WORK: NO CHILD'S BUSINESS

ADVANCING RESEARCH IN CSO PARTNERSHIPS

Localization as a way forward

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PREFACE

This guide was commissioned by the Work: No Child's Business programme, an international Alliance of UNICEF Netherlands, Save the Children Netherlands, the Stop Child Labour coalition, and many partner organizations in six countries. It is the result of a study carried out to help the programme support research by organizations in the programme countries, and to do so in a way that advances localization.

We would like to thank the WNCB programme for supporting this study and, the WNCB Research working group members for their guidance and reflections. Many thanks also to the different staff members in Jordan, India, and Uganda who have taken the time to share their experiences, reflections, and viewpoints. This has been extremely valuable.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has become widely accepted that the use of evidence is essential for improving development policies, programmes and practice and the call for evidence-based working in development has grown increasingly louder. As a result, many civil society organizations (CSOs) have started to invest in research in the context of their programme, sometimes also seeking to strengthen the research capacities of organizations involved and creating opportunities to do research within CSO partnerships. However, research opportunities within CSO partnerships are often skewed, with most of the funding and decision-making power resting in the Global North, leaving Southern-based organizations often in a position of implementing a donor-defined research agenda.

Capacities of Southern-based organizations are in this regard often approached from a deficit perspective, in which Southern organizations are deemed to lack the necessary expertise to conduct high-quality research and ‘need their capacities built’ by their Northern counterparts. This approach to CSO research severely limits the space for Southern-based CSOs to work from their own contextual understandings and locally-defined knowledge questions and delegitimizes research that Southern organizations can do, thereby disqualifying relevant, contextual knowledge and capacities.

Furthermore, by failing to acknowledge the tensions emerging from different perspectives on knowledge and a lack of appreciation for more informal approaches to research, CSO partnerships run the risk of becoming exclusionary and disconnected from local needs and realities[1].

Especially for CSOs that see themselves as intermediaries between different actors in the development process, and as brokers of knowledge and expertise, such as international NGOs carrying out multi-country development programmes, it is critical to step back and address questions of power and practices associated with the production of knowledge. Based on critical and collective reflection, organizations can address these power imbalances in order to support research that advances the quality of programmes, while being locally led and locally relevant.

This guide was developed to help civil society organizations move forward with this. Rooted in an analysis of the perspectives and experiences of staff interviewed in three programme countries in the Work: No Child’s Business programme (running 2019-2024), the guide offers principles for advancing research through localization, pathways for change, and conversation starters to explore opportunities and ways forward together.

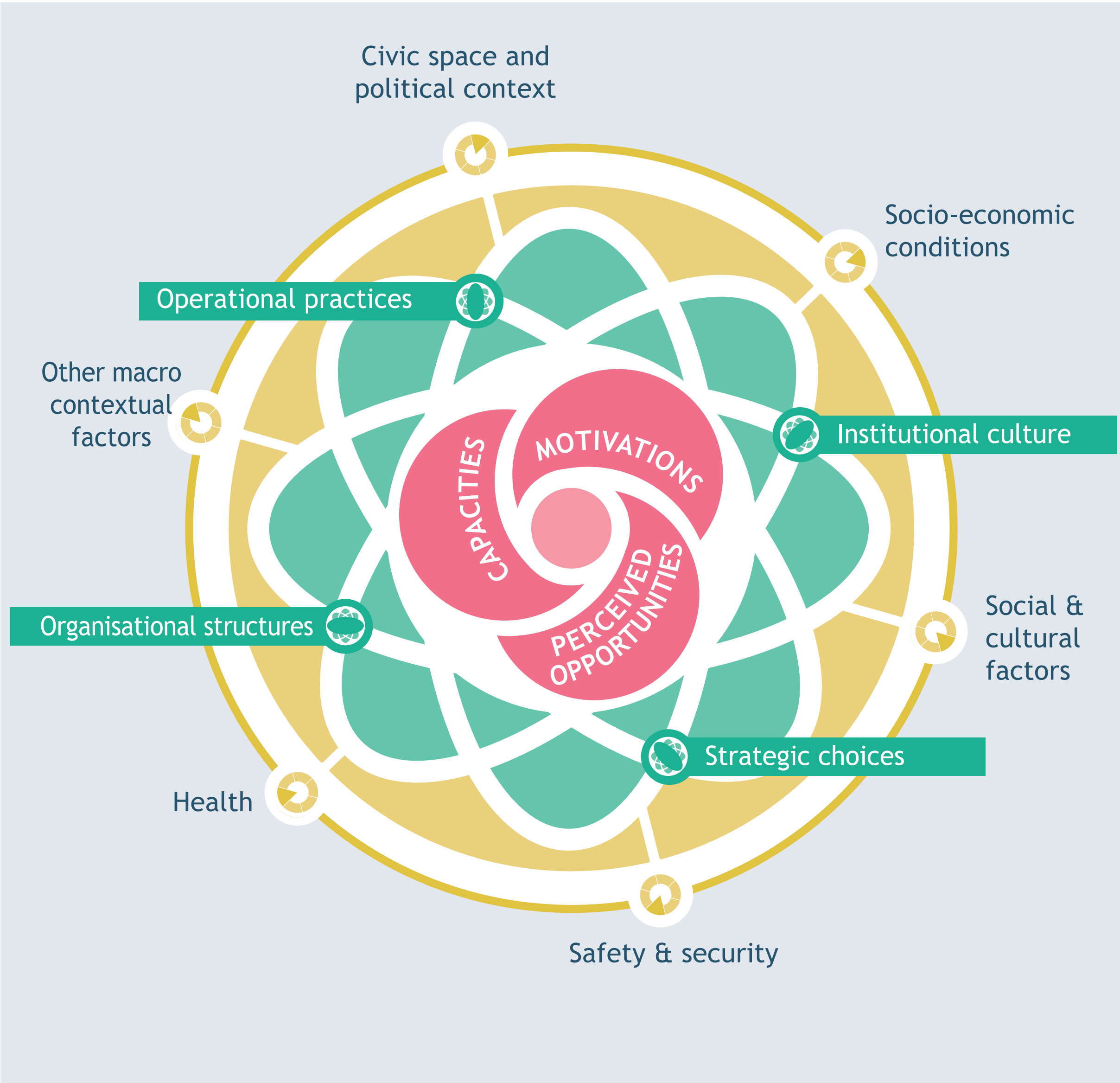
The insights presented in this guide are grounded in a model developed by the research team that identifies different factors contributing to organizations’ engagement with research. We call this model the CSO Research Ecosystem, which we define as:

