



Getting good at disruption in an uncertain world

Insights from Southern NGO leaders

Lila Buckley and Halina Ward

Working Paper

December 2015

Governance

Keywords:

Disruptive change, organisational learning, non-governmental organisations, strategic planning, international development

About the authors

Lila Buckley is a Senior Researcher at IIED,
lila.buckley@iied.org

Halina Ward is an independent consultant,
halina@halinaward.co.uk

Produced by IIED's Strategy and Learning Group

The Strategy and Learning Group (SLG) leads on four aspects of IIED's work at institute-wide level: generating new income; reporting to existing institutional funders and building positive relations with them; improving our effectiveness in monitoring, evaluating and learning from our work; and ensuring that cross-IIED systems that support these objectives are working effectively. The Strategy and Learning Group also aims to ensure that the main components of IIED's institutional development are addressed in timely and coherent ways across the institute.

Acknowledgments

This working paper has been made possible through generous support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). We are grateful not only for DFID's financial support, but for its commitment to the learning that this research is generating. This research has also benefited immensely from the reflection and input of our core-team members, Jane Clark, Head of Learning, Climate and Environment Department, Policy Division, DFID; John Hailey, Professor in the Faculty of Management at Cass Business School, City University; and Sarah Mistry, Director of Effectiveness and Learning at Bond. They have each made great efforts to align their busy schedules in order to participate in a series of discussions as this research unfolded — and their insights have shaped this work in important ways. The core of this work would not have been possible, of course, without the experiences that were shared generously and openly by our interviewees. We learnt a great deal from their experiences. Whilst we know that this paper is a poor substitute for the richness of their reflections, we hope that this is the beginning of a longer-term dialogue. We would also like to thank Tom Bigg, Director of Strategy and Learning at IIED, for his commitment to developing this new area of work at IIED. Finally, we thank Katie Gilbert at M&C Saatchi World Service for input on Figure 1, Mary Buckley for editing, and Regent Typesetting for designing this version of the working paper.

Published by IIED, December 2015

Lila Buckley and Halina Ward. 2015. *Getting good at disruption in an uncertain world: insights from Southern NGO leaders*. IIED Working Paper. IIED, London.

<http://pubs.iied.org/11505IIED>

ISBN 978-1-78431-286-2

Printed on recycled paper with vegetable-based inks.
International Institute for Environment and Development
80-86 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8NH, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055
email: info@iied.org
www.iied.org

 @iied

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This working paper summarises a series of interviews with non-governmental organisation (NGO) leaders in middle- and low-income countries, and highly experienced development practitioners. The interviews provide insights into how NGOs in the global South are addressing disruption in their external and internal operating environments, and their unique perspective on what, in practice, ‘disruptive change’ means to them. The aim of this paper is to share the principal insights with donors and international NGOs to help inform funding and development strategies and operating practices, and enable them to more effectively support Southern NGOs facing uncertain and turbulent operating environments daily, while minimising the potential of those organisations to act as ‘disruptors’ themselves.

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Summary

Southern NGOs find themselves operating in turbulent and uncertain times. Disruption is part of life. Even so, many insist that disruption should not inherently be seen as negative, but can be appreciated for its creative potential — its ability to seed innovation rooted in regionally and nationally self-directed development pathways. Southern NGOs themselves may find ways to disrupt established structures and practices to achieve positive change. Many are already seeking to do so.

At the same time, powerful external disruptors — including natural disasters, emerging technologies, and climate change, as well as poverty itself — are recasting the operating environment for civil society around the world. Southern NGOs in particular are also at the sharp end of numerous internal disruptors — such as staffing challenges, succession planning in weak institutions with strong leaders, and even significant campaign success itself — that potentially hamper their efforts to strategically plan for these external disruptors.

This working paper summarises a series of twenty-three interviews carried out over July–September 2015 with NGO leaders in middle- and low-income countries and development practitioners with longstanding experience working with such leaders. The interviews provided insights into how NGOs in the global South are addressing disruption in their external and internal operating environments, and allowed IIED to draw out their perspectives on what, in practice, ‘disruptive change’ means to them.

IIED’s aim in preparing this working paper is to share insights from our sample of Southern NGO leaders with the United Kingdom (UK) Department for International Development, which has funded the work, and with international NGOs that partner with NGOs in the global South. These insights can inform donor and international NGO strategies and operating practices so that they can more effectively support Southern NGOs facing uncertain and turbulent operating environments daily.

Too often, key players in the international development community, including development agencies and international NGOs based in the North, are themselves disruptors of Southern NGOs’ efforts to tackle poverty and deliver positive outcomes. Interviewees gave numerous examples, such as ‘cut and shut’ changes in donor policy, the disempowering side effects of tendering requirements for consortia, and reluctance on the part of international NGOs to share scarce funding for organisational development with their Southern partners.

The negative impacts of both internal and external disruption are more acutely felt in regions and countries where very few NGOs have endowments or reserves to cushion operating budgets during periods of uncertainty. The frequency and intensity of disruption from two sources in particular stood out for our Southern interviewees: funding turbulence, with its associated financial uncertainty; and rapidly changing (and often shrinking) operating spaces for civil society, even among democracies of the global South. Consequently, actively protecting and nurturing the distinct ‘civic space’ of the global South is itself an important task for donors and international NGOs who want to help Southern NGOs more effectively manage disruptive change, or maximise their contribution to positive development outcomes.

Whether understood as sudden shocks or a general awareness of impending change, disruptors are catalysts for organisational change. This paper details the range of approaches interviewees have adopted for anticipating, engaging with, and responding to disruption. Interviewees described how disruptors can trigger re-thinking of organisational missions, business models, and ways of working; they described the roles of their leaders both as disruptors themselves and, at their best, as key players in the *avoidance* of negative disruption. Several highlighted their commitment to continually refreshing their organisational capabilities, for example, by bringing in private-sector experience or technological know-how.

A sample of twenty-three interviewees does not offer solid ground for broad conclusions. Neither has our sample engaged extensively with civil-society leaders operating in the most fragile or so-called ‘failed’ states, or those gripped by conflict or emerging from dictatorship. But some patterns do emerge that begin to reveal the characteristics of a ‘disruption-ready’ or even ‘disruption-embracing’ NGO, as well as some approaches that have proven effective in managing change without generating undesirable effects. Many of these characteristics enable innovation rather than reactive, purely adaptive, responses to disruption.

It was clear, for example, that the most effective responses to change are those that nurture, enhance and deploy the internal skills base. Some interviewees expressed their commitment to distributed leadership approaches, and to organisational cultures that could empower everyone, which incidentally had the effect of generating deep and lasting commitment to organisational mission. Many interviewees emphasised the importance of organisational learning and the use of foresight, despite multiple drivers of short-term, reactive approaches. In the face of funding squeezes and a need for innovative strategies, a number of them had begun to integrate social enterprise within their business models.

For international NGOs as well as their partners in the South, the idea of ‘disintermediation’ — in essence, cutting out the Northern international NGO or other middleman — is a key focus of current discussion about the changing roles of international NGOs. Our interviewees’ stories offer insights into both positive and negative realities of international NGO decentralisation, nationalisation or relocation to Southern headquarters in response to shifting geopolitical and funding environments. These shifts, at their best, fostered the emergence of empowered and effective Southern NGOs. But it is clear that they could also become powerful disruptors in their own right if not managed wisely. There are potentially important challenges and lessons here for international NGOs and donors alike.

Interviewees were asked to consider the implications of their experiences in managing disruptive change for donors and international NGOs. In short, if international NGOs, and development cooperation agencies such as DFID, take seriously the role of Southern civil society in delivering on the promise of the newly concluded Sustainable Development Goals, they must put renewed effort into minimising the negative impacts of their own practices on Southern NGOs and to becoming better partners and collaborators. Specifically:

- Northern-based international NGOs (INGOs) must step up efforts to expand the effective operating space for civil society in the South.
- Through their own operating practices, they need more actively to nurture innovation whilst continuing to value resilience and adaptive capacity.
- They need to consider the value of — and avenues for — unrestricted financing to bolster organisational development, and the skills and capabilities needed to turn disruption into a creative force for innovation and sustainable development.

The Southern NGO leaders with whom we spoke gain inspiration and peer support for managing disruptive change from a variety of settings including colleagues, elite fellowships, NGO coalitions and networks, project-based partnerships, and many others. At the same time, not many dedicated settings exist for the kind of reflection prompted by our interviews, which were necessarily extractive in nature. In its earlier draft form, this paper served as a useful tool for interviewees to reflect on their experiences and learn from each other. When asked, interviewees universally welcomed the prospect of a direct peer-to-peer exchange of experience on disruptive change. IIED aims to build on this in future work in this field.

We look forward to continued dialogue with all those colleagues whose rich experience has informed this working paper, and together to strengthening the resilience and innovation of NGOs in the face of disruption.

1

Introduction

Our reality is one of consistently trying to overcome uncertainty. The reality of the change process has been to learn to manage uncertainty on an ongoing basis (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

Around the world, development efforts are at a crossroad: the common framework provided by the Millennium Development Goals has been replaced by a new and challenging agenda; global action on climate change has high ambitions and a challenging road ahead, while the impacts of climate change itself are increasing; and existing aid and development practices are being challenged by technological and geopolitical shifts that are bringing in new actors and funding models. These factors themselves are disruptive changes, upsetting the very conceptualisation of development as well as existing methods of achieving it.

How organisations respond to these changes — as opportunity, threat, or something in between — will define the shape of development work moving forward, and impact on the international community's ability to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 'Sustainable Development Goals' or SDGs) adopted this year. Important work has already begun by a range of organisations, including the International Civil Society Centre (ICSC), DFID, Bond, Oxfam, CIVICUS, and Action Aid, that are grappling with disruptive changes and their implications for the future of development.

It is striking, however, that so far the experiences and perspectives of Southern NGOs in preparing for and managing their own disruptive change have not generally been analysed. IIED's work consistently demonstrates that effective NGOs at subnational and national levels are necessary for building the agency of poor people and marginalised communities, and in achieving sustained change. Many Southern NGOs are agile and innovative, seeking out new ways in which to disrupt established structures and social settings for positive change. But even these NGOs can struggle to resource the effective organisational learning and development in which resilience and innovation, as well as sustainable responses to disruption, must be grounded.

The struggle to resource organisational change occurs in the context of fundamental shifts in the operational realities of development actors in the global South. Space for civil society, and consequently for NGOs, is shrinking in many parts of the world. Powerful external disruptors, including natural disasters, emerging technologies, political shifts and climate change, continually recast the operating environments of civil society around the world. At the same time, the international development community itself can sometimes disrupt Southern NGOs' efforts to deliver positive development outcomes. The result is that not only are Southern NGOs often prevented from realising their potential, but the prospects for successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals are weakened.

If the world is to make real progress towards the SDG commitment that ‘no one is left behind’ (UN 2015), understanding and responding to disruptive change effectively requires ensuring that the resilience of Southern civil society organisations — their ability to innovate as well as adapt — lies at the heart of development work in a rapidly changing and uncertain world. This requires more than simply increasing financing for development; donors and INGOs alike need to make meaningful changes to their own operating practices to more actively support the growth of resilient, innovative organisations whose leaders have a voice in articulating problems and setting priorities. This means creating opportunities for southern NGO leaders to learn from each other and communicate their common experiences to the wider development community. Building a culture of learning must be at the heart of this process.

1.1 About IIED’s Disruptive Change Initiative

In May 2015, with financial support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), IIED began to explore how NGOs in the global South are addressing disruption in their internal and external operating environments. This Disruptive Change Initiative focuses particularly on the practical aspects of NGOs’ structural and functional responses to disruptive change (the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’). The initiative is grounded in three key questions, detailed in Box 1.

BOX 1. KEY QUESTIONS FOR IIED’S DISRUPTIVE CHANGE INITIATIVE

- **How can ‘disruption’ be understood?** What is the scope of this term? In particular, how do development actors in lower- and middle-income countries understand the sources and impacts of ‘disruption’?
- **What general and specific strategies** can help organisations to effectively manage, adapt, and innovate in the face of disruptive change (for example, in relation to organisational form, business model, leadership, governance, culture, business models or revenue streams)? Given the diversity of contexts, types of organisations, and forms of disruption, is it possible to discern any generic lessons about ‘how to do it well’ or ‘what to avoid’?
- **How can disruptive change management stories** from middle- and low-income countries help the international development community to learn and change? What questions do these organisations need to ask in order to most effectively address the challenges of disruptive change?

Work thus far has included an initial period of desk research reviewing literature on disruptive change in international development; a workshop with IIED partner organisations and donors to identify themes for further investigation; a series of twenty-three interviews about Southern NGOs’ organisational experiences with disruptive change; a learning exchange among Southern NGO leaders; engagement with donor and INGO audiences; and development of written outputs including this working paper.

To accompany the process, we convened a UK-based ‘Core Group’. The Core Group included DFID and a small group of UK-based development practitioners who helped us with ‘tuning’ so that insights from our semi-structured interviews could better inform donors and the approaches of high-income country-based international civil society organisations to ‘disruptive change management’.

Through this work, we seek to contribute to a reframing of ‘disruptive change’ that incorporates our learnings from Southern NGO experiences. We also aim to provide development practitioners (DFID and other bilaterals and INGOs) in the North with information and tools to support disruption-readiness in Southern NGOs. And at a practical level, we are looking to identify tools to help both local and international development organisations overcome barriers to change.

1.2 About this paper

This working paper reflects our thinking from the initial phase of this work, and has been compiled primarily to share the interview material. It is consequently content-heavy and analysis-light. Its primary aim is to present the views and experiences of interviewees regarding disruptive change.

The next section (Section 2) provides a brief overview of relevant literature, and identifies current gaps in existing literature, with the aim of situating interviewee insights in existing discussions.

Section 3 focuses on a number of definitional issues that emerged in the interviews. It contains interviewees' reflections on disruptive change and its value as a framing concept, including whether disruptive change needs to be seen as negative; how disruptive change might be seen differently from different actors' perspectives; and distinctions between internal and external sources of disruption. This section also highlights key disruptors mentioned by our interviewees.

The bulk of the paper is in Section 4. This section records interviewees' experiences managing disruptive change within their own organisations, and developing systems for managing future changes. Separate subsections consider the role of innovation in disruptive change management; the distinctive roles (both positive and negative) of leaders, boards, and peer-support networks; and the roles of flexible grant funding and new revenue streams in financing effective management of disruptive change. Final subsections draw together interviewees' reflections on the roles of organisational culture and learning in support of effective disruptive change management.

Following this, Section 5 highlights interviewees' messages and recommendations for donors and international NGOs.

Finally, the conclusion (Section 6) reflects on some of the key learnings from this material for INGOs, donors and southern NGOs.

Appendix A highlights five NGO leaders' stories of disruptive change management processes in different settings. Appendix B provides a complete list of interviewees and their affiliations.

The paper is intended for use among funders and interested partners as a catalyst for discussion about disruptive change. By sharing our thinking thus far, we hope to encourage a constructive conversation about what this work means for the global development community, including donors and NGOs in upper-, middle- and lower-income countries alike.

1.3 Research methods

Following a scoping phase of desk research reviewing literature and conducting a few preliminary phone consultations with key thinkers on disruptive change, researchers Lila Buckley and Halina Ward carried out twenty-three interviews during July–September 2015.

Interviewees were selected in consultation with IIED staff and members of our Disruptive Change Initiative Core Group (see Appendix B for interviewee list). Interviewees have worked in a range of development issues including poverty alleviation and community development, NGO capacity-building, natural resource management, community service, policy advocacy, disaster management, trade, and human rights. With such a small sampling, it was not possible to cover all geographies or subject areas. For example, only two interviewees were from Latin America and none were from Pacific Island nations.

Most of our twenty-three interviewees held senior management or leadership roles within a variety of small and medium-sized NGOs (up to around £11M annual turnover) working locally, nationally, or regionally in Asia and Africa. A number of the interviews were informed by their subjects' many years of consultancy experience with numerous organisations (such as organisational development consultant Chiku Malunga of CADECO in Malawi, or UK-based consultant Saverio Kratli, who works with pastoralists and herders around the world). Two interviewees were migrants ('expats') who founded an NGO in the middle-income country where they settled: Rich Brubaker is founder of Hands On, a volunteer organisation in China with a staff of twenty-nine and offices in three cities; Toshi Nakamura is a former UN worker who cofounded Indonesia-based technology NGO and 'development disruptor' Kopernik with Ewa Wojkowska in 2010.

BOX 2. MAIN ISSUES COVERED IN SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- 1. Introduction and background:** roles and responsibilities of the interviewee, as well as organisational focus, funding and staffing profile, and so on.
- 2. Framing disruption:** main sources or drivers of disruption for the organisation, including examples of the impact of 'disruptive change'.
- 3. Positive/negative examples of disruptive change management** in the organisation. How, if at all, do you go about planning or preparing for possible disruption in your organisation?
 - a. Stand-out success stories of that process of change, including roles of partners, funders, board, staff and others, with outcomes
 - b. Examples of disruptive change processes that didn't work well, including roles of those involved and lessons learnt inside and beyond the organisation
- 4. Areas for improvement/lessons for others:** areas for improvement in the organisation, and potential organisational capabilities or external resources to help organisations manage disruptive change more effectively.
- 5. Comparisons:** strengths or weaknesses (such as skills and knowledge) of other 'comparator' organisations for managing disruptive change.
- 6. Resources:** resources or tools to strengthen organisation's approach to disruptive change management (such as mentor, 'elder statesman', board training courses, or written materials).
- 7. Role for others:** the potential role of a) development cooperation agencies; b) international NGOs; and c) other stakeholders (such as municipalities, national government, or businesses) in strengthening the organisation's ability to manage disruptive change.

A majority of interviewees have had extensive regional and/or international experience, including Ousainou Ngum, executive director of pan-African NGO ACORD; Faith Nwadishi, who coordinates Nigeria's civil society Publish What You Pay coalition as well as directing a community-based NGO addressing women's empowerment in the Niger Delta, and also serves as an international board member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative; and Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Bangladesh and international board member of BRAC (formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), the world's largest international development NGO.

Because we were specifically looking for people who would be able to tell us stories of innovative disruptive change management — and to reflect on their experiences in meaningful ways for the INGO and donor community — this sampling is not representative of all 'Southern NGOs'. Indeed, we consider this group to be drawn from an exemplary set of disruption-ready — or in some cases even disruption-embracing — NGOs benefiting from exceptional leadership and refined donor intelligence. We also interviewed a few non-Southern consultants who had worked extensively with organisations in the South and who had deep understanding of organisational change.

Prior to the interviews, we shared a draft discussion paper with interviewees. The interviews were open-ended, and focused on areas outlined in Box 2. They evolved iteratively, with interviewers suggesting further avenues for discussion in light of interviewees' initial comments and their individual 'disruptive change management' experiences.

Interviews were held on the telephone or via Skype by either Lila Buckley or Halina Ward, and lasted between 30 and 150 minutes, depending on the availability and preference of the interviewee. All interviews were held on the record, unless anonymity was requested by the interviewee. We have accordingly attributed the majority of comments to individual interviewees, whilst anonymising some of them at the interviewees' request.

Interviews were not recorded, but we took detailed contemporaneous notes. Consequently, all quotes are approximate, and have been lightly edited. They are designed to convey the essential flavour of the interviewees' insights and perspectives, rather than a verbatim record. Interviewees have had an opportunity to review quotes used in this paper.

2

‘Disruptive change’ as a lens

The concept of ‘disruptive change’ is useful for making sense of an increasingly uncertain world and the responses it demands. The term itself originated within the business management community, referring to a sudden shock that quickly and irreversibly changes a company’s expected future, challenging existing business models, values and norms (Christensen and Overdorf 2000). ‘Shocks’ for these purposes include events such as economic crisis, 9/11, or an innovative competitor that disrupts the market-share balance.

The business community finds a disruptive-change lens useful because it provides a much-needed framework for making management decisions in turbulent times. Normal business-management theory focuses on the everyday challenges of running a business, but does not address how to achieve long-term success when dealing with disruptive changes, as these are characterised by shifts in the underlying forces of an entire industry sector. A noteworthy insight from work on disruptive change within the business management community is the need to think and act differently when preparing for disruptive changes. Indeed, how disruption is framed internally in a company — whether leaders and staff think about the change in positive or negative terms — may have significant implications for what actions are taken at the organisational level. As described in an article on the subject in the Harvard Business Review:

When a company faces a major disruption in its markets — one that could fundamentally change the business — the way its managers perceive the disruption influences how they describe it to the rest of the organization, how they organize the response, and how they allocate resources. If they see the disruption as a threat, they tend to overreact, committing too many resources too quickly. But if they see it as an opportunity, they’re likely to commit insufficient resources to its development. In other words, the way managers set the context of a disruption — the way they frame it — shapes the strategy they adopt (Gilbert and Bower 2002).

At an organisational level, this means that disruptive change poses a unique challenge to business survival: hard work and sheer grit are not enough to ensure resilience. Rather, a fine balance of adaptive and innovative management approaches is likely to be required for successful outcomes.

This disruptive change lens — and the particular challenge it poses for organisational management — has proven useful in the development community as well, in the face of increasing uncertainty and disruptive changes in the development field. Within this context, the term ‘disruptive change’ has been more broadly applied to encompass both megatrends that are disrupting the international-development landscape over time and the distinct drivers of change that affect development organisations’ operational realities (Bond 2015; Gnärig 2015; Green 2015; ICSC 2013). These include, for example, climate change, technological transformations, demographic and urban shifts, geopolitical shifts, the new climate regime, changing distributions of poverty and inequality. These broader and often slower changes will undoubtedly disrupt development work at all levels, even generating sudden shocks, and will challenge development practitioners to search for creative innovations.

For the purposes of this paper, our working concept of ‘disruptive change’ incorporates insights from the business understanding of sudden shocks or events, and also the understanding of important longer-term trends and drivers of change that affect our work in slower ways. These changes are major ones, closely associated with changes in the overall development landscape and with significant challenges to currently planned futures, strategies and operational models. It becomes clear through this research that from the micro level, within organisations, the major disruptors and the day-to-day lived reality of disruption and uncertainty are interconnected; it can thus be difficult to disentangle the micro from the macro sources or drivers of disruption.

There is a large body of literature that could shed light on issues of disruptive change and the management responses that it elicits. We have focused on literature that directly addresses disruptive change from the perspectives of development organisations and business management. We have also considered broader literature exploring potential ‘development futures’ and their impacts on the development community, as well as insights from a growing body of literature that applies systems thinking and theories of complexity to these issues.

