INCLUDE

Report Inception workshop, 'New roles of CSOs for Inclusive Development; Assumptions underlying *Dialogue and Dissent*'

Friday 15 December 2017, 9:30–16:30 hours

Introduction

On Friday, 15 December, the first workshop for the research programme 'New roles of CSOs for Inclusive Development; Assumptions underlying *Dialogue and Dissent*' took place at Leiden University. The workshop brought together all of the parties involved in the Assumptions programme to create a common understanding of the set-up, goals and expected outcomes. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), NWO-WOTRO and INCLUDE introduced themselves and explained their role in the programme. The six research groups also presented their projects and the different aspects of their research proposals, as well as the connection with the overall research programme. During the introductions, critical questions were asked and remarks made about the different elements of the Assumptions programme. In the last part of the workshop, cross-linkages and differences between the studies were explored in an interactive way. This allowed research groups to look critically at their own and other proposals, while at the same time gathering new insights to inform their next steps in the programme.

Workshop objectives and roles of the parties

The participants were welcomed by the Chair of the INCLUDE Steering Group, who stressed the **objectives of this first workshop**: to exchange information on the set-up, introduce the different parties involved and the aim of the programme; share insights into the different studies conducted by the six research groups; and engage in a dialogue about the cross-linkages between the different studies conducted at the programme level.

The **MFA** shared its motivation for engaging in the Assumptions programme, which will serve as input for the learning trajectory in the Dialogue and Dissent framework and for the new policy framework design in 2019. The research programme will scrutinize the assumptions underlying the Theory of Change in the framework. The Dialogue and Dissent framework draws on both the social transformation approach and the managerial approach. It tackles different challenges through its Theory of Change, focus on outcomes (instead of outputs), bottom-up structure, direct funding to civil society organizations (CSOs), and strategic partnerships, among other things. However, at the executing level the logic of the social transformation and managerial approaches can conflict. The proposed research navigates these tensions by learning about the role of CSOs, how the aid system strengthens/weakens this role, and how the worldwide trend of shrinking civic space affects this role. Therefore, the MFA will take a closer look at their own assumptions and the underlying processes that take place (or do not take place) in the Dialogue and Dissent framework through the six research projects.

NWO-WOTRO also explained its role in the Assumptions programme, namely: the management of funding, the day-to-day management of the programme, supporting the Programme Committee and International Advisory Committee, and the monitoring and evaluation of (intermediate) results. NWO-WOTRO should be contacted by the research groups in case of any changes to the research projects (including to staffing and budget) and for questions about monitoring and evaluation. The most important aspects of monitoring and evaluation is to assess the societal and scientific relevance of the research.

The role of **INCLUDE** is to make the knowledge and findings generated by the Assumptions programme available and accessible to policy stakeholder in a comprehensive way (e.g. as syntheses and by making linkages). INLCUDE encourages mutual exchange between researchers and policy stakeholders by linking the knowledge generated to

wider academic, policy and practice discussions. Various activities will contribute to this mutual exchange: four workshops, a webpage, several blogs, two synthesis papers, a knowledge base, INCLUDE's Question of the Week, visual communications, joint publications, and three lunch meetings at the MFA.

The different **research groups** also presented themselves and their research proposals. The outlines of their studies can be found on the [website of INCLUDE](website).

Highlights of the discussions

- Some research groups showed concern about the (tight) **timeline** and payments within the programme. These technical concerns will be looked at by NWO-WOTRO in consultation with the MFA.

- The concept of **autonomy** in relation to CSOs was raised several times. The main question was 'autonomy for whom?'. In relation to CSOs, autonomy means that they are able to set their own agenda and priorities. Ideally, this would mean that CSOs are strategically able to set their own agenda and use their funding in a way that they perceive is meaningful. However, this may be too idealistic, because CSOs are strategic units on their own and require a certain amount of funding to be able to operate. This requires a critical approach by the research groups to explore what is most important for CSOs: guaranteed funding or setting their own agenda? The concept of autonomy can be very complex, so research groups should take this into account and make their definition of the concept explicit in their projects. The Theory of Change also mentions the concept of autonomy, so this can be a starting point in defining the concept within the different studies.