> *A system reflecting the formal and informal linkages and interactions between different actors and conditions involved in facilitation, initiation, development, and carrying out of research by civil society organizations*

The CSO Research Ecosystem model was built on existing literature and further developed based on empirical insights gained from research into the Work: No Child's Business programme. In total, 58 interviews were conducted in the Netherlands, Uganda, India, and Jordan, primarily with staff of in-country lead organizations, partners, and staff members of the international organizations involved.

The CSO Research Ecosystem consists of three dimensions that can be either conducive or restrictive to evidence-based working by Southern CSOs. First, the model places Southern-based organizations at the centre of analysis and focuses on organizational factors shaping organizations' engagement with research – the organizational drivers. Subsequently, the model looks at the collaboration context of the partnership by analyzing how the set-up of the programme and the relations between organizations influence the engagement of organizations with research. Finally, the model considers how external conditions (economic, demographic, social, cultural, and political) influence organizations' decision to engage in research, which is captured in the third dimension of the model as the macro context. See below for a visual representation of the model.

Figure 1. The CSO Research Ecosystem



Starting from the CSO Research Ecosystem model enables organizations in CSO partnerships to engage more meaningfully with their partners to support research by facilitating local ownership and leadership of the research agenda. This encourages a process of localization, which starts from the premise that development should 'reinforce rather than replace local capacities'. Applying this principle to stimulating research by Southern-based organizations in CSO partnerships calls for a strengthening of Southern institutions in their production of research. Application of the model can help address localization-related questions around accountability, ownership, and resources, and help acknowledge and address power asymmetries within CSO partnerships. Fundamentally, it can help facilitate a reorientation of North-South partnerships and a move from an 'expert-driven model' of knowledge and learning to a 'facilitator model'[2] that allows for more equitable Southern engagement in research. The model thereby illustrates how localization of research is not necessarily a challenge on top of the challenge to work more evidence-based. It can, in fact, enable it.

Emerging from the model are five key principles for advancing research through localization that build a facilitating collaboration context while maintaining focus on programme objectives. These principles, each in their own way, seek to build relations on a more equal footing, with research seen as a process involving a coming together of different actors in the programme in new ways.

1. **Embracing diversity of organizations**
2. **Strengthening capacity - building on existing capacities**
3. **Facilitating exchange and learning to build mutuality**
4. **Addressing questions of power**
5. **Diversifying funding mechanisms/opportunities**

Each principle offers various opportunities for action, in this guide described as 'pathways for change', to be explored for relevance and feasibility by organizations in the programme in a way that is to be conversational rather than managerial.