2.1 Disruptive change in the development community

As mentioned above, increasing numbers of development organisations are exploring how fit they are for the future, and for the uncertainty and disruptive change that increasingly characterise the world. Much of this work focuses on grappling with the potential disruptors themselves, in an effort to better anticipate and proactively respond to future events. This ‘futures’ literature includes direct references to ‘disruption’ (ICSC 2013; Kharas and Rogerson 2012) as well as broader entry points including: ‘changes in the development landscape’; ‘major change factors’; ‘critical uncertainties’; ‘changes that are not associated with appropriate interventions’; ‘sources of tension’; and ‘critical uncertainties’ — all of which make a new development approach necessary (Green 2015; Moris 2014; Peterson *et al.* 2014; Vaes and Huyse 2012; Vilby 2014; WEF 2013).

The approach in this literature is to take a broad perspective on the changing geopolitical, technological, socioeconomic and environmental trends and drivers of change for international civil society organisations and/or development cooperation agencies over a ten- to twenty-year time horizon (see Box 3).

BOX 3: TRENDS AND DRIVERS OF DISRUPTIVE CHANGE FREQUENTLY IDENTIFIED IN DEVELOPMENT WORK

- **Climate change** and recognition of planetary boundaries demanding a shift to a sustainable development paradigm while presenting problems for protecting shared space for development cooperation (Adelphi 2015; Bond 2015; ICSC 2013; Kharas and Rogerson 2012; PRIA 2012; Trocaire, 2011; Vaes and Huyse 2012; Vilby 2014)
- Rapidly evolving **technologies** leading to **disintermediation** (elimination of ‘middleman’ actors) (Bond 2015; Evans 2011; Green/Oxfam 2015; ICSC 2013; Kharas and Rogerson 2012; Peterson *et al.* 2014; Vaes and Huyse 2012; WEF 2013)
- **Shifts in geopolitical power** leading to a **shift to the South**, with new sources of development assistance not aligning with OECD/DAC definitions of overseas development assistance (Bond 2015; Evans 2011; Green/Oxfam 2015; PRIA 2012; Trocaire, 2011; Vaes and Huyse 2012; Vilby 2014)
- **Inequality, demographic shifts, and the changing nature of poverty** from ‘mass poverty to chronic pockets’ in fragile and conflict states, with a majority no longer in LDCs (Evans 2011; Green/Oxfam 2015; Bond 2015; Vaes and Huyse 2012; Vilby 2014; Trocaire, 2011; WEF 2013)
- **A shrinking advocacy and operating space** for civil society worldwide, coupled with shrinking institutional trust (Bond 2015; ICSC 2013; Vaes and Huyse 2012; Vilby 2014; WEF 2013)
- Shifting **delivery models** in international development leading to increasing numbers of partnerships with **private-sector actors** and a decreased role for government (Bond 2015; PRIA 2012; Kharas and Rogerson 2012; Peterson *et al.* 2014; Vaes and Huyse 2012; Vilby 2014; WEF 2013), and
- **Increasing conflict, displacement and natural disaster** leading to humanitarian crises, with refugees meeting increasing isolationism and nationalism in Western countries (Bond 2015; Trocaire, 2011; Vaes and Huyse 2012; Vilby 2014).

At a Donor Dialogue Workshop on disruptive change with around thirty IIED staff, donor organisations and partners from middle- and low-income countries in June 2015, participants came up with a list similar to that in Box 3. When asked to narrow their long list down to the top three disruptors for purposes of further discussion, they highlighted:

1. **Money:** Shifts in donor policies and changing trends in funding flows (away from CSOs and towards the private sector) force organisations to change reactively in order to survive.
2. **Fear of the future:** Public mood, xenophobia and generalised fear of what is to come impact government decision-making, and hamper use and allocation of ODA.
3. **Shifts in the global political economy:** the intergovernmental and transnational architecture of the post-MDG world, including reconfigured political economies, will reshape development's nature, tools and institutional settings.

Some of the literature identifies *positive* trends in global development, while exploring the disruptive potential of these patterns for current approaches to development. For example, Green (2015) points to **growing diversity and social complexity** within developing countries as a significant 'headline' — increasing connectivity and political engagement support growing agency of new actors while a rising middle class potentially strengthens human rights and democracy. Peterson *et al.* (2014) similarly highlight the importance of increasing empowerment of individuals. In IIED's Donor Dialogue Workshop, one participant noted that disruptive change has caused increasing organisation of urban poor in India and elsewhere. A number of other participants also stressed that disruption may be positive.

From this perspective, it is important to realize that disruptive change may accelerate, rather than hamper, development. It can be a potentially positive influence. How to ensure that this occurs, at least more often than not, is a major challenge for NGOs in both the North and the South, as well as for the funders who support them.

Existing literature explores some practical and strategic implications of disruptive change for development organisations, particularly those that work internationally. For example, ICSC (2013) argues that international civil-society organisations have a choice among three different strategies: to actively advance potential disruption rather than trying to avoid or mitigate its effects; to carefully screen changes in the environment and prepare to quickly embark on a deep-rooted response, should that become necessary; or to build strength in existing systems and navigate around disruption as much as possible — or all of the above. That paper concludes that preparedness, diversity and organisational culture are key to effective responses. Later papers (2014 and 2015), a book (Gnärig 2015) and an ongoing process grounded in ICSC's membership explore the implications of these strategic choices for making changes in a range of areas including organisational culture and business models, and with leadership and governance structures set to follow.

A range of papers further explores responses in terms of international civil society organisations' ways of working. Recommendations include:

- Relinquishing control and allowing for flexible and responsive decision-making, and non-linear project design and implementation (Green 2015; ICSC 2014; Vilby 2013)
- Holding a long-term vision (beyond the next grant agreement) to prepare for disruptive change, including decisions about what not to do, while detecting changes in real time and providing fast feedback to project design (Green 2015; ICSC 2014; Peterson *et al.* 2014)
- Creating space and building institutional capacity for innovation, including allowing for multiple parallel experiments, projects that fail, and the extra time and effort required by learning and adapting. This will also require updating approaches for reporting and measuring impacts (Green 2015; ICSC 2014; Kharas and Rogerson 2012; Moris 2014; Vaes and Huyse 2012), and
- Collaborating with others — related organisations as well as social enterprises, the private sector, and new technology providers — through networks and expanded engagement, in order to leverage resources for greater change than can be achieved by individual organisations alone (Green 2015; ICSC 2014; Peterson *et al.* 2014; WEF 2013).

At IIED's Donor Dialogue Workshop, this last point on collaboration was elaborated in detail. Participants worked with three different scenarios of disruptive change: within a bilateral donor agency, within an OECD development non-profit, and within a service-provision NGO in a low-income country. Though the responses and necessary skills varied in detail, participants universally emphasised the importance of strong strategic partnerships for remaining resilient to disruptive change and ensuring effective impact. This will be particularly important in the context of the increasing 'shift to the South', with local organisations in lower- and middle-income countries driving their own research agendas. Participants also emphasised the need for continually seeking opportunities for positive disruption, especially where more radical and transformative change is needed.

2.2 Development as ecosystem management

Regardless of how disruptive changes are categorised, there is broad consensus that they point to the need for a range of new approaches to development. This necessitates a shift from a 'best-practice paradigm' (Chambers 2011) to one of 'best fit' — that is, development interventions that are 'optimally adapted' to the socioeconomic, political and ecological context at any given moment (Ramalingam *et al.* 2014: 3). While development work has always dealt with complex problems (Mosse 2004; Ramalingam *et al.* 2014), the levels of uncertainty and disruption reflected in the lists above highlight the need for more fundamental shifts in how development organisations function; this points to the need to develop a new set of tools for disruptive change management.

A potentially useful framing comes from emerging work on systems thinking and complexity. For example, Owen Barder argues in a recent blog post that understanding development interventions as existing within an adaptive system is crucial for effective management:

If we want to accelerate development we have to focus on improving the system's capacity to adapt. As in nature, adaptive efficiency depends on two things: variation and selection. Interventions which improve or accelerate variation and selection will tend to help the system to generate the self-organising complexity we call development (Barder 2015).

In more specific terms, Peterson *et al.* (2014) argue that a systems approach calls for a highly entrepreneurial approach to problem-solving, international thought leadership, and a more comprehensive approach to scoping projects. Similarly, Vilby (2014) recommends the development of 'adaptive capacity', while PRIA (2012) states that 'civil society practitioners need enhanced capacities to operate in ambiguity, uncertainty and chaos.'

Oxfam's Duncan Green (2015) provides a useful metaphor for the conceptual shift required in the development sector, suggesting that the key to achieving these necessary adaptive responses is to see international CSO work as an exercise in 'ecosystem management' rather than to approach it as a conventional monoculture. He explains that systems thinking generates an imperative for international NGOs to 'relinquish control' since traditional command and control is ill-suited to complex systems. 'In a complex system,' he writes, 'a default option of "don't control unless there is a good reason to do so" may be more productive than the reverse approach, which would say "control unless there is a reason not to."'

This metaphor of ecosystem management strikes us as particularly useful for another reason: the paradigm shift required in the development sector will resemble the one that recently occurred in ecology, and by extension ecosystem management (Kratli 2015; Sullivan 1996). Until recent decades, ecosystems were assumed to exist in a steady state of balance and equilibrium, and ecosystem management focused on trying to control disruptions and return the system to a state of balance (much as in Duncan Green's monoculture example above). From a non-equilibrium ecosystem perspective, however, scientists have come to accept disruption as an inherent feature of ecosystems — indeed, as a 'functional element within a dynamic system' (Kratli 2015: 25).

Within this context, rather than trying to reduce uncertainty to a manageable simplification, managing disruption becomes an exercise in working with these patterns and supporting the overall system towards long-term resilience — much as the development sector needs to do in a world of disruptive change and uncertainty.

2.3 Insights from organisational change management

The development community thus far has largely continued to treat disruptive change-related issues as problems that are more effectively managed when simplified. Ideas of ‘complexity’ and ‘fitness for purpose’ or ‘future-fitness’ have proven easy to conceptualise but harder to operationalise — largely because barriers to change are deeply ingrained in the structure and organisational cultures of development organisations. Existing literature does not readily lend itself to considering *how* to manage the changes. As mentioned above, one exception to this is work currently under way at the International Civil Society Centre, focused on large international civil society organisations (ICSC 2013, 2014 and 2015). Specifically, ICSC is leading a process of ongoing engagement with INGOs on the ‘how’ of organisational culture change (Ibid, 2015).

Future-oriented literature on the ‘how’ of disruptive change management for national or local nongovernmental organisations in middle- and low-income countries is almost non-existent. Current guidance also tends to downplay or even ignore the material and structural realities that often inhibit the practical realisation of organisational change. An organisation can be very effective, for example, at anticipating change in the short term — and may even have strong longer-term scenarios and understanding of their implications — without necessarily having the capacity to apply these to its day-to-day operations.

The business community has some useful insights to offer through its literature on change management in companies. In disruptive-change business literature, there is a strong focus on more practical elements, asking, for example, ‘How do you know [when you are faced with truly disruptive changes]?’ and ‘How do you think and act differently [when faced with disruptive change]?’ (Berger 2005; Christensen and Euchner 2011).

Change management presents a dilemma: it seems that the very things that make for ‘good management’ of organisations — a strong institutional culture shaped by ambitious and ethical visions, stability and strong growth, continuity of relationships, and robust institutional systems — are exactly what often stand in the way of organisational change (Christensen and Euchner 2011; Leonard-Barton 1992). Indeed, this ‘innovator’s dilemma’ is relevant in the development sector as well. For example, Bond (2015) notes that taking action to address the shifts called for by disruptive change is ‘countercultural’ in many organisations, running counter to ‘the low risk-taking and rigid performance and accountability frameworks of many established bilateral donors.’

The role of leadership supported by strong vision in such situations thus emerges as key for driving necessary changes through organisations and remaining resilient in the face of disruptive change. The literature emphasises that certain core competencies need to be ‘embraced by leaders, role modelled, and instilled into teams and individuals across the organisation’ (Kaplan 2012). These may include, for example, a ‘leap-frogging mindset’ and an ‘unyielding desire to create a breakthrough’; willingness to push boundaries; integrating good information with good intuition; taking action to ‘drive results, learning from them, and then modifying assumptions and approaches’ in order for future strategies, plans and actions to be better aligned to the needs of the market; using surprise as a strategic tool; and accepting that it is an ‘inevitable part of business’ to turn disruption into opportunity (Christensen and Euchner 2011; Kaplan 2012).

Whereas much of the ‘futures’ literature frames disruptive change negatively (with some exceptions, as noted above), business literature focusses much more on the positive side of ‘possibilities’ and ‘opportunities’ presented by disruptions in business as usual. ‘New possibilities often come from challenging industry-wide assumptions,’ argues Berger (2005). ‘However, your assumptions are generally hidden. These undetected assumptions organize your thinking without your knowledge.’

Echoing the call for new development paradigms, business literature repeatedly argues that success in the face of disruptive change is about learning how to think differently. But unlike the civil society-oriented futures literature, the business change-management literature provides practical advice on various entry points for achieving this. For example, Berger suggests that organisations can achieve a new mindset by thinking backwards from the end they want to achieve. ‘You can take innovative action in the present, informed by your future,’ explains Berger. ‘Do things now that make sense in light of your new future. Say “No” to those things you used to do automatically but that no longer make sense given where you are now going.’ Christensen and Euchner (2011) suggest that that future can be seen through watching ‘how the customers live their lives.’ In doing this, however, they cannot just be asked directly in a survey, because that is part of the old model. Rather, it is necessary to put yourselves in their shoes, and reflect deeply and creatively.

While these management insights are useful starting points for thinking about how change happens in practical ways at the institutional level, business operational models and strategic decision-making do not easily translate into the operational models of nongovernmental development organisations. Furthermore, in the context of the need for a paradigm shift in development thinking itself, business literature — with its focus on abrupt, live-or-die disruptive change — will inevitably fall short of providing a practical working framework for the development community.

2.4 Missing perspectives

What emerges from the bodies of literature we have reviewed is the insight that new ways of working are required to respond proactively to disruptive change. These will certainly demand strong leadership, informed by a clear vision of what the future could hold and what role the organisation wants to play in attaining that vision. Equally, the new ways of working will require agile, flexible, and outwardly focused entrepreneurial (or at least ‘innovation-friendly’) operational models, supported by strong organisational cultures of change.

Though there is a strong body of literature describing the types and impacts of disruption, very little of it has addressed the skills of effective disruptive change management, particularly in nongovernmental or civil society organisations in middle- and low-income countries. The work so far has tended not to consider the disruptive-change management insights and experiences of Southern development actors. Instead, the analysis highlighted above is largely rooted in OECD-based institutions.

Disruption in the international development community will not only affect institutions and development actors based in high-income countries. It will fundamentally, in multiple distinct forms, be part of the lived experience of development organisations (many of which may not even identify their work with the word ‘development’) and other ‘development actors’ in middle- and low-income countries.

How, for example, can or will local community organisations or a poorly resourced municipal government in sub-Saharan Africa deal with change resulting from rapid shifts in urban population, volatility in food prices, unpredictable rainfall leading to floods, and so on — all increasing at once and interacting with one another? What does it mean to embrace change in this context? And how do international NGOs and development cooperation agencies themselves need to change so that their work will be most beneficial?

It is also important to note that learning and capacity development in this context need not be exclusively one-way. For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, IIED Principal Researcher Dr Saleemul Huq gave a series of lectures in the United States (US) that contrasted preparedness for major storms and flooding in Dhaka with the New York hurricane response, and identified a number of specific lessons for change anticipation and management that US institutions could learn from approaches already in place in Bangladesh.

As we were reminded by a Caribbean partner during an IIED Donor Dialogue Workshop in June 2015, organisations in middle- and low-income countries ‘live disruptive change.’ They often face much more fundamental challenges from volatile and unpredictable change than their international counterparts in wealthier regions. Indeed, many drivers of change are already generating increased and cumulative impacts that multiply the uncertainties faced, often with inadequate resources and capacity to respond. For institutions facing disruption on an ongoing basis, managing disruptive change is not about trying to control disruption but about existing robustly within it, integrating systems and skills for rapid decision-making and action that allow them to be resilient through constant uncertainty and disruption.

We suggest that it would not be wise to apply insights from the reports we reviewed directly to nongovernmental actors based in middle- or low-income countries. Geographical and cultural contexts, among other factors, affect the micro and meso sources and drivers of disruption, and what determines the urgency of disruptions.

This is not to suggest that ‘rich-world’ analysis and recommendations are irrelevant. On the contrary, given the current and evolving development roles of Northern-based development cooperation agencies, and of international civil-society organisations and businesses headquartered in OECD countries, it is important both to understand and to enhance their approaches to anticipating and managing disruptive change. However, it is also important to recognise the analytical bias that can result from following a ‘Northern’ or ‘international’ development actor-centred analysis too closely.

If development actors exist to enable their beneficiaries to improve and advance their own development outcomes, and if there is something in the idea of disruptive change management that reflects a commitment to enhancing development outcomes for the long term, then a perspective that takes not only Northern actors but their partners and beneficiaries into account is crucial.

It is striking that the one paper we reviewed that does consider Southern perspectives (PRIA, 2012) highlights certain patterns that do not emerge strongly elsewhere. For example, the authors point to simultaneous contracting and expanding of space for civil society; to citizen protests; to new models of management borrowing from the private sector that express 'alternative values of inclusion, participation and innovation'; and to the 'blurring of boundaries' between North and South, which 'call for reassessment of civil society roles.' Though the analysis is still very much at the aggregate level, these explorations of what could easily be termed 'disruptive changes' look significantly different from other lists.

The literature review presented above led IIED to focus our work on this missing perspective — exploring the experiences of Southern NGO leaders in conceptualising and managing disruptive change. We believe these perspectives are important because:

- Local and national NGOs are invaluable in building agency and achieving lasting change. Donors and INGOs need to work with Southern NGO priorities for change.
- Southern NGOs can feel development disruption more acutely than INGOs. They are often closer to its impacts.
- Southern NGOs are used to managing disruption in the here and now. Donors and INGOs need to understand these experiences in order to better address future development disruption.
- Indeed, the SDG commitment to 'leave no one behind' demands effective organisational capacities to adapt and innovate.

The need for this kind of approach has already been identified. For example, Alex Evans recommends, in a 2011 paper for ActionAid, that the development sector should explore 'the ways in which poor people are developing some of the most dynamic, innovative and resourceful responses to a volatile world.'

The remaining sections of this paper focus on insights gleaned from interviews with donor-savvy, disruption-ready Southern NGO leaders. We look not only at their experience and insights into responding to megatrends or drivers of change but also at their day-to-day lived experience of disruptive change management. Our aim in doing so is to identify insights that can inform preparedness as well as 'adaptation and innovation capacities' for longer-term processes of disruptive change, both on the part of middle- and low-income country-based development actors and the international NGOs and development-cooperation agencies who work to support them.

3

Perspectives on the idea of disruptive change

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the last section, the term 'disruptive change' is increasingly being used in literature addressing key strategic choices and roles of international civil-society organisations.

As we moved from desk research to interviews with Southern NGO leaders, a number of interviewees questioned our 'disruptive-change' entry point. One or two wondered whether DFID's support for our work indicated that the term has become new donor jargon and, if so, what its associated assumptions are. The term itself could also be called into question by the lived reality of our interviewees:

Disruptive change should be called something else, because it's here to stay. We no longer live in a static world. Those who survive are the ones who make this part of the everyday. Change is a dynamic that fosters creativity and innovation and, in the long run, sustainability (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

From the IIED team's side, our approach to the term 'disruptive change' has essentially been an inductive one. Our general literature review, shared with interviewees beforehand, set out some distinctions, and noted that most of these were developed with business or international civil-society audiences in mind. We invited interviewees to indicate what the term means to them, to draw out their own insights on 'disruption' as they saw it without seeking to impose any particular definition.

3.2 Five key questions and associated distinctions

Our interviews generated five distinct questions about the term 'disruptive change' that could help to refine current understanding of the concept:

- Does (or should) the term incorporate the idea that 'life will not be the same again'; or does it allow for disruption that may be time-limited, followed by a return to a 'pre-disruption' state?
- Is disruption always negative? (A number of interviewees felt that care is needed to avoid the risk of framing disruption as inherently negative.)
- Disruption for whom? (One organisation's negative disruption may be another's force for growth and innovation.)

- Internal or external disruption? (A number of interviewees felt that it is important to consider in-country sources of disruption, not only transnational or global forces.)
- Is there value in seeking explicitly to distinguish between ‘adaptive response’ and ‘proactive change and innovation’? Alfredo del Valle from Chile suggested that it is imperative to enhance capacity for the latter, not just the former.

Interviewees’ views on each of these questions are considered separately in the subsections that follow. Their value for our initiative is to help narrow down identification of ‘disruptions’ for more detailed investigation and learning — although the implications of doing so in the variety of ways suggested are beyond the scope of this working paper.

3.2.1 Does ‘disruptive change’ imply ‘no return’?

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya noted a potential distinction between a ‘shock’ and a ‘disruptive change’, and stressed the concept of degrees of disruption:

The idea of a ‘shock’ implies that there was a steady state earlier, and that after the shock there is a return to the initial condition ... Disruptive change may be more medium-term and could result in an ongoing process of change. When it normalises, [things] will not return to the initial condition. This is change, or disruption, that would create a new benchmark ... A layman’s definition of disruptive change might be, ‘Life will not be the same again’ ... Life is a series of disruptive changes; if your car doesn’t work, of course it’s disruptive — but that’s a micro disruption. So there is also an issue of scale (Debapriya Bhattacharya, Bangladesh).

Our interviews offered insights into both shock and disruptive change, as distinguished by Dr Bhattacharya. In practice, the distinction may not matter a great deal for purposes of generating learning, since both test organisational management, strategic skills, culture and adaptive capacity.

