

Reflections on the first session of Dialogue on International Relationship, 5th of March 2009

During the first meeting we discussed 5 central themes related to international relationships, namely:

- Nature of the relationship
- Organisation of the sector
- Cultural diversity
- Roles
- History/ colonialism

Discussing these central themes with colleagues from other organisations inspired even more questions afterwards. International relationships have so many dimensions. It made me wonder whether the Southern NGOs participating in the Dialogue are faced with similar issues. I wonder how they see 'us'.

Below some of my personal reflections and some ideas that jumped to my mind. It is much easier to ask questions than to answer them...

1) Nature of the relationship

- whose project is it? in the "North" organisations tend to refer to projects as "their" projects, what does this say about the ownership of the "Southern" partner?
- to what extent should "Northern" and "Southern" partners influence each other's organisational structure if this structure affects the success of the project in a negative way? Are we meddling in internal affairs?
- why do we idealise the term "partnership" and tend to name all forms of cooperation "partnership"?

2) The organisation of the sector

- How does the presence of field offices of the "Northern" partner affect the relationship with local partners?
- Are field offices in competition with strong "Southern" partners? Do they strengthen or hinder local partners?

3) Cultural diversity

- how important is the concept of "trust" in the development field? how do strict reporting conditions affect the level of trust between both partners?

4) Roles

- what is more important the process or the final result? if we focus mainly on the result, does this prevent us from learning in the long run?

5) History/ colonialism

- to what extent is our day-to-day work influenced by our colonial past?

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