Conversation starters, rooted in the different pathways, form entry points for building connections between organizations and levels in the programme and for exploring possibilities, understandings, and priorities together to build research in a partnership.

1. INTRODUCTION

It has become widely accepted that the use of evidence contributes to improving development policies, programmes, and practice and the call for evidence-based working in development has grown increasingly louder. As a result, many civil society organizations (CSOs) invest in research to build and develop their programmes.[3] However, these opportunities are often skewed, with most of the funding and decision-making power resting in the Global North, leaving Southern organizations in a position of implementing a donor-defined research agenda.

Within development collaborations, international NGOs (INGOs) often maintain control over research agendas and processes, turning towards 'capacity strengthening' or 'capacity building' of Southern organizations as the main strategy for enhancing the role and quality of research, while also placing Southern researchers in roles as implementers rather than developers of research. This limits opportunities for making the most of available knowledge and undermines research production in the Global South. Expectations around research in international programmes are often grounded in theoretical starting points and understandings of the role of research that are not shared by all organizations, limiting space for Southern-based NGOs to work from their own contextual understandings and locally-defined knowledge questions.[4] In addition, requirements of research rigour and the need for specific technical expertise may be out of reach for many Southern-based organizations. Such requirements may furthermore delegitimize research that organizations can do, disqualifying relevant, contextual knowledge from the outset of the project.[5] By failing to acknowledge the diversity and tensions emerging from different perspectives on knowledge and a lack of appreciation for more informal approaches to research, CSO partnerships run the risk of becoming exclusionary and disconnected from local needs and realities.[6]

In recent years, the call to transform development partnership has grown ever louder, and the principle that top-down and top-heavy partnerships constellations need to make way for in favour of a more decentralized and locally-led development approach is now commonly accepted.[7] Much discussion addresses funding relations, governance structures, mentalities, questions around expertise and knowledge, and other factors shaping CSO partnerships.[8] At the same time, research and how to shape it with local relevance and ownership in mind has found little attention thus far, in spite of the widespread interest in research to advance evidence-based working.

Localizing research requires rethinking accountability, ownership, and resources, and ensuring that power asymmetries within CSO partnerships are acknowledged and addressed. It also requires a reorientation of North–South partnerships and a move from an 'expert-driven model' of knowledge and learning to a 'facilitator model'[9] that allows for more equitable Southern engagement in research. Especially for CSOs that take up roles as intermediaries between different actors in the development process, and as brokers of knowledge and expertise, such as INGOs managing multi-country development programmes, it is critical to step back and address questions of power associated with the production of knowledge in order to support locally-led and locally-relevant research.

The question is what such a facilitator-oriented model would look like. Most of the frameworks on evidence-based working are still based on a Western understanding of research and tend to overlook not only cultural dimensions of knowledge but also the importance of power relations in shaping the purpose as well as the process of research by CSOs.[10] There are some studies situated in the Global South- most notably Ghana[11] and South Africa[12] - but these do not bring the perspectives of Southern organizations to the fore. This guide aims to fill this gap by starting from the experiences and perspectives of Southern CSOs on evidence-based working and the influence of the set-up of CSO programmes and collaborations. It seeks to help organizations in managing roles to engage more meaningfully with their partners and support research to advance evidence-based working in CSO partnerships.

1.1 USING AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH TO FACILITATE RESEARCH

To understand the engagement of CSOs in research and help organizations to localize these efforts, there is a need to analyze the knowledge system that underlies CSO programmes and collaborations. As Margaret Wheatley acknowledges:

> *'In order to change, the system needs to learn more about itself from itself'.*[13]

To gain insight into how Southern-based organizations relate to research and how this can be supported within CSO partnerships, we built on existing literature on evidence-based working in the field of international development. The theoretical context of this project was shaped by literature providing insight into the various forms that research can take, the power relations shaping understandings of research[14], and the space to reconsider and reshape these relations through working on localization.[15]

Much existing research and tools on CSO research focus on the use of evidence for evidence-based advocacy and conceptualize this as a linear process; from delivery by a supply-side of NGOs to the uptake by a demand-side of policymakers.[16] However, this conceptualization does not question how evidence is produced, nor does it take the relational dynamics that are at play in research in CSO

partnerships into account. Stewart et al. (2019)[17] and Goldman and Pabari (2020)[18], who have worked on evidence usage by policymakers in Africa, offer a different perspective by conceptualizing evidence-based working from an evidence ecosystem perspective which they define as:

> ***‘a system reflecting the formal and informal linkages and interactions between different actors (and their capacities and resources) involved in the production, translation, and use of evidence’ (2019: 3-4).***

While they are helpful contributions to the debate, these works mainly address the interplay between evidence producers and policymakers as evidence users, and thereby again do not yet include organizational dimensions when it comes to the engagement of CSOs in research. Therefore, we also draw on the work of Langer and Weyrauch (2020)[19], who identify capability, motivation, and opportunity as factors contributing to evidence-based working in CSOs. Finally, acknowledging that research does not happen in a vacuum but is influenced by external societal factors, we also include the research environment into our analysis, looking at the macro-contextual factors that influence the engagement of organizations with research.