3.2.2 Is disruptive change negative?

Many interviewees stressed that we need to be open to understanding disruption as potentially positive:

Disruption is life! Disruption connotes unexpected things that upset our perfect systems and plans. But the way that I relate to the term is very closely related to my attempts to understand development itself. When our organisation was formed, our mission was around trying to facilitate ‘development’. Development is the life-force that carries all life onward. When you start looking at the patterns, stages and phases that all living systems move through, and trying to understand why we get ourselves stuck, you start recognising a number of things. At moments of stuck-ness, disruption is what brings the energy for movement again. It is a force that keeps things dynamic, forming and reforming. I view disruptors as very, very crucial drivers of development. Often we respond to change in a negative way. But it is a very important part of the tension that develops between the striving for equilibrium and the force for disruption. It isn’t about trying to fix that — it is about working with it (James Taylor, South Africa).

For me, ‘change’ is the first thing; and it could disrupt a process either positively or negatively. The first thing you think [about disruptive change] is always negative — but there are plusses and minuses. For instance, in a family, if a relationship is not conducive for children or either partner, you have to stop that relationship, to create a better environment. But when you look at the deeper reasons why that change had to happen, there are positive aspects. The children could grow up happier.

Disruptive change ... has a cultural dimension. If you are thinking of bringing about a change that doesn’t fit well with a culture, it will be seen as negative. If it does fit, it could be seen as positive. And there’s a thin line between positive and negative. You can [also] have a disruptive change that happens over time. It could start as negative, and shift to positive — or vice versa (Faith Nwadishi, Nigeria).

What’s the antonym of disruptive change? The phrase has a negative connotation. But if you consider the positive dimension, there are two possibilities: disruption might not be bad, because [your organisation] can thrive on other peoples’ sorrow or misery. And there is a positive dimension when disruption benefits everyone (Debapriya Bhattacharya, Bangladesh).

3.2.3 Disruption for whom?

Our interviews focused on civil-society responses to disruptive change at an organisational level, but they also provided an opportunity to consider the role of NGOs themselves as disruptors of the international development landscape.

Some of interviewees themselves sought to be disruptors of the development world, consciously attempting to drive disruption for positive outcomes rather than absorbing, responding, and adapting to its impacts. Toshi Nakamura, co-founder of Kopernik, describes this alternative starting point:

The idea [of disruptive change] means quite a lot to us. When we were thinking about the idea of Kopernik, we got excited about new ideas and technologies. We wanted to embrace a new movement of start-ups creating technology for the poor, and a connection to areas that need them. We thought, this is a really new trend — when people with an engineering or design background start to create something for the poor, it's a new thing. We really liked that trend. For them, it's a mix of business and social mission. They principally want to solve the social problems; it's not the money first. The fact that 'unusual suspects' are joining this area is really disruptive. We were promoting and accelerating changes by promoting these technologies, and demonstrating the impact (Toshi Nakamura, Indonesia).

Lina Villa-Córdoba of the Alliance for Responsible Mining described some of the consequences of seeing one's organisation as a disruptor:

There are so many assumptions that we all have, including assumptions about development. What are the basic assumptions in this sector? We tend to have very strong preconceived notions ... that are very set. Questioning those assumptions is being disruptive. When you are disruptive, you get criticised — and you can make mistakes.

If you want to be disruptive, you need to not take the world as it is, but leave more windows open to the world as it should be ... You need to be very open to breaking stereotypes. For example, many of our new staff have the preconception that the private sector is bad and small miners are good, and that therefore we shouldn't work with large companies. But we have to ask, why not? How can we make it possible to work with them? You need to find people who have a 'yes' mindset, and the ability to question and then deal with the consequences (Lina Villa-Córdoba, Colombia).

Disruption is, in any event, in the eye of the beholder:

I've always questioned terminology like 'disruptive' because it's so relative; what's disruptive to one agency isn't disruptive to another. Even if something has global resonance, it doesn't necessarily affect agencies the same way ... Obviously, if values or programming have to change drastically, you would count that. But sometimes — for example, if your volume is low, or your organisation is small — any change is a big change (Allan A. Calma, Pakistan).

An Ethiopian perspective supports this view:

The arrival of the Chinese [in Africa] is anything but disruptive; it has been very constructive ... [There has been] much more negotiating power than with the usual donors (Saverio Kratli, UK).

3.2.4 Internal or external disruption?

There is also a geographical dimension to disruptive change. Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya asked whether we were focusing only on external disruptors, at the expense of seeking to understand internal or domestic disruptors, such as relationships with government and the ruling elite. He suggested that a focus limited to disruptive changes that result from global trends could be too narrow:

You are defining disruptive changes only from the external point of view, which is a bit narrow. You're imagining that internal disruptive changes are less significant — that they don't cause major spillovers, or that you can only deal with the external. That is curious, because you are addressing [international NGOs] that deal with civil-society organisations or partners within the country boundary ... The disruptive changes are very much at the country level ... [There is a risk that] the external priorities are submerging the internal. There are stronger, if not bigger, issues at the doorstep, that are creating more disruption than many other things out there ... The relationship with government is the major disruptive change that we manage, particularly regarding change towards 'loved' and 'unloved' NGOs (Debapriya Bhattacharya, Bangladesh).

Allan A. Calma of Community World Service Asia in Pakistan echoed Dr Bhattacharya's reflection:

The external factors closest to you are the ones that make the loudest impact. It's like an earthquake — the further you are from the epicentre, the less you feel it (Allan A. Calma, Pakistan).

Intrac's Rick James reflected informally via email on a related issue, shortly after returning from a break to Malawi:

One of the main things that struck me ... was how little had changed in the ten years since I had lived there. I was really surprised how challenging and expensive it is for people to access the internet — so much for the digital revolution! One of the NGOs had internet that was not working at all; another had used up their weekly megabyte allowance. And it was very expensive for the friends we were staying with. So I could only connect every few days, when I went to a hotel and bought some airtime. Global changes look very different from a Malawian perspective.

It also struck me that things that we see as huge changes here actually pass by many poorer countries and communities. The disruptive changes in Malawi were not global changes, but local issues — NGOs were mainly affected by the flooding in January, the government corruption scandals, and inflation/declining value of the kwacha more than anything else; or a donor's strategy shift left dependent NGOs without funding for the next year (Rick James, UK).

Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, who leads the African Model Forests Network Secretariat, further suggested that internal conditions such as management style within NGOs are primary sources of disruption, with internal and external drivers of disruption feeding into one another.

3.2.5 Are some responses better than others? Adaptive change versus proactive change and innovation

Disruption tests organisational strategy skills as well as those of change management. Adaptive strategies such as 'capturing the mood' of donors at any given moment can even become a form of change management:

Some organisations become adept at not just transforming but also capturing; and they are successful because they are able to survive through the adaptive capacity of capturing the mood; climate change is a very good example, and we'll see it in the years to come. Any new trend will force us to adapt — for some, in a way that is positive, and for others, in a way that is too opportunistic for our mandates or missions to survive (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroun).

Other organisations (such as Indonesia-based Kopernik in our interview sample) have been set up explicitly with a view to *causing* disruption in the international development landscape. They seek to 'be the (disruptive) change they seek'.

In an insight that bridges these distinctions, practitioner-academic Professor Alfredo del Valle from Chile proposed an important distinction between 'adaptive' change and 'proactive change and innovation':

First, I think it's essential to distinguish 'adaptation' and 'proactive change and innovation' ... Both are changes. The typical kind of change in developing countries is reactive change — when some event occurs in the environment and the system and/or NGO reacts. If that change is very strong and shatters everything, people talk about 'disruptive' change — ... cutting off of funds, or an earthquake ... But it's essential to also think of innovation that comes from within. Innovation can also be disruptive (Alfredo del Valle, Chile).

3.3 What disruptors?

3.3.1 Sources of disruption for Southern organisations

We invited interviewees to share what they experienced as main sources or drivers of disruption. A number mentioned familiar drivers of change in international development such as poverty, climate change and technology. But the development community and its practices have clearly generated their own disruptors too. Major disruptors they identified include:

- Poverty
- Climate change
- Technology disruptors/barriers to technology access

- Changes to land access
- Staffing turnover and other human-resources challenges
- Leadership changes
- Shifts in donor policy
- Mainstream 'development' activities
- Impacts of NGOs acting as intermediaries between North and South
- Changes in international NGOs' delivery pathways
- Funding turbulence, and
- Rapidly changing operating spaces for civil society.

Poverty and climate change were highlighted as critical causes of disruption by South Centre advisor Youba Sokona, who noted that drivers of disruption can also be location-dependent: 'In some parts of the world, climate is one of the key drivers; in others, it's much more social issues.' **Technology disruptors** (or barriers and opportunities for organisational development of technology) emerged in a number of interviews; these include such concerns as internet functionality and access to other kinds of technology.

Saverio Kratli often works with pastoralists and herders around the globe. From this perspective, **anything that affects access to land** is a potential disruptor:

[Pastoralists, producers, livestock owners and herders] ... will be disrupted by any shift affecting flexible and timely access to the land, ... [or] any change that affects their capacity to introduce and use variability in their production approach ... The long-term disruptive change is the polarisation of wealth, the growing gap between rich and poor ... It polarises competence, and creates situations in which the necessary collaboration and solidarity is not possible. You can't practice pastoralism in drylands as a family unit; you need the conditions that allow for a wider network (Saverio Kratli, UK).

Just as frequently as they referenced external sources of disruption, interviewees cited inherently organisational (rather than societal) disruptors. And human-resources challenges, or the impacts of changes in donor priorities or INGO practices, were also frequently cited.

In common with a number of other interviewees, Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) in Pakistan deals with constant uncertainty, with external and 'development community-specific' disruptors combining in multiple and unpredictable ways.

Our organisation has grown from something very small to something very large — all in the context of wars, [ethnic] conflicts, a major earthquake, changes in donor priorities, and changing policies of government and space for civil society. This is an incredibly turbulent environment (SRSP, Pakistan).¹

But many of the disruptors cited by interviewees were to some degree internal, arising from the interplay of different actors within the established development community, or even caused by successful civil-society activism. James Taylor of CDRA in South Africa shared thoughts on success itself as a disruptor. He reflected on the founding of his organisation:

In the 1980s we realised that a lot of organisations (most quite small) were doing great work in external purposes, but were starting to come apart internally. We recognised the immense value that these organisations contributed, and could see that we were viewed by others as remarkable; but we saw internally that we were coming apart, [with] interpersonal conflicts and tensions. [And] organisational functions weren't being externally fulfilled. Our basic mode of operating was an activist mode, directing all energy outward to the vicious nature of the [South African apartheid] regime, and to the suffering of others around us. So lots of energy was directed outward — but not enough inward to build the internal systems, structures and processes that were increasingly required (James Taylor, South Africa).

¹ The SRSP interview was conducted with three interviewees simultaneously by telephone, so individual interviewees could not be reliably identified and quotes are therefore attributed to SRSP.

Taylor went on to provide an example of how these disruptions were experienced in an organisation he consulted for, and of the causes of its 'coming apart':

This organisation mobilised people infected with HIV who were being denied services by the government. They had taken on the government and international drug companies in court and won, and they were nominated for a Nobel Prize. This is a classic example of an organisation born out of reaction to injustice and crisis. Funders love them; they run to the party, bringing bucketloads of money. Loads of people join the organisation. Growth was rapid and success was high — but systems and procedures were absolutely minimal. Big donors don't even demand them; they are just so happy to be part of this crisis organisation that leaders can pick up the phone and ask for money at any point.

But then they reach a limit. The rapid growth and success become the seed of their crisis. Massive tensions start growing, both inside and outside. Relationships become problematic. In extreme cases, they can even go toxic. Organisations are living systems; they exist in relation to others and with themselves. They can arrive at points where their organisational form can no longer contain the development that is needed — funders start asking for things they can't deliver, or the whole funding environment changes, and they haven't prepared. This is a natural thing, it happens (James Taylor, South Africa).

In Appendix A: Managing change 6, Lina Villa-Córdoba of the Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM), which works with and for small-scale and artisanal miners, shares insights from ARM's rapid growth and the associated challenges. ARM's experience contains insights into the 'successful management of success' to avoid the 'coming apart' in James Taylor's example. Lina Villa-Córdoba is modest about her own role, eschewing the rock-star culture of the stand-alone social entrepreneur. But effective leadership, clear direction and strategy, strong organisational values, connection to core constituencies, and flexible management and organisational culture all seem key to 'surviving success'.

Nongovernmental organisations are often explicitly established to disrupt the status quo. In a development landscape that is itself subject to considerable external disruptors, it should come as no surprise that a new generation of not-for-profit organisations is now applying entrepreneurial ideas of 'disruption' to the development landscape, as in the case of Kopernik in Indonesia, which seeks to deploy new technologies in 'last-mile communities' that are remote or underserved by infrastructure or services.

Several interviewees referred to challenges in **human resources and staffing**. For Daisy Kambalame in Malawi, formerly Director of the African Institute for Corporate Citizenship in Malawi and South Africa:

You find that people who are most efficient and understand issues are not keen to work in the NGO sector. They are easily taken out to work in the private sector, where they can get better returns. Even now, for most local employees, there's a tendency to offer a third of the remuneration that an expat would get. That leads to unstable institutions.

I find that leadership and governance are also quite critical issues. People say, 'If you don't pay the right amount, don't expect to get quality.' But there is still a lot to be desired in how people conduct themselves; there is an expectation that it's OK to be lazy ... With time, there will be a recognition that standards shouldn't be lower just because you work in the NGO sector. So it's about capacity-building, and being able to appeal to people motivated not just by money but by a sense of purpose. So the targeting becomes different — people who actually want to make a difference (Daisy Kambalame, Malawi).

High staff turnover can be particularly disruptive in a small NGO. Larger organisations or donors are sometimes blamed:

There's a small NGO, and you're trying to build capacity; maybe you have a bigger NGO that comes to support the organisation. But when you are at the point of delivery, or feeling that you have stabilised, the national NGO hires away your very good staff. That change is destructive in the sense that if the organisation is still growing, it could actually kill the organisation. But it could be positive in the sense that it will take the NGO back to the drawing board to create succession plans or sustainability plans, [which are positive] not just for the organisation but also for personnel (Faith Nwadishi, Nigeria).

Daisy Kambalame echoed this as a concern higher up the local-to-global chain as well: 'Donors and international NGOs sometimes take staff from national NGOs. We've had that.'

Disruption for staff may also come from the top. Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya reflected on potential disruption when NGO leaders, for example, run for political office:

Many organisations have had charismatic but not flawless leadership. In many cases, organisations have collapsed. In some, the leader might run for a parliamentary seat, and wants the NGO to become his or agent — but the workers don't want to. We have experience in Bangladesh and Africa of NGOs crossing over into the political space (Debapriya Bhattacharya, Bangladesh).

From Pakistan, Shahid Zia reflected candidly (see Appendix A: Managing Change 2) on a process of change management in which he himself, as incoming chief executive with a different strategic path from that of his predecessor, was the disruptor. Succession planning for 'change at the top' can present particular challenges, and generate disruption if not planned for in an effective and timely way. As Dr Bhattacharya notes:

Succession has always been a problem. What we have [in Bangladesh/South Asia] is weak institutions managed by strong individuals. Succession without a succession plan is an issue (Debapriya Bhattacharya, Bangladesh).

But in common with a number of others, Daisy Kambalame in Malawi suggested that sometimes the biggest disruption for NGOs comes from **changes in donor policy**:

In most NGOs I have worked with, the biggest source of change is in the policy of donor countries. If policy changes in the UK or the US, people have to change their whole approach and/or organisational structure.

Sometimes it comes in themes. For example, there was a time when HIV/AIDS was the key theme, and at some point it didn't matter what you were doing — you had to have something in that area. There was another time when GMOS were the big thing, so there's lots of push for NGOs to have some programme to address that. You're always on the lookout, and have to adjust. Because most NGOs don't have secure sources of funding, they have to regroup and reorganise themselves [according to these trends] (Daisy Kambalame, Malawi).

The disruptive impacts of changing donor priorities were highlighted by many other interviewees:

On top of the disruptive socioeconomic environment and unemployment ... donors change their priorities and project focus, so we can't develop human resources — which means that our organisation cannot grow, because we need to invest in our people. There is an overall decline in funding (Mulugeta Gebru, Ethiopia).

Shahid Zia (Appendix A: Managing change 3) describes a number of ways in which donors (including international NGOs) became disruptors, and highlights the near-impossibility of a locality-based NGO changing its location in response to changing donor priorities.

Elsewhere in Pakistan, changing donor priorities drove a complete rethinking of Sarhad Rural Support Programme's strategy:

We used to work with community organisations exclusively. But in 2001 the aid paradigm had shifted, so we were required to engage with government. Some people within the organisation resisted, but we saw that the whole world around us had changed, and if we were not willing to adapt to it, we may as well just sit aside and die as an organisation (SRSP, Pakistan).

Likewise, Nicole Leotaud, chief executive of CANARI (Caribbean National Resources Institute) in Trinidad and Tobago, recalls:

There was a big shift in our work with the last strategic plan because of a donor push for results-based management. We used to be very fluid and project-focused in our work, prior to this. We shifted from having no programmes to having eleven work programmes (Nicole Leotaud, Trinidad and Tobago).

Shahid Zia amplified this thought in the context of climate change:

Many Southern NGOs were quite late to join struggles against climate change. There was resistance in the beginning — [a feeling] that climate change is a Northern, not a Southern, agenda. You might have heard many different voices from the South — if not from NGOs, then from media/government — that we have so many other things to work on; that climate change is not our first priority, whether mitigation or adaptation. Many NGOs held the same view; they felt that food security, poverty, education, access to clean drinking water — all these issues had suddenly gone on the back burner, with climate change becoming the priority. There was a feeling that temperature increase will not bring that much hardship to the South, because the South already experiences high temperatures — that climate change would cause much more trouble for the North.

What I'm saying is that frequent changes in positions from the North — without engaging Southern partners — [had] created a deficit of trust. Nowadays, many funds for organisations working on development in the South have incorporated climate change in their programmes. But still, I feel that food insecurity is linked to climate change but isn't the only source of food insecurity ... We shouldn't forget the other factors (Shahid Zia, Pakistan).

Mainstream 'development' activities were often themselves cited as disruptors, both directly and indirectly:

From pastoralist perspectives, a large proportion of 'development' activities are the main sources of disruption for them ... What development often does is to replace the problems that you can solve with the problems that they can solve — and then they leave ... There has been a real reversal from the trends in the 70s and 80s, which emphasized consulting of local groups and trying to understand their perspectives, the internal logic of how they see problems, and what solutions they see. Today there seems to be more emphasis on understanding the perspective of the donors (Saverio Kratli, UK).

Donor practices can disrupt NGOs in other ways too, for example when they create new sources of competition between civil-society groups.

DFID started a 'coalitions for change in Nigeria' programme. Under that programme, they set up CATEIFFN (Coalition for Accountability and Transparency in Extractive Industries, Forestry and Fisheries in Nigeria). When I became coordinator of Publish What You Pay in 2009, I asked Cattafin for support. They said that PWYP had to subscribe to the new coalition before they could support us. But as soon as the coalitions-for-change funding came to an end in 2010, CATEIFFN ended too.

If you had funds to work on the extractives sector, maybe you could have found out what the strengths were of the existing coalition, and strengthen that ... DFID is in a good position to see how to strengthen coalitions (Faith Nwadishi, Nigeria).

The **impacts of NGOs (often international and Northern-headquartered) working as intermediaries between original donors and Southern NGOs** were also seen as a key disruptor by several interviewees. As Alda Salomão explains:

We do not need intermediaries to channel money for us — first, because we lose some of the funds; second, because the intermediary puts its own objectives in front of the funding. I've seen many organisations here being penalised because the intermediary didn't agree with the project approach. That is not the role that the intermediaries should play. They should be here to support our work, not to be a bottleneck for it. They should not continuously act as a barrier for organisations growing up, doing things our way in the most effective manner. We are seeing this trend more and more — international NGOs interfering with national NGOs, acting as a second donor (Alda Salomão, Mozambique).

Changes in international NGOs' delivery pathways as they respond to their own strategic imperatives can also cause difficulties for their partners. One interviewee stated:

One of [a Southern NGO]'s longest-standing funding partners is Oxfam NOVIB. But the Dutch government has now made changes to how it approaches being the back-funder for NGOs. Plus Oxfam NOVIB is now part of the Oxfam family, so it's unifying its operation, which means that relationships you've built up over ten or twenty years are now at risk: Oxfam GB and NOVIB won't be working alongside one another anymore in the same geography. So those shifts, whilst they make sense for those international NGOs, create new risks [for Southern NGOs]. (Anonymised)

3.3.2 Southern NGOs face funding turbulence and a changing space for civil society

In some ways, NGO experiences of disruptive change management in middle- and low-income countries are no different from those of NGOs in any other parts of the world. They readily aggregate to the trends and high-level experiences of their Northern or Southern counterparts elsewhere. But as ACORD Chief Executive Ousainou Ngum reminded us, 'If you are thinking that Southern organisations are homogeneous, that is a big mistake. We have our own dynamics.' Often, though, in regions and countries where very few NGOs have the reserves to cushion operating budgets during periods of uncertainty, the negative impacts of disruption, whether internal or external, are more acutely felt.

Other insights into disruption could be understood as distinctively characteristic of Southern NGOs:

A national NGO in the South is different from a national NGO in the North. Staff in a Southern national NGO may come from the [project] area and have a strong relationship with the communities that the NGO works with. When [leaders or managers] take action against such individuals, or change their roles, it brings a challenge not only within the organisation but within the community. So [achieving change] in the organisation becomes more challenging. (Anonymised)

The frequency and intensity of disruption for our Southern interviewees of two particular sources of disruption stood out: **funding turbulence** and **rapidly changing operating spaces for civil society**.

Funding turbulence is associated with uncertainty and often financial difficulties. A number of interviewees reflected candidly on ongoing financial challenges. Comments by Mulugeta Gebru, Executive Director of JeCCDO in Ethiopia, were particularly striking:

Civil society is at a really critical stage in Ethiopia. There has been a big change in terms of financial flow in recent years; 160 civil society organisations have been closed due to lack of resources ... The situation is really challenging for our organisation right now; the future is very uncertain. We have such deep experience, strong engagement, and good learning and processes — but we don't know what we will be able to do in the future.

Funding has really shrunk, so our organisation will have to really shrink. We are in the process of developing a six-year strategic-management plan, and we have started restructuring ourselves to meet the new reality. We will be smaller, and we have begun engaging in social-enterprise activities. We are using our training facilities to hold trainings and generate our own income. But this is an early stage, an entirely new way of working, and it will take time before we can really see this kind of revenue supporting us. Big donors are telling us they want us to sustain ourselves, but no one is willing to invest in helping us stand by ourselves. The initial capital is not there. We just don't get positive responses [to funding bids] these days (Mulugeta Gebru, Ethiopia).