- Concerns were raised about the explicit reference to the political role of CSOs. The Assumptions programme focuses on the political role of CSOs, however, in most contexts, organizations do not represent themselves having a 'political' role. Openly emphasizing the political role of CSOs might be sensitive and hinder their ongoing research activities. This **sensitivity** should be taken into account because any hindrance or safety issue concerning the research activities should be avoided. Therefore, more neutral terms will be used in external communications about the Assumptions programme. INCLUDE will take this matter up with the research groups. Input from the research groups is welcome in adapting the titles and descriptions of their projects.

- **Legitimacy** plays a major role in all of the research studies. Legitimacy for a CSO means the justification and value of the CSO in their environment. Similar to autonomy, it contains many complexities and levels, so it is not easy to grasp the meaning of the concept. The legitimacy of a CSO can be gauged through the eyes of the communities it serves, but also through the eyes of other (key) actors in the field. The concept of legitimacy is closely linked to authority. It is important to ask what creates legitimacy and which stakeholders decide on the legitimacy of a group or organization. What contributes to an organization being considered a legitimate actor is very difficult to identify. More questions were raised to dig deeper into the concept of legitimacy: What is legitimacy? Legitimacy for/by whom? What are the different sources of legitimacy? What are the conditions for legitimacy? Are there possible layers of legitimacy that need to be considered? Does legitimacy differ between or within actors/levels? How does legitimacy relate to representation? How can policy contribute to legitimacy? It was agreed that the concept of legitimacy needs further discussion among the research groups. The concept should be clearly operationalized by the research groups to make it a suitable concept with which to work.

- The **methodology** chosen by the different research groups needs more elaboration and concepts should be precisely defined. The Assumptions programme asks for a literature review and empirical research; both parts of the research should be thoroughly explained. Research groups are encouraged to look

- critically at the skills and capacity within their research teams, as well as the scope and ambition of their research. Both should be taken into account when deciding on the methodology to be used.
- Every study will have to reflect on issues of **causality**. However, in the short time period allowed for the research projects (18 months) and with the proposed methodologies, it will be hard to identify cause and effect, because there are so many other (possible) variables influencing the context and outcomes of the activities. Researchers should be aware of this and reflect on the best possible way to address it. Approaches can be built on what is available in the literature already, which can be used to guide the research design.
- The **development discourse** should not be overlooked in the study settings. How do you encourage organizations/interviewees to open up without reproducing the development discourse? During the discussions it was recognized that there is a clear gap between the language of a researcher and the language of a CSO member. This gap should be acknowledged by the different studies and bridged using different approaches. A potential contribution would be to use storytelling. Storytelling methods might let actors speak for themselves. Relevant to this discussion is the definition of CSOs and community based organizations (CBOs). The research groups should clearly define the operationalization of these organizations, while considering the communities and contexts in which they work.
- A practical suggestion is to **exchange literature** by sharing references in a standardized Excel sheet. This suggestion will be followed up by the INCLUDE Secretariat. At the request of the research groups, an extra workshop outside the regular Assumptions programme is being organized. In this workshop, the research groups will take the lead and discuss running issues (e.g. the literature review, causality, legitimacy, autonomy, etc.). This **extra workshop** will be held in Utrecht on 22 February from 13:00 to 16:30 hours. Another practical suggestion is to share knowledge cross-country, as well as cross-team, to encourage collaboration among the research groups. This will be taken up by the research groups themselves.

Concluding remarks

The MFA emphasized the importance of keeping in mind the policy relevance of the research. There is a need for evidence on the Dialogue and Dissent policy framework, and research groups can generate this with their findings. Besides providing evidence, the research groups must also generate analytical frameworks and frame the major issues relating to the policy framework. The analytical framework is connected to the empirical research and together these will provide input for the new policy framework in 2019.

In the coming months, policy dialogues will be created that go beyond the research projects. The Assumptions programme will involve meetings and facilitate the exchange of ideas and the sharing of perspectives. Key to the research programme is the synergy between the six research projects and the linkages with CSOs on the ground. The combination of activities and (sharing) knowledge will make policy relevance both a process and an outcome of the Assumptions programme.

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