be with a strong and well articulated vision on where we want to be and find (not choose) like minded actors to co-shape the change agenda relevant to tackle a particular issue. And yet Cordaid remains humble, mostly because we are aware that a concept, an idea, will not in itself change anything. People and organisations will. This document was meant to explain the motivations underlying the introduction of the new concept of Global Communities of Change, whereby the change element is central, and engaging with all types of actors crucial. We look forward to fruitful and challenging discussions!