Some interviewees related financial challenges to the consequences of changing donor priorities, as numerous examples throughout this paper indicate. But financial turbulence also emerges from globally shifting geopolitics. In rising-power countries such as India, for example, rapid economic growth has meant **less donor interest**. Harsh Jaitli set the scene in his conversation with us:

What we see today, at least in India — at least over the past ten to fifteen years — is that India is projected as a country with a reasonably improving GDP. But a lot of people are still in poverty, and [very few people] have gained a lot in the last fifteen years. People have demonstrated their wealth outside India, and India now wants to demonstrate itself on the outside stage ... In 2005–7, the government of India started to tell international NGOs working in India, 'We don't need you.' Many bilateral donors left India at that time. Second — taking British NGOs as an example — many INGOs were doing excellent work in India. They were heavily dependent on individual giving in the UK for their funding; but many people in the UK started to say, 'Why should we give to India if they are sending rockets to Mars, buying our cars, and so forth?' Even people who know the reality will say, 'They're so rich, they need to look after their own poor' ... By and large, Indian NGOs work closely with INGOs; but the resources have gone down, so almost everyone is looking at how they will achieve their mission (Harsh Jaitli, India).

Lack of financial stability has a number of consequences, and fundraising can sap time and resources needed for longer-term goals. From Senegal, Amacodou Diouf expanded:

[We are] forced to work fully on developing the funding to survive, and we can't carry out [our] work on [supporting] social movements ... We are obliged to do consultancy work to pay the bills — and thankfully we have the skills to do so. But many other organisations are not capable of this; they aren't research organisations ... SDGs were developed, but those were at the country level, and we don't have the means to attain those goals. In reality, the populations were not consulted. We can't put a policy in place (Amacodou Diouf, Senegal).

Other interviews pointed to the challenges generated by national-level regulatory changes that restricted the availability of foreign funding for national or local NGOs. And, more broadly, numerous interviewees highlighted the challenges created by regulatory and policy changes for civil society, even in countries considered broadly democratic:

The government is corrupt, and doesn't create space or means for civil society. Policies are contrary to organisational development (Anonymised).

We've found that the weakness of the sector is now used by the government to control the sector. We have to make the sector understand: If you want to survive, you have to change (Harsh Jaitli, India).

In India, regulatory changes and shifts in the political environment have significantly disrupted the civil-society space, and have received considerable attention. In an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2015, a group of civil-society leaders wrote:

Funds are being frozen, intelligence reports are being selectively released to paint NGOs in a poor light, disbursements of funds are being subjected to case-by-case clearance, and their activities are reportedly being placed on 'watch lists'. As a result, several NGO projects have shut down, donors are unable to support work, and there is an overall atmosphere of State coercion and intimidation in India's civil-society space.²

Even leaving aside changes in the formal or regulatory operating space, the idea of 'civil society' is very far from uniformly established. Alda Salomão, general director of Centro Terra Viva in Mozambique, referred to the practical challenges of being part of a fledgling civil-society sector there:

We operate in a sector that is still under construction. Civil society is a very new type of institution. There is a lot of prejudice against NGOs so, depending on the positions we take, we are either welcome or not welcome. The first thing that can be attacked is our identity and our alliances; people criticise us for 'trying to manipulate the communities' or for being 'against the government' or having a 'foreign agenda'. This means that we are trying to make an impact on the issues at the same time that we are learning to operate in the sector. How do you position yourself in a manner that really proves your value? We focus on technical competence, professional integrity, and capacity to intervene in the right time and place and right manner (Alda Salomão, Mozambique).

The changing operating space for civil society presents a challenge for donors too:

Protecting [civil-society] space from a dictator is much easier than protecting it from change that comes from an elected government. Current disruptive changes are happening under elected governments — but governments that are behaving arbitrarily (Debapriya Bhattacharya, Bangladesh).

Both funding turbulence and our interviewees' comments on the evolving civil-society operating space reveal real vulnerabilities confronted by Southern NGOs. Against this background, it is all the more important that the practices of donor agencies and INGO partners alike do not inadvertently add to the potentially negative burden of these disruptors. The distinct 'civic' space that is occupied and protected by civil society in the global South needs to be actively protected and nurtured.

² http://southasia.oneworld.net/peoplespeak/civil-society-leaders-in-india-protest-against-targeting-ngos#.Vd9CK_IvHbc

4

Creating disruptive change management systems in an organisation

4.1 Introduction

Whether as shocks experienced in the moment or in a sense that things will change in the future, disruptors are catalysts for changes at the organisational level. We set out to investigate how Southern NGOs manage these changes, and what the implications might be for donors and international NGOs.

From South Africa, James Taylor pushed us to think critically about how and whether to use the word ‘management’ in relation to disruptive change and its organisational responses.

This is effective shorthand, but it conjures up mechanisms for control in people's minds, at a time when many who are exploring these things are starting to understand that living systems are self-managed. Our ... understanding of the need for management is being profoundly challenged at the moment. The term that has become very central to our work is ‘practice’. People don't really get it when we go on about ‘What is your practice’? They aren't really aware of their own practices. But this is ultimately at the heart of creating robust organisations to address disruptive change (James Taylor, UK).

An argument for even embracing chaos was voiced by Masood UI Mulk, CEO of SRSP in Pakistan:

When I walk into an organisation and I see chaos I am very happy, because I know that things are getting done. When I walk in and see everything very slick, I worry that everything has come to a standstill. In an uncertain world, if you try ‘perfect management systems’, they may just fall apart (Masood UI Mulk, Pakistan).

From this perspective, a search for ‘disruptive change systems’ might more accurately guide our exploration of ways forward for Southern NGOs in times of disruptive change. Our interviews showed that Southern NGOs have adopted a wide range of approaches to engaging with, anticipating, and responding to disruption. That that is the

case should come as no surprise, given the wide range of 'disruptors' identified by our interviewees, and the variety of organisations with which they work. James Taylor offers an almost joyful approach to understanding the nature of these processes, for those leaders or practitioners who choose to embrace disruption:

The question for the practitioner is, 'How do I use what has now become a disruptor, and see the opportunity, the incredible opportunity for creativity?' We resist acknowledging change; we don't open out our arms to disruptions and say 'Yippee!'

In facing the challenges of our time, this focus on building experimentation into our ways of being and doing is an antidote to hierarchical command and control systems that all too often result in and perpetuate impoverishment ... How can we use our own organisations as living laboratories of social systemic experimentation? How can we contribute to finding new organisational practices that maximise the benefits of diversity, participation, co-ownership and co-creation — and minimise the tendency to 'lowest common denominator', risk-averse decision-making, and its resulting uncreative stuckness?³

This section explores the organisational-change processes related to 'disruptors' identified by interviewees, and describes how they experienced them. We then highlight the potential impact of disruption on organisational missions and ways of working. Furthermore, we consider the roles that have been played by various actors in disruptive change-management processes, highlighting the value of focusing on human skills, the importance of learning, and the significance of organisational culture in shaping responses to disruptive change. From this, we begin to identify a cluster of characteristics that could enable innovation rather than reactive, adaptive responses to disruption.

4.2 A disruptive change management process may demand revision of mission and operations

In some cases, interviewees had concluded that disruption demanded a redefinition of organisational mission. James Taylor described how the shifting aid landscape has necessitated a complete reorganisation of CDRA:

Investing in learning costs money. We were a well-funded organisation for many years; we recognised the cost, and therefore felt committed to capturing and sharing learning. Our annual reports have been used as readings in universities and publications around the world; we felt we were giving very good value. But there's not money for that now. Funding focus is about projects and external results. It is about spending as little as possible on the organisation and as much as possible on activities. People are not funding South Africa anymore — but internal funding in South Africa is not yet very sophisticated.

We looked ahead, and could see that we weren't going to survive as an organisation anymore with our old structure. So we radically changed our structure; there are no salaried practitioners anymore. But we are trying everything we can to hang on to the organisation as a container of learning and values. We are using it now to imagine new forms of organisation that are sustainable. We still have a board, and associates who work through the organisation. We are now acting more as a platform; we are looking for new ways of creating learning — but this needs to be self-funded now (James Taylor, UK).

JeCCDO Executive Director Mulugeta Gebru described a similarly transformational process within his organisation — from running orphanages to today's community-service focus (detailed in Appendix A, Managing change 4). In this example, the strategic decision to shift from orphanages to community engagement in order to better serve the children can itself be placed at the heart of the change process that followed.

The immediate impacts and implications of disruptive change may leave missions or goals intact, whilst indicating that new operating models or internal systems are in order. For example, in Ethiopia, Mulugeta Gebru spoke of restrictions on pursuing rights-based approaches to development under civil-society law. In an example of adaptive management, his organisation, JeCCDO, responded by working directly with community-based organizations, whose grassroots structures were not subject to the same restrictions:

We capacity-build the community-based organisations, and those CBOs can then do the rights-based work themselves. We also have continuous dialogue with governments at the grassroots level. We convince them to engage with citizens, and help them see the value of citizen rights (Mulugeta Gebru, Ethiopia).

³ www.cdra.org.za/uploads/1/1/1/6/111664/civil_society_and_the_future_work_of_social_change_-_james_taylor.pdf

Whether or not an organisation is able to adapt or evolve its operating model to fit current and future needs seems central to determining how disruptions are experienced. As Harsh Jaitli explains, in an echo of remarks earlier in this paper that ‘disruption is in the eye of the beholder’:

Many organisations are changing — but many are not changing, and are still following the old model of development, the old model of functioning. So for them it’s a crisis — and for others it’s an opportunity (Harsh Jaitli, India).

4.3 Decentralisation, nationalisation and relocation are both ‘response tools’ and disruptors

With a global shift in economic (and hence political) power from the North and West towards the East and South, many international NGOs have engaged in change processes that result in their headquarters and/or management centre of gravity relocating, or their internal systems decentralising. A number of interviewees recorded aspects of these processes of change, and highlighted some of the associated change-management challenges.

India’s NGOs have been at the sharp end of this process of change. According to Harsh Jaitli of Voluntary Action Network India (VANI), ‘Most INGOs working in India realised that they won’t get much money in India [as international organisations]. Many of them [therefore] registered themselves as national entities in India, so that they can raise funds there.’ One consequence was that ‘the sense of partnership that formerly existed slowly started to change into competition.’

Two interviewees offered contrasting examples of change processes undertaken by OECD-headquartered international NGOs to ‘nationalise’ or shift headquarters to the South. In one example, fundraising and strategy were effectively ‘nationalised’ long before formal governance structures and legal form followed. In the other, a process of relocation — from a consortium of Northern NGOs to a pan-African NGO with a centre of gravity in Kenya (albeit with a head office still formally registered in the UK) — generated significant disruptive effects for staff who remained within the organisation.

4.3.1 ACORD: Relocation and decentralization of head office

The pan-African NGO ACORD is registered in England and Wales, with headquarters in Kenya. ACORD evolved into its present form out of a consortium of Northern NGOs who had been working together on projects in more than forty-five locations. ACORD afforded the members of the consortium an operational arm in Africa. Its centre of gravity was in London until 2004, when it shifted to Nairobi.

ACORD today has a turnover of some £10–11 million annually, and focuses on four core themes through projects in eighteen countries. The four themes are: livelihoods and food sovereignty; gender equality and women’s rights; conflict transformation and peace-building; and the right to health. An overarching pan-African programme focuses on cross-cutting advocacy within Africa’s Three Economic Communities and the African Union, linking with allies to global policy and advocacy processes.

The story of ACORD’s process of changing from a Northern consortium to an Africa-rooted and -led regional NGO has been recorded in Alan Fowler’s book *Overcoming Uncertainty*. Chief Executive Ousainou Ngum offered some reflections from a disruptive-change perspective in his interview:

Before ACORD relocated to Nairobi, expat staff led many of the projects. As time went on, discussion of decentralisation suggested that the ACORD model was disempowering for Southern employees and partners ... More importantly, there was a research arm in the head office, which generated resentment over time, a feeling that, ‘We’re in Africa, living in the context, understanding it ... Why are we told what to do from somewhere else?’ ... The real issue was, ‘If we transfer power, whom do we transfer it to? And who will be responsible for funding the organisation?’ But the question wasn’t posed like that. There was a reluctance to talk about identity.

In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, ACORD’s headquarters [though not its legal registration] was transferred to Kenya. ACORD country managers were transferred to Nairobi from across the continent, but they weren’t prepared for the new reality. They showed up in Nairobi with ‘country programme manager’ mindsets — to receive a programme mandate from London, together with associated funding, and then to deliver it. They were

now supposed to manage the organisation — but they weren't prepared for it. They were now responsible for strategy, leadership, direction ... and for creating systems around this ... None of the UK staff relocated, though it was open to them to do so ...

The Northern side was looking for new partners in the South — largely elsewhere ... For a year, the two offices [London and Nairobi] ran simultaneously — you can imagine the dynamics! ... There was a desire to be empowered, but with Southern leadership. There was no recognition, though, that more fundamental was the need to build, nurture and develop a new organisational culture allied with [the identified values]. ACORD has had to do that subsequently — and very painfully. Our reality is one of consistently trying to overcome uncertainty. The reality of the change process has been to learn to manage uncertainty on an ongoing basis (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

4.3.2 CWS: Nationalisation of headquarters

By contrast, Allan A. Calma, Deputy Director of CWS Asia's Disaster Management Program, described a relatively smooth process of transition from a US-headquartered international NGO to a national Pakistani organisation working on humanitarian relief, advocacy and development:

US-headquartered, faith-based Church World Service had been working in Pakistan since 1954, when it was invited to respond to a humanitarian emergency. About a decade ago, a discussion began with headquarters on 'nationalising' the office in Pakistan ... The final leg of the separation and nationalisation process took place around two years ago, when CWS registered in Pakistan as Community World Service Asia. Today, CWS Asia has a staff of about 220 across Pakistan, and a turnover of around US\$8.5 million last financial year.

Whilst the process of nationalising was in some respects disruptive, in others it wasn't, because CWS Asia has in practice worked quite independently in Pakistan and Afghanistan for around ten years. At least ninety per cent of funds had been raised locally for some time ... Day-to-day governance had been entirely local too. Headquarters would very rarely intervene in terms of directing which projects to pursue. Very occasionally, they might offer a mandate, but they would never question the strategic focus. In that sense, nothing really changed; the board had to change, but staffing and structure didn't ...

Nationalisation isn't something you do quickly ... For us, a whole decade of preparation ... helped a lot. So by the time you formally become 'national' only the legal part is missing. In some organisations, there are urgent deadlines, and nationalisation has to happen within a year. We've seen that happen with a UNDP project in Pakistan ... Eventually it became quite big, and they were managing it — and then decided to separate. But within six months or a year, the agency closed down. It wasn't used to being separate.

At the same time, we're still getting used to the idea that we're now a national NGO after maintaining our presence as the regional office of an international NGO for more than sixty years. In contrast, we've seen a lot of other NGOs working on humanitarian relief come and go — opening, closing, and then reopening in response to particular emergencies (Allan Calma, Pakistan).

Thus, in this case, a potentially disruptive experience benefited from good management, preparation and engagement to make for a smooth transition.

4.3.3 JeCCDO: Decentralisation of headquarters

For national NGOs, the process of decentralising may offer opportunities for empowerment, as with JeCCDO in Ethiopia:

We made a big effort a few years ago on decentralisation over a two-year time span. We wanted people to take responsibility for their own work, and engage them in the decision-making process within the organisation. We opened an office and hired someone, as a project supported by a donor, to engage in a process of decentralisation. They conducted a study of our operations, and we adopted their findings to adjust our systems.

We had branch offices without enough autonomy and power, so we explored how to empower them. The findings suggested that the branch offices become independent institutions, to give them power over their quarterly budget, engage independently with local government, hire and fire independently, and so on. It also emphasised the need for staff at all levels to manage resources and communicate independently, to make the organisation less hierarchical and help staff feel ownership of the organisation.

We were able to implement these changes in systems through a participatory process, and adopted all of the recommendations from the study except for making the branch offices fully independent organisations (because the law restricted that). But we are now very open, with transparent financial information and auditing, and staff engaging at every step at every process. People know what is allocated for what, and how expenditures are spent. We try to be as open as possible, so that people don't have fear. Fear is a real block for creating change and learning. Our recruitment and selection process is also open, transparent and collaborative (Mulugeta Gebru, Ethiopia).

4.4 Effective change processes nurture and deploy internal skills

Many disruptive change management processes have focused on rethinking or refining the capabilities of an NGO's staff — or adopting new ways of deploying existing skills. If staffing problems can be a source of disruption, as a number of interviewees suggested, it is equally clear that careful staffing decisions can be an essential component of organisational resilience in the face of disruptive change. As SRSP CEO Masood UI Mulk explained:

Creating these kinds of organisations is not simple. We are operating in a turbulent, uncertain, rapidly changing environment that demands strong understanding of the culture we operate in. We understand that we work in a world where there are going to be power dynamics in every level of our work; we live in a political world. For us it may be a project with certain objectives, but each actor may see it differently. For them it might be a job, or a resource, or a barrier.

You cannot run away from the politics of it. How do you deal with these? You have to have people on staff who are very good at dealing with people. We have a clear understanding in our HR approach of the different skills needed — some technical, some more social, based on the demands of the role ... Our 'management' approach is totally different from what you see in the business-school literature. We focus on individuals who have the skills and characteristics of leaders, who can make decisions on their own in the field at any given moment (Masood UI Mulk, Pakistan).

Ousainou Ngum saw a need to rethink the organisational (and governance) skills mix in light of emerging trends in Africa:

We're writing a new strategic plan, and we need to rethink the skills and people we bring into our governance model. For example, we have to find a way to be part of the emerging technological trends. I don't underestimate the youth bulge — we need to connect with that. We also need to connect with the continent as an engine of growth, and an emerging middle class (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

Harsh Jaitli of membership body VANI in India commented on the consequences of the trend of bringing more private-sector experience into the NGO community, and in particular its consequences for the ethos of India's NGO community:

Many organisations are purely targeted at raising funding, [so] they hire people with a communications background. But when it comes to delivering, these people are not helpful. So now many Indian NGOs are trying to hire people from the corporate sector. There have been mixed experiences; ... the basic perspective of NGOs can change along the way ... Some organisations involved in advocacy may become more like consultancy firms. Some involved in delivery are now hiring ex-army people. They can become like a service-delivery machine, and the sense of the sector goes. A lot of energy in our sector goes into process documentation; but then it becomes not a learning institution but a delivery institution (Harsh Jaitli, India).

Toshi Nakamura, from technology NGO Kopernik, offered insights into how Kopernik goes about finding people with the right mix of drive and passion — qualities it considers most important for delivering on its mission:

In a typical screening process in development agencies, you look at the number of years of experience, and so on. To us, that's not really the point. The person should be motivated to make a difference. It's hard to judge that by looking at CVs, so our policy is to get a one-minute video first, [of the candidate] talking about why they are the best for the job. We get a sense for what kind of person they are, with what kind of drive. That's the first thing. Without that, it's hard to run an organisation that is at the forefront of disruptive change (Toshi Nakamura, Indonesia).

Disruptive change management may also call for existing skills to be asserted in new ways. In the Caribbean, CANARI is forging new ground in engaging government partners, experimenting with new ways of working in an attempt to reverse the trend of shrinking civil society. Central to this effort is the organisation's ability to put forward the right staff, and make a clear case for their capacity to cooperate. As Nicole Leotaud explained:

There is token involvement for NGOs through consultations, but governments are still very uncomfortable with giving them a real role, or resources. We are invited to every relevant meeting in the region — but very few meeting organisers offer support for us to attend ... A lot of them are just trying to tick a box to say that an NGO was present — but it doesn't really bring value to us, and it isn't a strong platform for us to have a voice.

We have been exploring the question, 'How can CANARI be more influential regionally?' The model in the past was project-focused. Maybe five per cent of our work was technical input or consultancies. What we observed was that a lot of projects were going to government [agencies]. The support for civil society was shrinking, and the scale on which NGOs were being asked to engage was beyond our capacity. So we decided to try to have a greater role and influence in these larger-scale government projects.

We started with a small role in a small workshop, which led to bringing on a well-connected and experienced staff member. This enabled us to engage in the next phase of project design, [which] put us in the position today of being a member of the core management team for implementing this project. We are the only civil-society member of this team — others are UN bodies, government, education, and so on. We are even proposing taking on an entire component of the project.

This is a shift from trying to bring others into our project to now really influencing others and getting accepted as an NGO. This is still very much a work in progress. But it reflects some answers to the question, 'How do we move beyond being contracted to run a workshop to really playing a meaningful role in shaping the project?' One key factor was having the right staff person, who had personally huge credibility and had operated at high levels before. He was well known by all of [the government representatives], and was very mature and experienced in dealing with these regional programs and how they work. We also leveraged an existing one million-euro project as the co-funding for this project; this allowed us to say, 'You are using our project, so we need to have a voice.' In this case, we had a big project to leverage, and a very strong person to negotiate.

This contrasts with another case where we had strong co-funding and are written in as a partner in the project, but were not really involved in a meaningful way, [partly] because we hadn't made a strong case for our capacity for collaboration. When we pointed out to the partner all the ways that we are working on other levels related to the project, their response was that they hadn't realised we worked in these ways. They were more receptive after that. You have to bring capacity to the table. That kind of collaboration is not a right; it has to be earned. The door may be open, but you can't walk through it unless you are really bringing something to the table.

A lot of the hesitancy of government to bring in and resource NGOs is because they don't feel NGOs have the capacity (Nicole Leotaud, Trinidad and Tobago).

For CANARI, innovation in staffing modalities means bringing in different capacities at different levels of engagement. CANARI has a core of full-time staff members with certain crucial skills. In addition, the organisation has a thoughtfully crafted group of 'associates' who work as independent consultants to bring in necessary skills and expertise on an as-needed basis. Nicole Leotaud explains that this model gives the organisation much-needed flexibility:

The associates are an important part of the CANARI family and institutional memory, and provide invaluable strategic advice. This gives the organisation a lot more very high-level capacity that we could not afford otherwise. This is one organisational model for dealing with funding uncertainty (Nicole Leotaud, Trinidad and Tobago).

In addition, CANARI brings in 'programme advisors' who are full-time staff of other organisations and therefore not available to be associates, but who can provide additional input on implementation of programmes as needed.

4.5 Leadership can help or hinder positive change

4.5.1 Leadership behaviours and cultures can make all the difference

Achieving bold changes in strategy, systems or staffing places significant demands on NGO leaders. Indeed, the leadership style or leadership culture of an NGO facing disruptive change may be a pivotal determinant of outcomes in managing disruptive change:

The most important thing about change is: who is leading the change — and can they be trusted? That's a very important aspect ... When Plan Uganda shifted in the space of two years from operating on a budget of US\$4 million a year to US\$100 million a year, the question was 'How do we manage this change?' The process was a positive one because: a) The leaders acknowledged the change and the fact that they needed to act, so it didn't take them by surprise; b) they put a process in place to deal with it; and c) they had a more comprehensive understanding of how organisations work [than other leadership teams] ... Also, the headquarters gives them the space to manage their own process. There was support, rather than blockage, from the top (Chiku Malunga, Malawi).

Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, of the African Model Forests Network, described a '**distributed**' leadership approach:

Our style of leadership is 'distributed' — everything is based on personal responsibility; each one of us is a leader in one aspect or another. Our younger staff members are leaders too; they call me and make demands [because] its 'their' project. For example, our biofertiliser scheme is led by a graduate student. We give them the chance; we create opportunities. They have the sense that 'This is our chance to make our mark on the world' ... We don't have a hierarchical structure; we have a cadre of senior staff, but that doesn't mean that people who are senior are always right ... The key to our network is not structure but concept ... [This] allows for multiple influences to play. It allows parts of the network to create and organise themselves (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroon).

Within this 'distributed leadership', staff roles are not rigidly defined. This, when coupled with deep commitment to an overall mission, can provide powerful resources for continued operation in times of disruption:

Twice, we had a funding shortfall of more than fifteen months without resources. And still people came to work. There's this capacity of being able to maintain commitment to the mission — you're connected to a mission, not to a job (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroon).

SRSP in Pakistan similarly emphasised the role of supportive leadership in achieving this kind of flexible, resilient culture:

Prior to 2001, we were a really centralised organisation. Now, with new leadership, we are a very decentralised organisation, with autonomy in each district. We have different forums to discuss different issues that come up. We have an open culture of discussion, and everyone is very open to the realities in the field. Even the junior staff can come at any time to talk and seek advice. You achieve this through the confidence and autonomy given by the CEO. Most operational decisions are made at the field level, and this builds confidence and ownership at the local-manager level (SRSP, Pakistan).

The benefits of the new organisational culture for staff have been multiple:

We are all thinking with a long-term perspective, and staff is emotionally involved. There is a sense of fulfilment in what we are doing; staff actually see the change on the ground, so that helps a great deal. Our staff also get wide multidisciplinary perspective. Many staff at the core of the organisation have been here a very long time (ten or more years); the projects may change, but the core of our organisation remains stable, so [we can] just graph projects needed from the communities onto that (SRSP, Pakistan).

Lina Villa-Córdoba, Chief Executive of the Alliance for Responsible Mining, also described an approach to leadership designed to empower employees to give their best and leave a mark on the organisation even if they move on:

It is a two-sided challenge; on the one hand, we have to deconstruct the idea that small organisations can only survive because of their leader. This may be true in the early stages, but the more quickly you can overcome dependency on the leader, the more quickly you can become sustainable. On the other hand, we have to explore how to invest in people when you think they will move on fairly quickly. I need people to give the best of themselves while they are with ARM. I say, 'I'll make your time here a very valuable experience.' People get to take ownership in decisions at a very young age. They can feel they are part of a bigger picture that is meaningful to people in today's world. But I also expect them to leave their mark here. In this way, I see that I will get the best out of them, and that they will do great work when they do move on.

If you allow people to pursue their passions and interests, they will always leave something (Lina Villa-Córdoba, Colombia).

Finally, as interviewees reminded us about the lack of succession planning, 'top-down' leadership without effective transfer of knowledge can light the fuse of future disruption:

My mantra as a leader is to do everything as if I am going to be run over by a bus the next day. That way I'm ensuring that I reinstall my learning into the organisation on a continual basis (Lina Villa-Córdoba, Colombia).

4.5.2 Boards can support change management but can also be negative disruptors

Interviewees spanned a range of organisational sizes and mandates. As might be expected, given this diversity, their boards played a range of roles in processes of managing change, both positive and on occasion negative.

Harsh Jaitli describes a shift in the overall landscape, from founder-driven to highly professional NGOs whose board members are personally committed, and whose backgrounds are more diverse:

There was a set of NGOs that started in the mid- to late 1980s, which were founder-driven. Such organisations still exist. More recently, organisations have started coming in that are very professional; some are offshoots of international NGOs. So the spectrum has changed. To confront changes in the external environment, many NGOs are also changing the composition of their boards ... Normally you would include someone with a government background; but now you'll often find someone with a private-sector background too. Now, those who are coming onto boards are people with some kind of commitment (Harsh Jaitli, India).

For ACORD, governing a difficult process of transformation from Northern Consortium to a pan-African regional player posed particular challenges for getting the right mix of board members:

The board was more or less exclusively Northern. So it became disempowered — its members weren't Southern, but they were the leaders. Then, in a smart move in 2004, an African woman was appointed as chair of the board. She came from a [Northern] member organisation, but was quite strong as an individual, and had some clout (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

Elsewhere, Shahid Zia, at the time executive director of Sungi Development Foundation in Pakistan (profiled in Appendix A), found that his outgoing executive director and founder, who remained on the board in his new role as Minister for Rural Development, became a helpful and noninterventionist advisor to him as he sought to implement difficult and major changes of direction.

Boards can be helpful in various ways; one interviewee said that her board had made personal contributions to retain several staff affected by an unexpected delay in grant renewal:

We were working on a World Bank project in the Niger Delta. We'd finished the first tranche of the project. They were supposed to give us a subcontract immediately, but it didn't come in for six months. During that time, we continued to pay salaries for the three staff associated with the project, expecting that the funds were coming. But when we got the subcontract, we were told that it could not be used to cover the cost of those salaries retroactively for the previous six months. We took the issue to our board, and they said they would make personal contributions to cover the shortfall (Faith Nwadishi, Nigeria).

But boards can also be disruptors. Chiku Malunga from Malawi, an experienced organisational development practitioner, reflected on the disruptive role that a board can play during a change of strategic or operational direction:

CABONGO was a very good organisation. From around 1997, it was the first organisation to really offer a capacity-development service to NGOs in Malawi. It did good work, and was a well-functioning organisation. There were ten of us — young men and women from Malawi, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya — who had been trained for two years to become service providers in what was DFID's most generous project in Malawi at the time. It was a good family.

Then, in 2001, we went for a trip at a lake together, as an organisation. There was dancing, and a drink or two. During that retreat, our director said, 'I have an announcement: The board has decided that from now on we will no longer provide organisational-development interventions delivered by trained organisational development practitioners; we'll become a school of organisational development — in other words, training other people to become organisational-development practitioners.'

This was a very different direction, and it created a strong conflict. People became emotional: 'We're not teachers, we're practitioners!' The board members, who were experienced directors of NGOs in Malawi, had made the decision. These were well-known people in the country who had joined the board because they could be trusted to guide the organisation ... I think the board felt that there were staff members who were difficult to control — so it was a management technique. The board insisted we were teachers. The organisation ended up dividing into two: CABONGO and CADECO. At the time, CABONGO was 100 per cent funded by DFID, but I don't think DFID was really following the process.

It took about six months to emerge from the conflict. By the time I left in early 2002, the first five years of DFID funding were coming to an end. DFID saw what had happened, and didn't fund a second phase. CABONGO is still there, but it's a shadow of its former self. The old management and board have disappeared. We still work together, but as two organisations, not one (Chiku Malunga, Malawi).

4.6 Organisational capabilities for innovation can determine outcomes

Adaptation is dancing to somebody else's music. Innovation is composing and playing your own music – and having others dance to it (Alfredo del Valle, Chile).

Normatively, the ideas and practices of innovation — in essence, doing new things, or doing old things differently — emerged as a recurrent theme as interviewees reflected on optimal approaches to disruptive change management. Innovation is increasingly recognised for its catalytic value in development practice and outcomes.

Alfredo del Valle notes that the common 'adaptive' or 'reactive' management approach, whilst characteristic of Southern NGOs, will not itself lead to the innovation upon which self-development (in contrast to development imposed from the outside) can be founded.

Having the capacity to adapt is essential ... Adaptation is necessary when what happens is something like illness, or the military coming from Europe ... But it is far less important than innovation. It is more important to have innovation capacity, because then you have the future in your hands — otherwise you don't. That's of the essence of being a human being ...

Reactive disruption management can't lead to innovation ... Human beings started to change more actively when they started to innovate and change their minds, ... [such as] after the Renaissance. Those were the periods when humans started to think, 'We can change proactively; we don't have to just adapt.' It was a very slow process ...

It's the survival mode in which NGOs and many organisations live in the developing world ... Survival is different from development (Alfredo del Valle, Chile).

Mariteuw Chimère Diaw of the African Model Forests Network Secretariat echoes the development imperative for innovation.

The future of a significant part of our work is in our capacity to modify conditions in Africa. Africa is in a pre-shift; the economy is going to shift. To [successfully navigate] that shift, we need to innovate and bring in new ways of doing things (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw).

A number of interviewees reflected on the value of innovation capacity as a breakthrough resource for managing disruptive change. Mariteuw Chimère Diaw again:

There is a vast field of innovators — people with courage and capacities who are showing the way and can help us to move forward, to use disruption not as something to fight against but as a steppingstone for the transformation that is needed. We need to transform the ecosystems of development (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroon).

Alfredo del Valle also highlights the imperative for innovation (and consequently for activities that can support innovation):

There is a deep distinction between developing and developed countries. In the North, innovativeness is a part of culture; in the South it is not. It is essential to understand that. NGOs in the North share that aspect of culture, and are immediately innovative. Yes, there are barriers, but in the North, the process began 400 years ago. That hasn't happened in the South ... NGOs normally only try to be reactive ... They could have far more impact if they think in terms of their potentialities (Alfredo del Valle, Chile).

Innovation need not always be organisationally disruptive for the innovator, but it will almost certainly be disruptive of established ways of doing things. Innovation shakes up assumptions and path dependencies. In Appendix A, Managing change 1, Allan A. Calma of CWS Asia in Pakistan reflects on some of the 'disruptions and avoided disruptions' that arose from his organisation's decision to more fully integrate its approaches to delivering humanitarian and development projects.

For NGOs, it is clear that innovation can come from anywhere. But innovators need support to connect their innovation capacities to development outcomes, and both international NGOs and donors can potentially help to make that connection:

Most innovation is at the grassroots, in smaller NGOs. They can deliver, but they are not aware of ... opportunities [to work with the private sector] (Harsh Jaitli, India).

4.7 Networks and peer support can amplify the impact of disruptive change management

4.7.1 Formal coalitions and networks

A number of interviewees offered insights into the challenges and opportunities of working in coalitions or networks, **both as sources of disruption** in themselves and as **spaces for building capacities** that can maximise the positive NGO contribution to national-level disruption management.

Faith Nwadishi, Publish What You Pay Coordinator in Nigeria, considered the former:

When you work in a network, there is a tendency to lose the focus of the network because of the politics. It happens [to some degree] everywhere, I guess, but it happens a lot here [in Nigeria]. Often, someone who feels they are the most qualified candidate but not the head of the network will do things to destroy the network, so that its credibility is affected. And then funding intended for the network can go to an individual organisation (Faith Nwadishi, Nigeria).

Nwadishi suggested that coalitions could operate more effectively if NGOs adopted codes of conduct, which could help shape responses to disruptive change. Shared codes of conduct could protect organisations from external interference:

FIFA [Fédération Internationale de Football Association], for example, ... came up with a rule at the international level, that governments should not interfere with the leadership of football associations in the country. If a government seeks to dissolve an already inaugurated football association's board, FIFA will terminate that country's association with it. And that has helped national football associations over the years (Faith Nwadishi, Nigeria).

In a separate conversation, Richard Bennett referred, unprompted, to the Publish What you Pay Coalition itself, which Faith Nwadishi coordinates in Nigeria, as a positive example of just this:

What interests me about [Publish What You Pay] in terms of dealing with disruptive change is that one of the key things they do as an alliance is to protect each other. They are working in a really edgy advocacy environment — a whole range of [places] where the countries and companies they are advocating about can get seriously dangerous. So their governance suite includes an Appendix that sets out in what circumstances and how they will protect each other if arrested or under threat of violence ... That means that as an alliance they can pull strings. Tackling civil-society space issues is a national concern; but the existence of international alliances can also be helpful (Richard Bennett, UK).

Formal coalitions and networks can offer resources to help NGOs manage the impacts of disruption. From a different vantage point, Richard Bennett, whose consultancy practice focuses on advising NGO networks and coalitions, offered a further insight reinforcing this:

If a network or an alliance is working effectively, it is probably doing two things: 1) collective advocacy, and 2) ensuring that its members can benefit from one another's experience ... [In the field of reproductive rights], agreeing how to deal with a Southern Baptist or an Islamic or a Catholic approach can strengthen your capacities at national level ... [So the network or alliance] can enable each [of its members] to handle [potentially disruptive issues] more effectively in their national setting (Richard Bennett, UK).

Turning to international spaces in which NGO agendas are set and played out across and beyond national borders, Youba Sokona, an advisor to the South Centre, reflected on the changing space for NGOs in global climate-change negotiations and their associated institutional settings. There are significant knock-on effects for Southern NGO engagement in an agenda that is a 'mega disruptor' of international development processes and outcomes.

In essence, Youba Sokona argued that, with a number of internationally networked NGOs (such as Friends of the Earth) now far less visible in the global climate-change arena, their opportunities to support effective engagement by Southern NGOs have also dwindled. With its emphasis on technology and science, the pool of NGOs effectively equipped to engage in the global climate agenda is limited. And Southern NGOs tend to lack the scientific capacity that could allow them to play a meaningful role. As a consequence, opportunities for shared learning and strengthening national advocacy are also reduced by diminished cross-fertilisation across and beyond the global climate-change arena.

By implication, the lack of science capacity (and therefore the lack of effective Southern NGO engagement with Northern peers across the international climate agenda) is also a barrier to effective engagement in climate change at a national level since, as Sokona stressed:

There is no way you can deal with the issue only in the South if you are not connected to the same approach in the North. There is also no way you can deal with adaptation if mitigation is not adequately addressed. It's not one or the other ...

The problem [of climate change] is highly related to science. This is why most NGOs from the South — apart from a very limited number with a high level of professionalism on the issue — cannot deal with climate-change issues, especially in the African context during the last decade or two. Because the critical issue at global level is understanding the phenomenon on a scientific basis, they have a limited role to play in concrete actions. If we manage to look at the convergence of climate and the SDGs, there may be some possibility for NGOs in the South, particularly in the African context. So far, though, they have had a limited say. Mostly, academics have taken over because of the science-driven aspect.

If [NGOs] have a limited background [they can't really engage] to support long-term solutions ... But most of the tension we are seeing in many Sahelian countries has to do with [climate change], which generates a number of conflicts ... There is progress in climate-adaptation science now, looking at the socioeconomic element. But our thinking is unfortunately still in silos, so climate [and] SDG conversations are completely separate; also the FfD [Financing for Development] discussions — all three are critically interrelated, but the discussions are taken by different people, and without alignment of the three tracks. That also creates problems. Unless the three are addressed together, there will be a limited role for NGOs. And then, fundamentally, the climate-change people are trying to say that, at least from the North, a key driver will be the private sector, technology and so on ... More and more NGOs have been marginalised in the process. Ten years ago, NGOs were part of setting the agenda. Now, they are not really heard — only some of the big NGOs, the think tanks that are more visible ...

So [Southern] NGOs will have to become more professional to [respond to climate change disruption]. Unfortunately, they are not highly professional. That is also related to social mechanisms at the national level — to what extent they are able to play a key role at the national level (Youba Sokona, the South Centre, Switzerland).

4.7.2 Informal networks

Alda Salomão highlighted both sides of 'network behaviour' in the broad sense of 'organisational networks'. On one hand, power struggles can cause disruption:

It is never very clear who your ally is. This has been a really important learning process for us. You have to select supporters really carefully. Sometimes we differ in our approach, and this can jeopardise our results because conflicts can get in the way. This requires careful planning, selecting, reflecting — and a lot of resilience-building (Alda Salomão, Mozambique).

On the other hand, she also emphasised the importance of relationship-building as an invaluable asset in a potentially disruptive environment:

It is crucial in our work to be on the ground at the right time. Where we are not able to do that, there must be information on the ground. So people have to be at the centre of our work. You have to be technically competent to address the issues. Peer support and learning is central to this. We go everywhere and we talk to everyone, within and outside of the country. We build alliances, because the work we do is not possible on our own; we need allies within the government, the private sector, etc. We need to promote opportunities for everyone to be on the same page; often we hear in private that people agree with you, but in public it is hard to admit weaknesses or mistakes, so in public we may get attacked. In this regard, relationship-building is really key. It supports our capacity to manoeuvre within the process, and make the best decisions possible with conflicting information (Alda Salomão, Mozambique).

4.7.3 Peer support and exchange for disruptive change management

Our NGO-leader interviewees reported that they learn from the experiences of peers in a variety of spaces. Some are connected to elite leadership fellowships (for example, the Ashoka Fellows network, or the World Economic Forum's Forum of Young Global Leaders), which can, as Toshi Nakamura expressed it, create opportunities for 'honest conversations'. Other networks were also cited, including the Asia Venture Philanthropy Network and its sister organisation in Europe.

Internal peer support can be important too, including from formal governance structures:

Twice a year we come together with all core staff to reflect on the way we work, the results we are bringing, our relationships, systems and processes. We have a slogan in our organisation: 'Unless we empower our own staff, we can't empower our communities.' My staff, through honest and open discussion, challenge me, and I challenge them. We have really capable and open staff, who are really open to learning. We have a sense of humour — we tease each other and make jokes and keep good relationships — but we are also able to be serious when it comes to talking about the work (Mulugeta Gebru, Ethiopia).

The best [support] person is ... the co-founder. We talk all the time. We co-founded the organisation, and we put everything into this organisation. We talk about things really frankly (Toshi Nakamura, Indonesia).

We have an annual Learning Forum as part of our governance structure. It also generates learning about organisational learning (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

Others also stressed the value of internal learning processes:

The women [in the African Model Forests Network] are extraordinary and committed, willing to take on extraordinary hardships to keep going. The thing that binds together a learning organisation is the sense of mission. And the learning you give one another is through actual, practical relationships (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroon).

Faith Nwadishi, a Nigerian NGO leader, reflected on the peer support that she gets from Clements Nwankwo at the Policy Legislation and Advocacy Centre: 'That's an organisation I can walk up to and talk to about my challenges.'

⁴ www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-20850778

Two of our interviews found inspiration in the writings of Margaret Wheatley:

I saw a paper called 'Taking innovation to scale'. It was like she was speaking of us. 'From network to community of practice' [also] epitomises what we're trying to do ... I found it fantastic (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroon).

If innovation capacities offer resources for disruptive change management, it makes sense to seek inspiration from multiple sources, including those beyond NGOs. Social enterprises and social entrepreneurs are also providing inspiration, particularly perhaps for NGO leaders like Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, whose organisations are beginning to incorporate social-enterprise models. Diaw cited the work of young Congolese social entrepreneur Verone Mankou, whose company VMK has created a line of smartphones and tablets said to be the first to be designed and developed by an African company⁴; VMK is now developing a 'tablet for development' to help promote education, health and agribusiness.

Lina Villa-Córdoba of ARM described how having a sense for organisational reference points or exemplars, as well as sources of inspiration from other sectors, helped to keep ARM grounded at a time of rapid growth:

A concern for many of us through this change process of our organisation has been, 'As we grow, how can we keep the crucial elements?' For example, we didn't have policies around office hours. It was just part of the culture that people came in from eight to five. But with growth, we realised we needed to have a clear policy. This meant we lost some flexibility, but we didn't take it to the extreme. It calls for a kind of intuition: How do we adapt as we grow — but slowly, in a manageable way?

Key to this is having references — model organisations that we want to emulate. What do you want to look like when you grow up? We used to think that we wanted to be like Fairtrade, for example, but later we shifted our thinking, and now we look towards companies like Google that operate professionally but with a lot of flexibility. Or in knowledge management, for example, we look to IIED. You manage your data very seriously. I tell report-writers to go to you and ask, 'How do you do it?' We learn a lot from you. The board is also an important source of support and advice. I go to them a lot. Finally, it is about being on the ground with miners, so that we don't lose connection to realities at the heart of our work. So this process is also about being humble; you are always learning, and you are never complete.

This is a constant learning process. I read a lot about management and sustainability, and what the trends are. I read every morning, and do a lot of things that I enjoy but that are also useful for my role and my work. I also like to be connected to other sectors. Sometimes I think that mining, which is a very small sector, is going to implode. So I have contacts in other sectors. I also use TED Talks (Lina Villa- Córdoba, Colombia).

4.8 Financing management of disruptive change calls for flexible funding and innovation

When grants are available, there is less innovation on the input side, but lots on the output side. But now, with the input less available, there is innovation there too (Harsh Jaitli, India).

Developing effective responses to disruptive change clearly demands organisational flexibility. For NGOs, whether that exists or not is partly determined by leadership style and organisational culture; but financial resources available to NGOs are also a key determinant of flexibility.

4.8.1 Flexible donor funding can make effective disruptive change management possible

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya noted that if one considers the drivers of disruption identified in our June 2015 working paper, the ability of civil-society organisations in the South to respond is closely connected to their financial independence and empowerment.

Interviewees face particular challenges in securing resources for effective organisational development, not only in response to current disruption but in order to effectively anticipate and manage possible future disruptions. From the Alliance for Responsible Mining, Lina Villa-Córdoba made the basic case:

There needs to be greater investment in developing institutions: organisations need space to develop their value proposition, a vision of where they want to go — and they need help delivering it. Projects can kill organisations when they make us lose our strategic focus. There is also too much focus on monitoring and evaluations. In

theory, there are lots of learning opportunities, but in practice it is less and less about learning when too much focus is on outputs.

There is some progress along these lines with the development of the social-enterprise model, but here there is still too much focus on the leader. There needs to be more focus on institutions and teams (Lina Villa-Córdoba, Colombia).

Similarly, Nicole Leotaud of CANARI in Trinidad and Tobago stressed the constraints of project-focused funding, and the importance of grants targeting institutional development:

What is impossible to fund is transformational planning — new strategic plans, the big issues of staff development, etc. Last year we were so tight on finances that we could not fund any training. Staff had to use their vacation time [to attend trainings] — and some did. These things require separate funding. You just can't fund 'organisational jumps' through project funding. MacArthur is one of our biggest donors, and they gave us a grant explicitly to strengthen our organisation, to create a new website and produce our latest strategic plan. Without this support, we simply wouldn't have a coherent strategy (Nicole Leotaud, Trinidad and Tobago).

Endowments can be particularly helpful in supporting organisational development. As a next-best resource besides an endowment, Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya cited the example of the Think-Tank Initiative (TTI, www.thinktankinitiative.org). This multi-donor collaboration of five funders, coordinated by Canada's International Development Research Centre, has selected fifty think tanks across Asia, Latin America and Africa, and agreed to underwrite one-third of their turnover.

Interviewees described their efforts to secure resources for effective organisational development in a variety of other ways. At ACORD, for example, this was an essential aspect of Chief Executive Ousainou Ngum's job as he steered his organisation through a difficult period of change. His description of key elements in that process is set out in Appendix A: Managing change 5.

While a direct institutional grant from MacArthur has enabled a crucial step forward, CANARI is also looking at other ways to fund organisational development. One option is through a planned 'transformational management' activity within a larger project:

We are gearing up for a major change. We are applying for a project that will double our staff size, and we are concerned that we might lose some key aspects of our organisation. Despite these challenges, we feel that this funding opportunity is really aligned with our mission; we have the opportunity here to really change the picture. So to achieve this major change, we plan to incorporate a 'transformation management activity' into our work plan for the project. This will focus on organisational strengthening as one component of the project. One of our board members is an organisational development specialist, and will be able to help shape this in terms of our structures and systems. We are still in early days, but this is one approach to funding the organisational change needed (Nicole Leotaud, Trinidad and Tobago).

This appreciation of flexible institutional financial support for organisational development was echoed by comments from other interviewees, such as Alda Salomão of Centro Terra Viva in Mozambique:

The capacity to intervene in the right time and place and in the right manner is crucial, and requires a lot of strategic thinking combined with financial agility. We monitor processes and provide legal assistance to vulnerable communities, so we have to deal with a lot of unforeseen events. There are also a lot of unforeseen opportunities, and if you miss them you miss the opportunity to make a difference. Grant-based work reduces our flexibility and our margin of reaction. We have been lucky to have institutional-support grants giving us support within the general framework of our goals. This has allowed us the opportunity to adapt, and even improvise, actions that were not necessarily in our work plan — to respond immediately to a given situation as it arose. This is the kind of support that an advocacy organisation needs in order to be effective (Alda Salomão, Mozambique).

Flexible funding that can be rapidly deployed in the face of disruption can be vital in enabling rapid responses to external (beyond the organisation) development disruptors too. Alda Salomão provided a specific example from a major land intervention in the north of Mozambique:

The land-use licence was granted in secrecy, and we only became aware as it was happening that the communities were losing their land rights ... We had to make a decision quickly; the issue fit with our general strategy (large-scale land acquisitions), but wasn't in our work plan specifically ... We decided to go forward because we felt that, even though we'd have to rearrange other planned work, we had here a project with potential to make an impact that would be felt all over the country ...

We had to engage in the EIA process, which was already under way. This involved huge costs to attend all the hearings, and extensive field-based work for the entire year. The only reason we could make that decision was that we had funds that allowed us to be flexible. The process was so irregular, so chaotic, so unpredictable — if we had had grants that were inflexible, we would not have been able to respond in a useful way (Alda Salomão, Mozambique).

4.8.2 Innovation in revenue streams is breaking down barriers between ‘donors’ and ‘the private sector’

Given the scarcity of grant funding for organisational development and other processes that could support effective anticipation and management of disruption, interviewees are seeking other avenues to increase unrestricted revenue needed to provide the flexibility for rapid change (or to act as effective disruptors themselves) when this is needed.

Some interviewees have already begun to experiment with private sector-inspired approaches, particularly the potential to incorporate social enterprise within their business model.

I personally am convinced that for ACORD to survive, it needs to have a strong commercial mindset — to look at resource generation in a different way (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

Social enterprise is already an inspiration for a number of our interviewees. Mariteuw Chimère Diaw told the story of the African Model Forests Network Secretariat thus far:

Around 2010, we carried out a diagnostic analysis, and realised that every five years or so there's a funding crisis within the network. So we had a meeting in Sweden in 2011 [with other model-forest networks], and the African part of the network suggested that we develop a social-enterprise strategy to ... inject wealth into the economy through SMEs that are socially oriented, and using the network as an instrument. We're looking to become a hybrid — to meet our mission and at the same time develop new models of economic empowerment. In the African network, we had to move fast; we are developing two social enterprises. The possibilities are enormous; just look at the market for plants — there is so much you can do for biomedical, or cosmetics. Africa is developing at an extraordinary rate ... A lot of positive things are happening. It's time for Africans to make a difference ... We have to develop the capacity to transform ourselves! (Chimère Diaw, Cameroon)

Technology NGO Kopernik, based in Indonesia, has largely eschewed traditional donor funding, instead adopting a blended model combining grants, online donations and user fees, and with a for-profit consulting arm. Kopernik aims to connect simple, life-changing technology to last-mile communities sorely lacking it:

Lots of companies are creating technology with huge potential, but all have struggled to deliver these products. So we thought that it could be a good contribution if we could bridge this gap and distribute the technologies where they are needed. We also liked the aspect of impact — these technologies have a direct, tangible impact on peoples' lives, saving time and effort and increasing socioeconomic productivity, which is really effective in getting people out of poverty. These ideas came together in Kopernik, and we've been active in twenty-four countries so far.

Companies were interested in working with us because they see a slowing down of economies in Europe, the US and Japan, and they see emerging rural areas as a potential next market. We get a lot of inquiries about what is needed, and what products would be well accepted. That's how we started the for-profit consulting arm, which is funding some new business ideas for the not-for-profit.

We didn't really approach ODA-type funders, because we wanted to bring in alternative funding sources ... We wanted to be freer. In terms of scale, individual giving has a much bigger potential. And when you seek ODA money, you need to satisfy what they want. We found that not many people on the aid side thought this [technology-distribution plan] would be a good idea.

In the first three years, we got almost zero funding from ODA sources. I think there were simply not a lot of opportunities. And we weren't very interested in responding to calls for proposals — just doing what they wanted NGOs to do. In the last few years, though (for example, with UNICEF's innovation theme), a small group of people began to be interested in exploring different ideas, and started to contact us for pilot tests, etc. It started with the World Bank innovation team, and then a partnership with UNICEF's innovation lab, and the UNDP innovation hub in Eastern Europe. The relationships started to change, because they too saw this as an

opportunity to have more impact ... We started to collaborate with them and, although the application process was similar, the way we worked after that was quite different. They were more interested in the results than in the financial reports. I think the ODA world is gradually changing (Toshi Nakamura, Indonesia).

A number of interviewees cautioned against a loss of distinctive civil-society identity if too much inspiration is drawn from the private sector for funding, staffing or business models. Nonetheless, as noted by an interviewee from India:

This is a future we see for Indian NGOs — that they have to live with the private sector (Harsh Jaitli, India).

Reflecting further on the contemporary Indian context, and with both financial and regulatory disruption at the front of many organisations' minds, Harsh Jaitli suggested that for many of VANI's members, a major challenge is building capacity to explain organisational achievements to funders — including those from the private sector:

We are trained to explain [our work] to bilateral donors, and now we need the capacity to explain it to private-sector people. You could call it brand-building ... The reality now is that it is important how good you look, not how good you are (Harsh Jaitli, India).

Lina Villa-Córdoba of ARM also expressed caution about expanding into social enterprise:

There can be a tendency in social enterprise to say that it is all about the leader — all about individuals. But this isn't my experience. I can be a very smart person, but I can't do anything without partners and donors and strong staff. The problem with this misperception is that options become available for the leader, and we struggle to provide growth opportunities for other staff. People want to make you [the leader] a rock star, but you want to empower other people. I get invitations to conferences all the time, but many times my other staff — those actually running the projects on the ground — are more qualified than I am to attend these conferences. But people don't like this; they want me as leader (Lina Villa-Córdoba, Colombia).

At the same time, the boundaries between 'NGO' and 'private-sector' business models may be able to blur without diminished commitment to values normally associated with social purpose. ARM functions in part as a social enterprise:

We see ourselves as a social enterprise — at least, we are working towards that ... We are a not-for-profit, but we do have a business model in place where we foresee being able to support ourselves financially on the operational level. We have four different income streams: projects and grants, Fair-mined certification work, consultancies and trainings.

The income stream linked to the certification streams for artisanal mining happens when the market player pays a premium to the miner and a development fee to us (licencing our label). We charge for the value that we add in the supply chain. We are expecting to reach break-even on this by 2017, but funding it before we reach that point is always a challenge. Most of the certification systems that exist do have a strong stake in their labels ... It isn't sexy to charge for a label that no one recognises. So labels are important — but what is more important is the real service behind those labels. Our value is about the service — connecting actors along the market chain. People do understand that the crucial role we play does cost money.

The other income stream is consultancies. We pull together experts globally who can deliver research on artisanal mining ... This income stream helps support operational staff and investment in new areas of work, but it isn't highly lucrative. A part of the benefit is that it helps bring in learning, and connect us with the relevant networks and individuals.

Finally, we are developing a training-the-trainers platform. The idea is to offer e-learning services to mining practitioners who work with us in different countries on issues related to artisanal mining. In addition to bringing in revenue, this will support the technical training of our staff and partners (Lina Villa-Córdoba, Colombia).

It would certainly be incorrect to suggest that the prospect of disruption, and the search for unrestricted funding to facilitate effective anticipation and management of disruptive change, are major drivers of social enterprise within Southern NGOs. But the process of responding to disruption is often one of experimentation, since disruption challenges organisations to come up with solutions not previously explored. We found anecdotal correlation in our interviews between the ideas of 'disruption' and 'innovation', as well as experimentation with new business models and revenue streams.

4.9 Organisational culture can determine disruptive change management outcomes

'Culture,' it has famously been said, 'eats strategy for breakfast.' And when it comes to the management of disruptive change, organisational culture can be a key determinant of outcomes.

Interviewees commented in a variety of ways on the relationship between organisational culture and disruptive change.

We are open in communicating, and are as transparent and accountable as possible. Trust is the crucial element. Once you build trust and establish relationships at different levels, you can have more flexibility [and] become more influential. These are the adaptation mechanisms that we use (Mulugeta Gebru, Ethiopia).

Technology-based development disruptor Kopernik has given considerable thought to aligning its internal culture with its role as a continual disruptor:

We really wanted to embed a culture of always identifying opportunities and areas for improvement — also a culture of action rather than talk. We have developed a culture page on our website [www.kopernik.ngo/page/our-culture]; the core came from the co-founders, but we discussed it with the team, and we still discuss it on a quarterly basis ... We go through the culture [statement], and we do a self-assessment as to whether we're living up to it. I think this is really crucial. It's our role, to keep bringing this up (Toshi Nakamura, Indonesia).

Culture, rather than legal form, can even determine geographic identity:

Some people said, 'If you're registered in the UK, you can't be pan-African.' I said, 'No' ... What has changed [from our origin as a consortium of Northern NGOs] is the organisational culture: We're African; our business is African (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

A number of interviewees highlighted ways in which 'NGO culture' sets up barriers to effective management of change:

It's the culture of busy-ness that's the problem; you never stop to reflect. There's a tendency to think that the bigger we are, the more successful we'll be. There's a lot of time spent 'doing,' and reflecting gets minimal investment ... People think that learning is leisure time ... For me, to be able to manage change, I have to have the capacity to stop and reflect. But that requires investment of time, money and energy (Chiku Malunga, Malawi).

More than one interviewee commented on the NGO culture of short-termism, and on how the repeated disruption that is the norm for many middle- and low-income country NGOs can result in a lack of strategic planning. Some suggested that regular horizon-scanning or formal learning forums could help:

Every year, boards should have one meeting when they do horizon-scanning, or ask a consultant to come in and talk about patterns happening in the external environment — and maybe to reflect, even before they become issues, what they are going to do about it (Chiku Malunga, Malawi).

The timespan of NGO outlook has always been short — projects of up to one year, and programmes of three years maximum. So the time horizon is day-to-day. And the way we operate has also been very 'programmatised'. So NGOs [in the South] have been very innocent in the knowledge market about the changes that are coming. Thinking ahead is very rare in the Southern context ...

When organisations write strategy papers nowadays, we look at the risk; but the risks we assess are mainly domestic ones — we don't really think about bigger issues such as migrant issues in the Mediterranean, or how what is happening in Syria concerns us. Or even, for that matter, if the Chinese stock market crashes, how that could affect agriculture. It would be useful to create a template, so that when organisations do strategic planning, they look at external shocks (Debapriya Bhattacharya, Bangladesh).

More often than not, you have to create a direct mechanism for learning, but most [Southern NGOs] feel they don't have the time to invest in that (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

4.10 Learning is a key resource for effective disruptive change management

Notwithstanding the potential for disruptors (particularly those associated with funding pressures) to drive and exacerbate short-term thinking, many of the interviewees expressed a strong commitment to continual learning and reflection:

We have to be open to change the way we are working. In each area we have an action committee, appointed by the community, who know what we do and get feedback from everyone involved; they tell us through quarterly reports what is working and what is not ... We say thank you, and we adjust. We also have a monitoring team made up from our staff, who come up with action points for each project. They bring this to an action committee, where we decide what to do. This is a participatory process, and it is continual and ongoing. It is about having a well-thought-out structure in place for information feedback flowing in two directions, from us to the communities and back (Mulugeta Gebru, Ethiopia).

We decided to be a learning organisation several years ago ... First, you learn about your own mission — when you set it up, you only understand it partially ... A key factor is strategic direction; you need a clear understanding of where you're going, to develop the tools you need to fulfil the mission (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroon).

James Taylor discussed how learning was placed at the heart of CDRA:

You have to look at all your organisational systems and maximise their contribution to learning. You have to design and facilitate human process to maximise the learning potential from the fullest diversity of contributions within the system. So in our organisation, for twenty-two years, we dedicated one week of each month to learning. This was our 'home' week. It provided an enormous amount of reflection. It had an absolute structure, and incorporated all of our organisational meetings, making it not just a navel-gazing escape from the hard realities of work. It was about making the central elements of organisational functioning part of the learning process. We looked at budgets, financial management, case studies from the field, etc., and reflected on them.

That week was recognised as the place for critical reflection, the place where practice was formed and honed, the place for building the relationships, the place where the values and intentions of the organisation could be fine-tuned. This practice was inextricably linked to our work. Having a once-a-month rhythm was crucial — the other three weeks, we were all over the world. In our self-evaluations, so many people have referred to our home week as the thing they appreciated the most (James Taylor, UK).

A flexible leadership culture can also help to create the space for resilience in the face of disruptive change. As SRSP programme manager Atif Zeeshan explained:

From the staff perspective, the kind of working space you have is really crucial. As a programme manager, I have all the liberty I need to develop concepts and projects ... It is not bureaucratic; I am not told to do this and that. Our board of directors are also quite flexible and forward-thinking. You can learn from mistakes, and there is room for discussion with management and support for this kind of learning. Management encourages us to learn from our mistakes (Atif Zeeshan, Pakistan).

Similarly, Nicole Leotaud described the culture of learning from mistakes that is fostered throughout the governance structure of CANARI:

Our governance structure is not conventional; we have a board and staff who are 'partners', and the executive director is a 'managing partner'. The culture of CANARI is very open, with all board meetings all open to all staff (except in confidential HR sessions). This culture is very open and collaborative, with the aim of making people really committed. The tone of board meetings is very supportive, and it does not feel like we are being monitored. The board has a lot of trust in staff, so when we are going through challenges the attitude is 'How can I help? We trust you. Here are some suggestions.' It translates to an atmosphere where we feel enabled to be creative and take risks and ask for help, and not feel that we are going to be attacked later for making mistakes (Nicole Leotaud, Trinidad and Tobago).

In practice, this involves being willing to take risks, and even expecting some level of 'mini-crisis' in order to allow learning to take place, as Nicole Leotaud went on to explain:

As the director, I may work on a project that is managed by a very junior staff member that I have to report to. This empowers them to lead. Leadership is a very strong culture within the institute. Part of it is that they have to feel safe to lead and risk making mistakes. For example, a new staff member took over an existing project while still on her probation period. She started having issues with the donor micromanaging the project, and didn't have the experience to push back. I encouraged her to push back and assert the realities of the project — but I have not intervened, and did not write the donor myself. I have gone on leave and am just coming back, and I am ready for there to be a mini-crisis — and that is okay (Nicole Leotaud, Trinidad and Tobago).

A key accompaniment to flexibility and risk taking at CANARI is collaboration, which is integrated into the systems of the organisation:

We have a lot of internal systems to check progress on projects — a joint calendar, project reports, and staff meetings every two weeks to make organisational-priority decisions. At every staff meeting, we have an agenda item on 'what we have learnt', which creates space for all levels of learning, and we keep track of this in a learning journal. This provides continual looking at 'What do we need to change, and how can we do it?' These systems allow us to collaborate and cross-check, so that people aren't doing their own thing in a bubble, and there are a lot of cross-linkages in our work (Nicole Leotaud, Trinidad and Tobago).

There appears to be a strong potential correlation among effective disruptive change management, internal mechanisms for learning, and rapid feedback from mistakes:

The more you have feedbacks organised in a relatively transparent way, the more you develop capacity to move through changes and keep [your organisational] integrity so that you remain resilient (changing whilst remaining the same). That's one of the factors — though funding and the mood of outside donors can be very crucial [too] (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroon).

As Diaw implies, even in the most effective learning organisation the role of funders in determining disruptive change outcomes, directly or indirectly, must not be underestimated.

5

Messages and recommendations for INGOs and donors

5.1 Recommendations that address both INGOs and donors

We are playing chess. The king can't do it all. The queen can't do it all. We need to all be working together, so we can all move forward (Richard Brubaker, China).

We explained to all interviewees that, at this stage of our initiative, the audiences for our work on disruptive change include the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and potentially other development cooperation agencies, as well as international NGOs headquartered in OECD countries.

In practice, the boundary between 'donors' and 'INGOs' is often blurred. In some cases, interviewees drew no distinction between the two when making suggestions on how 'donors' could support their work in ways less likely to generate or exacerbate organisational disruption.

Clearly, what is core or unrestricted funding for an international NGO can easily become restricted funding when it reaches national NGOs:

For local NGOs, it can be hard to access donors directly, so they have to rely on international NGOs — who make their own restrictions (Allan A. Calma, Pakistan).

Other recommendations from our interviewees referred to responses from both INGOs and donors more generally. Alfredo del Valle's key message, for example, was a call for international cooperation (whatever its constituent institutions) towards building the culture of innovation that he sees as the foundation for innovative rather than adaptive disruption management:

Development — and building a culture of innovation in middle- and low-income countries — is joint work involving civil society, governments and business. The three meet in public policy ... And that's where international cooperation could have a tremendous role. This is a tremendously disruptive kind of change — but it is disruptive in a good sense (Alfredo del Valle, Chile).

Learning initiatives potentially involve both INGOs and other donors. One interviewee suggested that both could help to create learning initiatives on processes of disruptive change:

Help local NGOs, for example, to formulate platforms where they can meet once or twice a year to talk about what changes are happening in their work and what can they do — how they can support one another in addressing those changes (Chiku Malunga, Malawi).

In another non-institution-specific recommendation, Harsh Jaitli of VANI in India suggested that in the Indian context, a comparative analysis of the legal and regulatory contexts in India and the UK would be helpful. He added that capacity-building for Indian NGOs on updating business plans and management systems could enable them to more effectively engage with donors in the contemporary funding environment.

5.2 Recommendations for international NGOs

What do national NGO leaders want from international NGOs? In some respects, the message is no different from the more generic insights for donors: Involve your Southern partners, and give them time and support to prepare for change. Shahid Zia, a Pakistani NGO leader, offered an example to bring this message to life:

In 2005, Oxfam brought out a report against lopsided trade agreements and injustices, with associated campaigns in thirteen countries. But within a few years, Oxfam changed its position regarding these trade agreements, and also regarding the role of multinational companies. They adopted a position more like, 'Working with [multinational corporations], we can change their behaviour' and 'We won't be involved in naming and shaming campaigns any longer'. But that sort of change in the positions of international NGOs can put their southern partners in trouble: How can they go back to the same communities, taking such different positions? Why can't [INGOs] involve their partners in the change process, so that they can make them understand what the change means for them?

When you change position whilst you're leading these campaigns, it's very hard for Southern NGOs to adapt (Shahid Zia, Pakistan).

Other pointed messages for international NGOs emerged from our interviews: on fostering learning; on addressing the operating space for civil society; and on good practice in partnership and funding.

At the moment, we're both a direct grantee and subgrantee of a Northern NGO who have also succeeded on the same call [for proposals]. On the parts [the NGO is] subcontracting, [the Northern NGO keeps all the funding for] all the systems and learning and overheads. They're only giving us the project funds. The only reason we're doing it is because we've won the other grant and can finance [the overhead] through that (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

Only one of ACORD's Northern partners is currently willing to act as a subcontractee to ACORD, reported Ousainou Ngum, and '[when it happens it's] an experience that is so enriching and empowering. Then you're actually sharing and talking.' He went on to offer a series of reflections on the implications for Southern NGOs of Northern INGOs' responses to the drivers of disintermediation:

Our old members [former Northern consortium partners] are now competing with us ... They have relocated South and created new identities ... Most Southern partners, I imagine, were not prepared for it. In a strange way, it is good for us that we had that pain a little earlier.

In 2006, I remember saying to ACORD's [Northern] institutional members, 'Your own structures and costs of existence are so high ... Your mediation role will be questioned at some point ... It is in your interest to conceptualise a new relationship with ACORD that prepares you for that.' And they weren't interested, saying, 'Our role is to support capacity-building.' That is an interesting logic that has come home to roost, in my view!

The dynamic now for us is competition as a result of disintermediation. What would have been ideal would have been for [Northern] members/partners to explore 'equal partnerships'/responsive programming together. But their own organisational cultures are not ready for that. For example, they're looking at us as subsidiary partners. So in a way we are being displaced by smaller CBOs [community-based organisations] who will work with them on the basis that they ask.

The disintermediation debate needs to look longer-term at that. If you go to an organisation like Oxfam or ActionAid, they are much more comfortable working with CBOs if they can claim costs for capacity-building, and so on. But why not cede that to a Southern organisation? ...

The INGOs are maintaining old ethics and culture, and perpetuating dependence, even when they set up offices on the ground in the South. They are trying to do it differently, and talking about disintermediation and empowerment. But there is lots of work still to do ... They should aim to loosen their structures significantly, so that they work towards genuine empowerment. The power relations have to be addressed (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

There were echoes of the disintermediation debate, too, in Ousainou Ngum's informal reflections on the possible future shape of his pan-African NGO:

I wouldn't mind an ACORD in ten to fifteen years' time that is a single organisation acting as [facilitator], with lots of other offices working as CBOs. There should be real capacity on the ground that takes on its own identity according to its own contexts; and then ACORD's role would be purely facilitating and enabling (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

When international NGOs work in networks and alliances with Southern partners, it would be useful to consider more explicitly how the dynamics and practices of networks they have joined can help Southern NGOs manage disruptive change.

Harsh Jaitli from India stressed that, in the field, international NGOs and national NGOs are 'like us; in a sense they're a part of the family.' But if international NGOs are in some respects 'just another donor', there is equally perhaps a betrayal of civil society solidarity reflected in some of our interviewees' stories of 'funding disruption'. What is at stake is the future of civil society itself:

Global organisations working on development don't have a common vision. They need to consult with civil society organisations around the world to build a common agenda together, and work together on how to do it. If not, soon there will not be any more civil society in the world (Amacodou Diouf, Senegal).

5.3 Recommendations for donors

A number of interviewees had seen donors taking a strongly government-centric approach, which they viewed negatively. In the context of our interviews, that criticism can be understood as the insight that a government-centric donor approach is suboptimal in enabling effective responses to disruptive change from multiple external sources:

The aid system puts too much burden on developing-country governments ... There's a lot of capacity at the grassroots level — small grassroots organisations and entrepreneurs, for example ... The role of government that the aid industry expects seems to be too much (Toshi Nakamura, Indonesia).

[One multilateral donor] has chosen to work with governments only. Imagine trying to reduce poverty among the Kurds by working with Saddam Hussein! (Anonymised at interviewee request)

For development-cooperation agencies, the clear message is that more needs to be done to create the conditions for flourishing civil society. Funding again featured heavily in our interviews:

Why can't DFID do more in ...? Why can't it fund civil society directly? The focus is on funding the state — but the state already has a budget ... Government has a budget for government activities, but civil society doesn't have money for civil society and development. (Anonymised)

More than one interviewee expressed a desire for more dialogue with donors:

I want DFID to engage more with civil society in this country. They work mostly with government — why not with groups in civil society, for a stronger link with communities and perspectives on the ground? It would be really useful for DFID to engage on the ground (Mulugeta Gebru, Ethiopia).

The challenge we've had for a long time is that donors want to talk about the successes, but rarely talk about the failures and difficulties. Disruptive change is about trying to learn from failure, and how it can inform what we do going forward (Victor Orindi, Kenya).

There were plenty of anecdotes about negative or even perverse (and disruptive) effects of new, rapidly changing or unpredictable donor approaches. The implicit recommendation is that donors should not themselves become negative disruptors, either of Southern NGOs or of the development landscape in general.

One interviewee cited the unanticipated effect of a change in a UN agency's approach to community animal-health workers:

They wanted to make it more sophisticated, so they introduced a literacy requirement — which almost completely excluded women (Saverio Kratli, UK).

In another example:

[The donor agency] introduced a new system for monitoring and evaluation, seeking figures that don't exist for pastoralists (milk yields over a year, related to condition of fields). This made it basically impossible to work with pastoralists, to the point that the local NGO no longer wanted to use that funding because they couldn't reach that target. If you know you won't be able to tick the boxes they require at the end, you don't even try (Saverio Kratli, UK).

Shahid Zia, whose experience of donor-generated disruption in a small start-up NGO is highlighted in Appendix A, emphasized, 'Something I really want you to understand and mention is that a change in donor policy is understandable, ... but changing the geographic focus is really hard for national NGOs to adjust to.' In his case, a change of the donor's geographic focus, from one region to another in the midst of disaster relief and rehabilitation work, posed major challenges for a small NGO that had already begun to engage and develop existing links with the affected community.

A number of donor operational practices were also singled out for criticism. Ousainou Ngum of the pan-African NGO ACORD pointed to the exclusionary effects for Southern NGOs of contemporary competitive tendering practices:

Ninety per cent of the time, Northern NGOs are better placed to respond to calls for tender, for example, from DFID, or the Dutch or NORAD. First they want you to do an institutional assessment — but how many can do that and succeed? ACORD can, because we anticipated it — but not because the INGOs facilitated it. The partners with whom the donors are working are not facilitating that. So, often, [the organisations on the ground] become a subcontractee. The bilateral [aid agencies] should look at that and see what they can do. That's not a criticism — [the INGOs] just don't have the reach on the ground (Ousainou Ngum, Kenya).

The consequences of donor requirements for consortium bids also emerged, unprompted, as a concern in two interviews. One highlighted the implications for civil-society networks:

One of the donor trends is to nudge organisations — or shove them quite hard — to form consortia in order to access resources ... Pretty much all of the experience of collective bodies of civil-society organisations suggests that when they are formed because of a shove from a donor, they struggle. If they are formed on the basis of the needs, priorities and wishes of the organisations that become their members, they are much more likely to thrive. So there is a problem with donors pushing organisations to form consortia (Richard Bennett, UK).

The disruptive effects of requirements for consortia-led approaches to humanitarian relief were also highlighted by another interviewee:

[Development cooperation agencies] always want you to work as part of a consortium. Basically, they want to deal with one person instead of several people for a big block grant. But this has disrupted how organisations respond to disasters.

In a consortium or alliance, you have to have a common way of implementing projects in relation to issues like movement or security. Taking security as an example — each agency will have a different security protocol; one will have unmarked vehicles, and others have a mandate to be protected by armed guards, or to have a highly visible brand... But in a consortium, you have to have a common understanding, which means that some part of the consortium has to give in and compromise. The compromise might be somewhere in the middle — or it might be dictated by the bigger agencies because it's easier to change the thirty per cent than the seventy per cent. But if we compromise on our approach, we are also compromising on our own long-term strategy.

Mandating consortia limits who can respond or submit a proposal. It's an approach that forces you into consortia even if you don't want them. And it creates an unfair disadvantage for local NGOs. For example, one requirement in a recent disaster-response situation was to have a UK-regulated bank account, and that limited those who could submit proposals to only like-minded agencies. If it's always the same ones getting the grants, it doesn't open the way to innovation (Allan A. Calma, Pakistan).

Harsh Jaitli suggested that DFID faces a choice in relation to its support for Indian NGOs:

DFID was for a long time a trusted partner of NGOs, with lots of projects in India. But now there is pressure to shift from aid to trade. There are two options: One is to abandon the aid sector and shift to trade; the second is not to abandon it but to do capacity-building so that the sector can survive (Harsh Jaitli, India).

Donor requirements have always been quite disruptive. Especially now, with the inclusion of aid in foreign affairs, there is a very real threat in terms of the politicisation of aid. Are new projects being approved because of actual needs, or because of some political agenda? When floods hit Pakistan in 2011, certain donors had pre-identified areas of response (for example, only related to health and livelihood, and only in certain provinces). We'd say: 'Why these areas, if we can show you from our assessments that the needs on the ground lie elsewhere as well?' We usually don't get an explanation (Allan A. Calma, Pakistan).

The short timeframe for project-based funding was singled out as a problem in disruptive change management. One interviewee highlighted the value of creating spaces where the differing needs of civil society and government can both be met. This too calls for longer-term programming:

Once you've created that space, the question then is how to enable them to move forward. This entails lots of dialogue. It is a long process, and ongoing. It requires lot of patience, and longer-term programming. If you go in for one year or two years, it doesn't have impact. The longer you stay, the better ... Change is a process. So a willingness to engage in longer-term projects is key, as is alignment with local priorities (Victor Orindi, Kenya).

More flexibility in how funding is applied could be of considerable assistance in managing disruptive change. Perhaps, according to Saverio Kratli, 'If producers have adapted by embedding variability into their ways of working, DFID would benefit from doing the same.' Another interviewee made the case for flexibility to be linked to organisational learning processes:

Donors often come in with prescriptive processes. But they need to be broad enough to allow for innovation and creativity, and to stop being too prescriptive in what they want. If you want to support change, you need to allow for failure. Let us learn from the failure (Victor Orindi, Kenya).

A lack of donor flexibility can have consequences all the way down the delivery chain. In Alda Salomão's example of a land intervention in Mozambique that required last-minute shifting of work plans, she explained that she had approached IIED staff asking for their input in the form of fieldwork. She was prepared to pay for their plane tickets and accommodations, but could not pay for their time. She realised only then that IIED staff themselves had challenges with flexibility:

I wrote to IIED and asked if they could go with us to the field to help us with the assessment. But IIED staff had no funding for this kind of flexibility. I know that it is important for us to have plans and budgeting; but for this type of work, if DFID and others are really committed to participatory governance — which means that civil society organisations are not only able to intervene by themselves, but also to rely on others for support as needed — then with the types of grants that they give, not only to us but to others around the world who work with us, this kind of high-level, flexible funding needs to be made available.

I'm promoting a disruptive change with regard to funding support and the use of intermediaries. DFID generally funds Mozambique civil society via intermediaries. But the use of intermediaries should be to provide technical backup to national NGOs. We do not need intermediaries to channel money for us (Alda Salomão, Mozambique).

As we have seen, developing innovation capabilities emerged as one key theme in our interviewees' responses to disruption, and also as a characteristic of effective disruptive change management. That has implications for donors, as Lina Villa-Córdoba noted:

Through this process of rapid growth at ARM, I see that there are some wider conditions in the development sector that need shifting and rethinking — that need disruption. Donors seem to want innovative solutions, but they won't finance things until you have a proof of concept. It becomes very hard to have innovation in the ways you deliver services, because the system tends to take you to the proven and traditional ways of doing things (Lina Villa-Córdoba, Colombia).

If donors want to strengthen innovation, says Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, they should support innovation from NGOs regardless of their geographical base:

We want the international cooperation agencies to be open to organisations that are innovative and bringing something different — looking at us based not on geopolitical thinking but on usefulness. We feel we have an advantage when it comes to contribution to solutions, and we'd like more people to look on that in a favourable way (Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Cameroon).

The evidence from our interviews is that not only do Southern NGOs possess an abundance of innovation capacity, but it is being actively nurtured by many of them, despite the barriers.

6

Conclusion

The development community thus far has largely treated disruptive changes as problems that are more effectively managed when simplified. Ideas of ‘complexity’ and ‘fitness for purpose’ or ‘future fitness’ have proven easy to conceptualise — but harder to operationalise, largely because barriers to change are deeply ingrained in the structure and organisational cultures of development organisations.

IIED’s Disruptive Change Initiative set out to explore how the concept of ‘disruptive change’ can be usefully applied in the field of development, and in particular how NGO leaders in low- and middle-income countries understand the sources and impacts of ‘disruption’. We asked what general and specific strategies have helped Southern NGOs to effectively manage, adapt, and innovate in the face of disruptive change. And we set out to understand how these disruptive change management stories could help the international development community to learn and adjust in order to most effectively address the challenges of disruptive change.

In this working paper, we have reflected on these questions based on the wealth of insights generated in interviews with twenty-three donor-savvy Southern NGO leaders. First (in Section 3), we explored their perception of ‘disruptive change’ itself. We saw how disruption can be seen differently from different actors’ perspectives — as negative, positive or something in-between; as both internally and externally driven; as a fact of life or an interruption of life as we know it.

These multiple interpretations of disruptive change are significant, because how disruption is framed internally affects how it is addressed at an organisational level. It is important to realize that disruptive change may accelerate rather than hamper development; disruption can be a potentially positive influence. How to ensure that this occurs — at least more often than not — is a key challenge for NGOs in both the North and the South, as well as for the funders who support them.

Section 3 also highlighted the foremost disruptors identified by interviewees, with two in particular standing out as distinctly disruptive and characteristic of Southern NGOs’ experiences: funding turbulence, and rapidly changing operating spaces for civil society. Indeed, the ‘usual culprit’ mega disruptors such as climate change, shifting demographics, or emerging technologies are often experienced as only secondary backdrops to the daily disruptive power of continually changing aid practices and national political will for supporting civil society.

Conversely, some of the more reactive Southern NGOs may nimbly deliver on changing donor, INGO, and government priorities, and can be very resourceful — but they may lack capacity to develop the organisational systems and innovation needed to chart their own futures in a disrupted world. This insight is noteworthy because it emphasises that addressing organisational capacity for disruption-readiness in the here and now can be a vital steppingstone to ‘future fitness’. Donors and INGOs could usefully reflect further on what blends of advocacy, partnership and financial support are most likely to deliver adaptative assistance that is also rich in innovation potential.

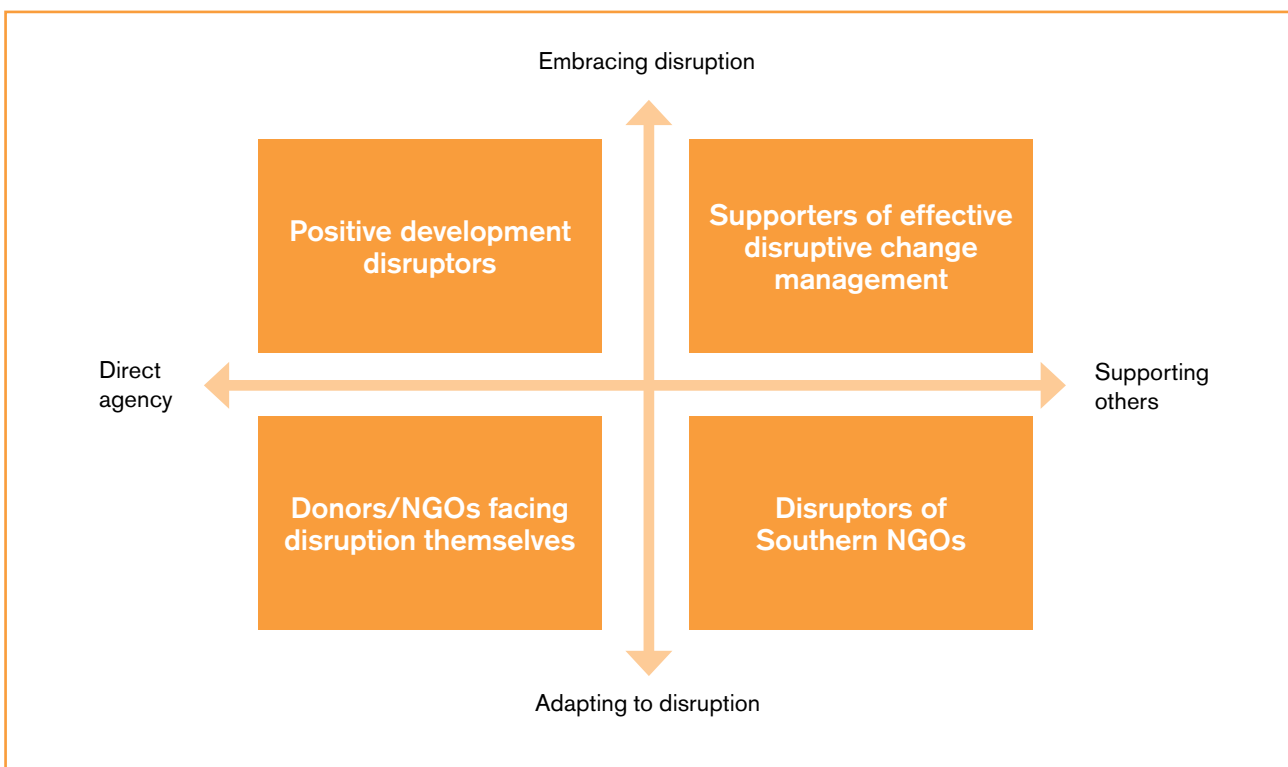
Section 4 shared interviewees' experiences managing disruptive change within their own organisations and developing systems for managing future changes. While the experiences of even our small sample of Southern leaders was quite diverse, key insights can be distilled from these as follows:

- A disruptive change management process may demand revision of mission and operations
- Decentralisation, nationalisation and relocation can be both 'response tools' and disruptors
- Effective change processes nurture and deploy internal skills
- Leadership culture can help or hinder positive change
- Organisational culture can determine disruptive change management outcomes
- Organisational capabilities for innovation can determine outcomes
- Networks and peer support can amplify the impact of disruptive change management
- Financing management of disruptive change calls for flexible funding and innovation, and
- Learning is a key resource for effective disruptive change management.

From these insights, we aimed to help the international development community to learn and adjust its approaches in order to most effectively address the challenges of disruptive change. To this end, in Section 5, we shared interviewees' messages and recommendations for both donors and INGOs. From these messages, we see donors and INGOs acting in four broad categories: in embracing disruption, they can act as supporters of effective disruptive change management in other organisations, and/or as positive development disruptors themselves. Conversely, when reactively adapting to disruption, they can become organisations facing disruption themselves, or as disruptors of Southern NGOs. These dynamics are visualised in Figure 1.

Donors may not be able to tackle systemic drivers of disruptive change, but they can more visibly support and advocate for the role of civil society in the international development community. They can also consciously aim to anticipate disruption in ways that: 1) push others to do the same, as positive development disruptors, with potential positive spillovers for development-conscious businesses, NGOs and wider ODA practice; 2) respond to disruption at an organisational level, to stimulate learnings about organisational responses within both their own

Figure 1: Four roles played by donors and INGOs



organisations and other development organisations; and 3) support effective disruptive change management by investing in ‘disruption entrepreneurs’ — people and organisations with scalable ideas that embrace disruption and might accelerate implementation of the SDGs.

Indeed, interviewees suggested creating pathways for more effective grantmaking and funding through support for ‘disruption-readiness’ (including via intermediaries such as INGOs). They exhorted donors to understand that funding is not the only avenue of support: advocacy and policy engagement also crucially affect the operating space for civil society. These learnings and actions could enable donors to minimise their impacts as negative disruptors of Southern NGOs.

By consciously becoming more attuned to Southern NGO experiences of current disruptions, INGOs can: 1) build a stronger evidence base for building ‘disruption-readiness’ for systemic drivers of disruptive change such as geopolitical shifts, climate change, urbanisation or resource scarcity; 2) embody solidarity by becoming better partners to Southern NGOs, and escalate advocacy for Southern civil society roles in delivering the SDGs, with potential positive spillovers for overall development outcomes, shared pursuit of change, INGO legitimacy, and INGO strategic planning for new ‘disintermediated’ roles (for example, through subcontracting technical support to Southern NGOs); and 3) support ‘disruption entrepreneurs’ through their programmes and research, and be prepared to share (and even procure) more scarce organisational development funds to assist Southern NGOs with strategy and learning. Many Southern NGOs already see innovation as a means to greater local ownership of regional or national development pathways; INGOs could, if invited, help Southern NGOs build the capacity to engage effectively with the tools of the contemporary mainstream innovation landscape and broker scalable outcomes.

Through these pathways, we see specifically that best practices to create ‘disruption-readiness’ might include some of the following approaches:

- **Continual learning processes.** These are a primary resource for effectively managing disruption. This fact has implications for donor/INGOs’ internal processes as well as for their support of Southern NGOs. INGOs and donors can improve their own ‘disruption-readiness’ by learning from Southern partners who live with disruption as a fact of life.
- **An evaluation framework for ‘disruption-readiness’.** This could inform more effective evaluation of development outcomes, including by INGO donors and partners. This could, for example, create space for more adaptive programming, incorporating more frequent quick-fire monitoring, learning and evaluation to provide insights for anticipatory disruptive change management.
- **Programming that specifically aims to leverage ‘disruption-readiness’ in the here and now.** This can also help to effectively manage change driven by mega disruptors. INGOs and donors can seek ways to link Southern NGO ‘disruption-readiness’ in the present with shared learning and foresight on preparing for mega disruptors. Climate change and urbanisation could be good starting points, as their implications can readily be connected to existing experiences of disruption.
- **Tendering, consortia, and grant arrangements.** These need to change if they are to minimise disruption to Southern NGOs. In acting as intermediaries between donors and Southern organisations, INGOs need to align their contracts with a commitment to sharing OD and learning resources with Southern partners. In addition, INGO business models and core funds need to allow more space for INGOs to provide contracted input to Southern NGOs at their request.

In addition to learning for donors and INGOs, this research has also provided a useful — if nascent — space for Southern NGO leaders to reflect on the concept of disruptive change and the effectiveness of their strategies to prepare for and engage with it. Interviewees gave their time generously, and often thanked us for the opportunity to step back and discuss these operational and strategic realities. Many were happy to participate in a follow-up phone conference to engage with each other, and were enthusiastic about the idea of a more structured network or platform for peer-to-peer learning on tools for disruption-readiness. IIED aims to build on this idea through future work.

Through sharing the initial insights from the research gathered in this working paper, we hope we have contributed to a constructive conversation about what managing disruption could mean for the global development community, including funders and NGOs in upper-, middle- and lower-income countries alike. We see this as an opportunity, ultimately, to find a positive path toward both setting strategic objectives and designing structural and functional systems for reaching them. The challenge, both now and for the medium term, is to ‘get good at disruption’ — which is increasingly a fact of life in the development sector.

Appendix A: NGO leaders' stories of disruptive change management

Managing change 1: Linking humanitarian relief and development

Allan A. Calma of Community World Service Asia noted that, in countries like Pakistan, whilst there is limited development funding, there is an abundance of humanitarian funding. Some NGOs are now beginning to redefine what was formerly a clear distinction between 'humanitarian relief' and 'development'. Allan Calma described how his organisation has managed this change process in practice:

When I joined the organisation, coming from a development background, there was a focus on helping to link humanitarian response to development work. The mandate of our disaster-management team was to bring affected populations back to a 'pre-disaster state'. But that could mean 'below the poverty line' — which isn't sustainable. So it's very important that development teams are able to take over the work after the recovery. The problem was that we couldn't do it effectively because, even when I was working on the development side [before joining CWS], we rarely crossed paths. It's just a different mode of working. So one disruption was that the humanitarian and the development teams were pushed into having to deal with each other. That took a lot of discussions; there was a lot of push-back. No one thought it could work out.

The development team said that the humanitarian team 'spoiled' beneficiaries — requiring only minimal contributions from the community itself — so that when the development team came in, they could not effectively manage their project. So we had to make changes. For example, in the humanitarian department, we had to focus on early recovery and rehabilitation so that it set the scene for development. We had to work on establishing village communities. And then, looking at livelihood programmes, we had to go beyond the provision of inputs to capacity-building, using local leadership to build programmes.

Previously, even with simple distribution of agricultural outputs, the style was, 'Buy seeds, buy fertilisers, and distribute them to everyone.' But we had to think about how to involve the community, and it became a voucher scheme. When a local village community is involved, they can carry on after you leave. So as well as providing a clear transition strategy, that made it a lot easier for the development team to then take it on.

In the past, donors weren't very flexible — for example, even asking for a distinction to be drawn between 'emergency' and 'development' toilets. But now there is a bit more flexibility. The humanitarian team is able to secure funding for development projects. That makes it easier for the development team to subsequently take those projects on.

Managing change 2: From rural development to sustainable agriculture

From Pakistan, Shahid Zia describes the challenges of shifting the thematic focus and practices of a regionally grounded rural-development NGO in Pakistan. He himself was the 'disruptor' in this case.

In 1999, I received an offer to lead Sungi Development Foundation, a national NGO working in mountain areas of Pakistan, as its executive director... Sungi at that time had 180–200 staff members, and an annual budget of 40–50 million Pakistani rupees (about US\$380,000–480,000) ... I had previously been leading a national campaign on preserving farmers' rights to save seeds with SDPI (Sustainable Development Policy Institute).

The first disruption was that I replaced an executive director who had been hired away as minister for rural development at the federal level — an indication of how well Sungi was rated in the national context. The outgoing executive director was also the organisation's founder. He had developed it along the lines of community development and community organisation, and campaigned for that rural-development model. But Sungi wasn't campaigning or taking positions on issues like the WTO and trade agreements, which were being negotiated at that time.

There was a disruptive change process, in effect, because the previous director had developed all the programmes to support [his own vision of] rural development. As a new leader, I was trying to bring in more international issues. The challenge was that my predecessor had selected the staff, who were not well-qualified, because he wanted to train them from the beginning in his own philosophy of rural development.

It was hard to replace staff, or move them to different positions whilst they were in senior management positions. And that was hard to manage for a new leader seeking to give a new face to the organisation, so that it was not only defending farmers but also part of the international struggles to save farmers rights, and advocacy with organisations like the WTO.

The second disruptive change was around bringing more sustainable agriculture to Sungi. I faced internal resistance — staff had only been trained in creating rural infrastructure such as latrines or drinking-water supplies — and I felt we needed to have a larger vision, and develop the kind of infrastructure that can help communities to avail themselves of the opportunities. So it's not just about a case of water and rural roads and latrines as the necessities of life. My thinking was that if we developed the communities to grab development opportunities, they would be able to afford latrines, drinking-water supplies, and so on, themselves. That was a change in the development thinking of the organisation.

It took me almost four years to develop an organic farming programme with capacity to engage in international campaigns, and a development philosophy to follow whilst we were doing the local development and improvement work.

For example: When visiting one development project, the farmer was using an animal-driven well to irrigate his land. Sungi offered him a loan to shift to motorised pumping. Staff showed me that as their big achievement, and I was saying that that's not a big achievement — that it was taking his farm into more trouble, because the recharge rate in that area was very slow. The groundwater level was now going down, and at some point his well would run dry. When he was pumping water with an animal-driven well, he was only pumping very little water, and using it very efficiently. He adapted the farm to use the expanded water supply — and suddenly found that he wasn't getting enough water from the well. Second, there was no local diesel or petrol supply, so he was spending time going to the city to get fuel for the pump, which was an additional cost.

So I found [myself in an] organisation talking about sustainable agriculture whilst the staff had no idea what 'sustainable' means ... One programme was talking about 'sustainable' whilst another was offering loans for pesticides and fertilisers; and the organisation's training programme was offering trainings that weren't aligned with the organisation. To make the change, we started with sessions bringing all the programmes together; we had combined trainings on sustainable development and what it means; how all the programmes should work together, and so on. New staff were inducted as needed. Then we needed to have board and staff in [skill] areas as needed. That was an internal adjustment.

As the former executive director was also the founder, he was also on the board. But he never, ever interfered in the changes I was bringing in or the way I was managing the change. He was quite supportive. Sometimes I approached him to discuss my strategy, because he had longer experience of working with certain individuals, for example, and he was able to share his experience with me.

On the donor side, they were shifting their policies in relation to programme or geographic focus. When the donor focus changed, the organisation struggled to find funds; they had to forget about their own focus and go where the donors were offering the money. So I started to raise these issues with the donors: When you change your funding policy, it's easy for you to tell us that you have shifted focus; but that often means that funded organisations have to adjust their staff. If you have someone who has worked for ten to fifteen years on one thing, you cannot expect him to move to a new project area altogether tomorrow. You will have to make changes — terminate this person; hire new staff ... The organisation has to keep changing with each change in donor policy.

This is OK for organisations working as service providers, but not for an organisation, for instance, with a position on organic or ecological agriculture — and then a new food-security project becomes about distributing fertilisers/seeds/pesticides. So they are campaigning for farmers to reduce pesticide use, but then expect the same organisation to be distributing those things elsewhere. How can that same organisation tell farmers that pesticide use is bad for their own health, and also the health of their soils — when farmers can see that the organisation is offering loans for pesticides and [chemical] fertilisers? And in geographic areas where Sungi was working, other organisations in the area started projects offering free pesticides and fertilisers. It's not just about control of your own organisation; there are also issues about donors not coordinating — when one NGO in the area is offering free fertilisers, and I'm trying to train farmers to shift away from fertiliser use ...

At Sungi, we were successful in forming a donor-coordination committee ... that met regularly at least twice a year ... All the donors supporting the organisation [gained a] deeper understanding of Sungi's development philosophy, and also tended to agree on a common support framework.

Managing change 3: Disrupted funding in a start-up

Shahid Zia moved on from Sungi Development Foundation (discussed above) to set up an entirely new NGO, Lokh Sanj Foundation. His early experience with this small start-up gave him new insights into how donors themselves can be disruptors.

Whilst I was successful in developing programmes within Sungi, it was a challenge to work only in one geographic area that's not a main agricultural area of the country. The board was reluctant to allow us to spread to other parts of the country, so I set up a new organisation, Lokh Sanj Foundation.

Initially, I was working alone for a few months, without any donor funds. I started working on organic rice, wheat and vegetables in Punjab, and in a few villages where I had good connections. I formed some farmers' groups and got started without any staff.

Then I got a very small research grant from IDRC Canada. For that project I hired a couple of employees. We were to document the uncultivated plants that people were consuming as food, and carry out a biodiversity research programme. That was for one year; when it ended, there was no funding to support them, and there was a gap of about six months.

Then I got another grant from the Finnish embassy, also for one year, for an organic programme at community level. But it was a very small grant, for just a few villages. Their sustainable-development advisor visited the programme, and was quite happy; then someone from the administration side visited the programme and questioned the capacity of our finance person, because at that time we only had one computer in the organisation, and didn't have a computerised system in place; all of our financial reports were manually managed. For that reason they refused to fund us later. That was really a shock — that they were unable to understand that we were in a very early stage, and had no funds for a PC. The funding we were getting was not enough to buy finance software. Not only did they discontinue the project, they didn't consider our proposals after that. That showed a lack of understanding on the part of the donor — expecting something beyond the capacity of a new organisation.

It's important to know that when you start a new organisation there are many different kinds of challenges in the beginning. Donors expect you to demonstrate capacity for a large project. But you have to have funds to build that capacity. So it's a chicken-and-egg story ...

Then Pakistan [suffered a] big earthquake in 2005. We provided food support to communities in affected areas. We were approached by some donors to ask if we could help with service provision, of food, drinking water and other necessities like blankets. But I was thinking that we shouldn't just provide these things. Their agricultural systems, livestock, tools — all of those were gone, and that needed long-term support. The [donor] compromised, because of the scale of the tragedy. And we compromised on our development strategy. We distributed blankets and corrugated sheets to help build houses. Then we got funds including not only early-recovery funding but a long-term livelihood component. We built a long-term livelihood programme in two phases, from early recovery to long-term rehabilitation of livelihoods.

Again, when we were almost in the middle of that project, donors decided to discontinue support, and we were left with no funds to continue what we had started there. Our own funds were insufficient to continue, and we lost experienced staff. We got funds from another donor to continue work in that area — but in the gap we had lost our experienced local staff. So we had to hire and train new staff — a big challenge for the organisation.

Most of our funds come from international NGOs ... They have their own challenges. Much of the post-disaster funding is for early recovery, and then their funding reduces for the longer-term, so they reduce [their funding to us]. It's understandable. There are many international NGOs specialised in relief and early recovery. For example, Oxfam is considered a leading relief organisation, and there are others like Islamic Relief that have major relief programmes. But development organisations like ours are the ones who can help from early recovery to rehabilitation.

[Pakistan suffered another disaster in 2010.] Again, we negotiated with our donors, [saying] that we're not interested in helping with just relief. Our specialisation is from early recovery to long-term rehabilitation. We got some funds for early recovery and rehabilitation. But again, because an international NGO had challenges travelling into that area, they decided to drop it for their livelihood work. That was a big change, and a challenge for us, because we'd started our programme with communities. The programme should have continued for five years, but after one year the donor decided to drop that area because of travel problems. The government required them to get permission, so that it could arrange special security to avoid a mishap. The donor NGO argued that without free access they couldn't work there ... This presented real challenges for us. We scaled down our programme to the minimum possible.

The INGO donor suggested that we work in KPK, which was also affected, but drop the work in Punjab — in effect, to move wherever they asked us to move. That kind of adjustment is almost impossible for national NGOs.

Managing change 4: From orphanages to community engagement

Ethiopian NGO Jerusalem Children and Community Development Organisation (www.jeccdoethiopia.org) was founded at the time of the 1984 famine, in collaboration with the Anglican Church. Until 1994, the organisation was running orphanages. Then it decided to change direction and focus on community engagement. Today, JeCCDO has around 150 staff, and an annual budget of US\$4.5 million.

Executive Director Mulugeta Gebru described the process of change:

The decision to shift from orphanages to community engagement was a major disruptive change for our organisation. Staff and board members held an internal dialogue: are we doing right by the children? They lacked social skills, a value system, love and affection. They needed exposure to the community; they needed to observe and engage in what community members did in the struggle to survive. We said we needed to do something about this gap.

It was not easy to get the board to agree, or for the staff to share the vision. And not even easy for society, because many people felt that institutions were more comfortable for the children than living in the community. It took a lot of effort and convincing on my part, at every level. I started with management, then the board, then the rest of the staff, then the children. They all resisted. My focus was always on the children. I said, 'If these were your children, would you want them to live in these orphanages?' None of them said yes.

Once everyone in the organisation shared the vision, we worked with the children to help them engage their birth communities, to try to trace their heritage; to go to churches and mosques, etc. When they went there, they were welcomed. They became excited, and they gathered information about living relatives. They owned the process and fed the information back into the community. We started dialogue with these communities about reintegrating the children. It was a tiresome, tedious, difficult process. But this is how you make a really significant change. These children have grown up now and are grateful to us. They recognise in hindsight that this was a good vision.

Staff in the orphanages were unskilled, so we had to change ninety per cent of the staff to do completely different work from what they did before. The orphanage buildings became training centres. Through dialogue, we helped them to see that there were different opportunities for them, and to give them attractive packages to transition to other livelihoods, such as starting small businesses. It was difficult, but I made sure that the dialogue was always about the children's needs, so that it was easier for people to accept.

On top of all of these challenges, we had to build a new organisation, because our current systems and processes didn't match our needs going forward. We had to be open to developing new knowledge and new skills. Team-building was important; I had to build teams that really promoted the process. I had to convince the board to help me move that process forward. We also had to convince the donors: How will these changes benefit communities? And the government: How will this change benefit the country?

I had to use strong communication and negotiation skills. And we had to design smart projects. We brought in advisors, and had to just work really hard and believe in what we were doing — believe in the vision and push for it at every level.

JeCCDO's goals now are to become a local grantmaker, helping local CSOs to grow; and to decentralise their own work.

Managing change 5: Reshaping membership and business model

Ousainou Ngum, chief executive of ACORD, headquartered in Nairobi, reflected on the process through which his organisation's business model and membership structure shifted during a disruptive process of change from a Northern NGO consortium (whose members constituted ACORD's 'members') to an African regional NGO from 2003–2006.

The London structure used to be funded by a levy of fourteen per cent on projects. When we moved to Nairobi, donors and partners [asked,] 'Why are we paying fourteen per cent now?' We didn't have solid communications, which allowed people to think whatever they thought, and this led to significant dysfunction.

As part of the conceptualisation of the new ACORD, there was a recognition that we needed to move away from the forty-seven existing projects, into about twelve area programmes. There was an ideology behind this, a shift from programme delivery to advocacy. So the way to do that conversion was to step back and look at common issues. The mistake, rather than allowing that to happen naturally, was to impose a structure on it ... that was put in place without regard to available financial resources ... As you can imagine, everyone was trying to poke holes into what everyone else was doing. It's a very recognisable effect, if you don't prepare people. And everything they wanted to do had to have a committee ... for tea-buying, for paper-buying! So basically, nothing worked.

Clearly, a new organisation needed to be structured and resourced, and made nimble — loose enough to adapt and respond to change. We then said we needed to look at the head office [doing the] programming work itself rather than levying for survival ... And that's how we conceptualised the pan-African programme. At the same time, we needed to ensure that country programmes informed our policy and advocacy work, and vice versa.

After six months, the executive director was asked to leave ... and I was asked to assume that role in the interim. But ... that decision was challenged. The board succumbed to the pressure, and offered me a six-month contract followed by an evaluation with staff. In essence, they said, 'If the staff all says he can do it, ... that's OK' ... I didn't want to be disempowered by that; I just thought, 'I am going to do what is right.'

So I negotiated for a Pan-African programme, and an institutional-development programme. I went back to our members and said, 'If you're serious, you have to ensure we have capacity to work — and we may, as part of that process, have to restructure and remove most of these people in Nairobi.' In the end, I had to say this in a three-

page memo to the board. There was some negotiation ... Most of those people had been drivers of change; they had been there for twenty to thirty years ... By this time, various partners and donors were complaining. And that's natural, because no one was concentrating on the projects at this stage ... The income was going down.

As a Southern organisation, we wanted to prepare ourselves to respond to big calls [for tender], with robust governance, and internal and external accountability mechanisms. And we also had to make the organisational systems nimble, so that decision-making was fast and turnaround swift ... The problem was that we didn't have our own resources for that. With our new institutional-development programme, we asked [our members] for a pot of £1M so that we could have the right systems, structures, and capacity in place to respond to the new vision. Our 2006–2010 strategic plan set that out. We got around £600K.

At that point, in 2006, we still had a board made up of member-organisation nominees. But those of us with more of a private-sector background said, 'Hang on a minute — when you call a general assembly, the supposed members don't come ... Who are the real members?' We weren't getting quorums, and realised we needed to look at how to craft an identity consistent with the change, and governance mechanisms consistent with that.

We decided to convert the board to be both board and assembly, and to aim toward gradually having an assembly of 25–30 members and a board of 9–12 members. We were quite aggressive in inviting assembly members. But all of these were as individuals [not members], from NGOs, beneficiaries — people with ideas. And today we have twenty-five assembly members and ten board members (only three of them with institutions historically connected with ACORD).

During the period of dysfunction, most of the historical members didn't say, 'We're no longer members'; they just started funding other partners. There was no formal understanding of what constitutes 'membership'. By 2006, the few still engaging with us were asked, 'Do you still wish to be members, or not?' Of those remaining, four said 'No, we want a different relationship' ... And three expressly wanted to remain. To this day only three members remain. We have to call them 'members', and we have designed a governance structure that entitles them to be called members.

Managing change 6: Growing ambitions when the value proposition demands it

In just four years the Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM), based in Colombia, has grown from a team of four people to a multi-office organisation with a staff of thirty-five, a budget of US\$2 million, and an international reach. ARM works for the sustainable development of Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM), which has a worldwide network of experts and partners. Executive Director Lina Villa-Córdoba oversaw this rapid transition, and describes a people-centred approach that is grounded in a clear medium-term vision and organisational story but at the same time allows space for risk-taking:

We realised that we had a good value proposition, and that we needed to expand in order to deliver on that value proposition. The challenge was that while delivering on the outputs themselves you also have to deliver a transformation in the organisation.

To do this, we started with the understanding that you need to have a story of where you want to be in three to five years. It is impossible to see [much] beyond three years because everything changes every year. When I arrived, our organisation was managed very much like a project. Everything was managed on a log-frame, with work plans and deliverables. I also found a great asset in the networks and stories that had been developed, and in the professional work that had been delivered. Yet we were not considering the growth and governance of the organisation.

We said, 'We are going to draft a strategy setting out where we want to be in three years, and how we are going to get there.' This process puts the focus not just on outcomes but on assets, profits, incomes, etc. We adopted a balanced scorecard as a management tool. This helped us focus on doing things right while also looking into ourselves.

We then had to convince the board to move forward on this. There was some sense that it was a little crazy to be bringing in new staff and forming such high ambitions. The risk was that some people would lose a job, or that we would not deliver on our objectives. But you have to be willing to take the risk. If you don't, you aren't

delivering on your objectives, and people aren't employed at all. Creating this kind of organisational change is about being ready to live in a chaotic situation all of the time — understanding that everything is risky. I tell my staff that we don't control everything, so we just have to relax and enjoy the ride. If we don't, it is going to be very painful.

After that, it is a matter of selling yourself. You are selling a reality; you are selling a story. And then the story happens. This is a necessary thing for a social enterprise that needs partners — it is about sharing a story of possible change that people can engage with. In my experience, it has been very much about value ... If you are reading the environment and are able to keep your value proposition, over time, there isn't a real reason to worry.

People are at the centre of this. We spend a lot of time listening to people, and reading the environment, to really understand how we can continue to add value. When I started working, I was young and single, with no kids and no family. I didn't care about how much I earned. Other staff were similarly unattached, focused on the goal, and surviving. But as people start growing with the organisation, you have to learn to support those people and their ambitions, to provide a stable and competitive salary and a 'home' for them.

Another essential element of creating change is about adopting simplified systems, like larger organisations have, which allow you to do things on a small scale but on a really professional level. For example, we aren't a large organisation by most accounts, but we have put a modest customer-management system in place. This allows me to keep track of people in the organisation, to see what is happening and make strategic decisions about them. It also helps to continually feed back learning from the individual into the organisation. [When staff turnover happens], we have to be able to ensure that the learning doesn't leave with them.

Appendix B:

List of interviewees

NGO leaders

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh

Richard Brubaker, Founder, Hands On, China

Allan A. Calma, Deputy Director, Disaster Management Program, Community World Service Asia, Pakistan

Mariteuw Chimère Diaw, Director General, African Model Forests Network Secretariat, Cameroon

Amacodou Diouf, President, Conseil des Organisations Nongouvernementales d'Appui Au Développement (CONGAD), Senegal

Mulugeta Gebru, Executive Director, Jerusalem Children and Community Development Organisation (JeCCDO), Ethiopia

Harsh Jaitli, Chief Executive Officer, Voluntary Action Network India (VANI), India

Daisy Kambalame, Country Coordinator Malawi, IDH — The Sustainable Trade Initiative, Malawi

Nicole Leotaud, Executive Director, Caribbean National Resources Institute (CANARI), Trinidad and Tobago

Toshi Nakamura, Co-founder and Executive Director, Kopernik, Indonesia

Ousainou Ngum, Executive Director, Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD), Kenya

Faith Nwadishi, Executive Director, Koyeneum Immalah Foundation; Coordinator, Publish What You Pay Coalition in Nigeria, Nigeria

Alda Salomão, Director General, Centro Terra Viva (CTV), Mozambique

James Taylor, Former Director, Community Development Resource Association (CDRA), South Africa

Masood Ul Mulk, Chief Executive Officer (along with two colleagues who also joined the interview: Atif Zeeshan Rauf and Aftab Ahmad), Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP), Pakistan

Lina Villa-Córdoba, Executive Director, Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM), Colombia

Shahid Zia, Managing Director, Rural Business Development Centre (RBDC), Pakistan

Consultants

Richard Bennett, Independent Consultant, UK

Rick James, Intrac, UK

Saverio Kratli, Consultant; Editor, *Nomadic Peoples*, UK

Chiku Malunga, Director, Capacity Development Consultants (CADECO), Malawi

Kate Simpson, Head of Development, Wasafiri, UK

Others

Alfredo del Valle, Professor, Ceres Centre, Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaiso

Victor Orindi, Climate Change Advisor, Arid and Semi-Arid Lands Secretariat, Ministry of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, Kenya

Youba Sokona, Special Advisor on Sustainable Development, the South Centre, Switzerland

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Acronyms

ACORD	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
ARM	Alliance for Responsible Mining
CADECO	Capacity Development Consultants
CANARI	Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
CDRA	Community Development Resource Association
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
ICSC	International Civil Society Centre
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
JeCCDO	Jerusalem Children and Community Development Organisation
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development /Development Assistance Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SRSP	Sarhad Rural Support Programme
VANI	Voluntary Action Network India

This working paper summarises a series of interviews with non-governmental organisation (NGO) leaders in middle- and low-income countries, and highly experienced development practitioners. The interviews provide insights into how NGOs in the global South are addressing disruption in their external and internal operating environments, and their unique perspective on what, in practice, ‘disruptive change’ means to them. The aim of this paper is to share the principal insights with donors and international NGOs to help inform funding and development strategies and operating practices, and enable them to more effectively support Southern NGOs facing uncertain and turbulent operating environments daily, while minimising the potential of those organisations to act as ‘disruptors’ themselves.

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International Institute for Environment and Development
80-86 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8NH, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055
email: info@iied.org
www.iied.org

Funded by:



This research was funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government.



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