Building upon this existing literature while also using the empirical insights gained from our research, this guide puts forward the ‘CSO Research Ecosystem model.’ This model has two functions. It is an analytical framework that can help show organizations to what extent and why partners engage with research, and how the collaboration and macro context contribute to this. Second, the model is a practical tool to help organizations facilitate research in CSO partnerships through a process of localization.

1.2 STRUCTURE OF THIS GUIDE

In chapter 2, the empirical case on which this guide was built is presented and the research methodology used in this project is elaborated.

In chapter 3, the CSO Research Ecosystem model - an important and broadly applicable result of this project, is presented and the different dimensions of the model are explained.

Chapter 4 offers ways forward, identifying 5 key principles for the localization of research and suggesting pathways of change that can help advance research within CSO partnerships. Finally, the chapter offers conversation starters for organizations as entry points for building connections between organizations and levels in the programme, for exploring possibilities, understandings, and priorities together to build research.

An appendix provides an empirical illustration demonstrating the validity of the model. The model was developed and applied in an analysis of the *Work: No Child's Business programme*, showing how addressing each of the elements of the model contributed to identifying and explaining the degree and way in which organizations in the programme engage in research.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE CASE

The findings presented in this guide are rooted in an analysis of the *Work: No Child's Business (WNCB) programme*, an international development partnership funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme has the aim to make a strong and lasting contribution to the elimination of child labour. The €35 million programme will be carried out over five years (2019-2024) and programme activities are implemented in six countries with a high prevalence of child labour: Cote d'Ivoire, India, Jordan, Mali, Uganda, and Vietnam. The findings in this guide are based on research conducted in three of the six programme countries[20]; India, Jordan, and Uganda respectively and on engagements with key actors in the Netherlands.

The Research Working Group of the WNCB programme commissioned Wageningen University to conduct the research project underlying this guide to help the programme support research in the programme, and to do so in a way that advances Southern ownership.

2.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research team conducted a review of available research as discussed in the introduction, a desk review of relevant documentation related to the engagement of research in the programme, and in-depth interviews with key actors in the programme. From March to September 2021, the team conducted a total of 58 interviews, both with in-country organization programme staff and members of the WNCB Alliance in the Netherlands. In total, 61 programme staff were interviewed, representing 17 different organizations in the WNCB partnership. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, most of the interviews were conducted online, although the research team did have the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in Jordan, interviewing in-country programme staff and visiting project locations on site.

Analysis of the data was qualitative, keeping questions in mind around the model, such as: what are the key motivations that stimulate partner organizations to conduct research? How do they perceive opportunities for research within the collaboration? What capacities or further support to develop capacities do they locate within their organizations and the collaboration? For an important part, data analysis focused on identifying patterns in the data by using the model. This analysis focused on building insights on the role of research in the work of organizations involved and identification of opportunities for the programme to advance research. The analysis in turn contributed to the further development and refinement of the model. The research team's interaction with organizations in the programme around the model helped develop a well-grounded and multidimensional understanding of how they relate to doing research in the context of the programme and whether and how research can be supported by advancing their various needs and purposes.

Applying the CSO Research Ecosystem model to an ongoing development partnership sheds light on the opportunities and challenges that organizations might experience when it comes to stimulating and localizing research, thereby sharing valuable lessons and insights for other international CSO partnerships. However, as the research was limited to only one programme, it is likely that not all possible factors are identified in this guide. Further research may well yield additional aspects that could be relevant for advancing CSO research in international CSO partnerships.

3. THE CSO RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

To advance research in CSO partnerships, is it essential to first understand how organizations relate to research. Drawing on existing literature as well as our own findings, we identify different factors contributing to the way organizations engage with research. In this chapter, we will introduce the different dimensions influencing CSO engagement with research and how the underlying conditions for research relate to each other, presenting the 'CSO Research ecosystem' model as a guiding tool. This chapter aims to show why these elements are considered important when it comes to CSO research and how organizations can work with this model to stimulate and localize research in CSO partnerships. In later chapters, the model is applied to the *Work: No Child's Business programme* to show how different issues may be addressed to stimulate research in CSO partnerships.

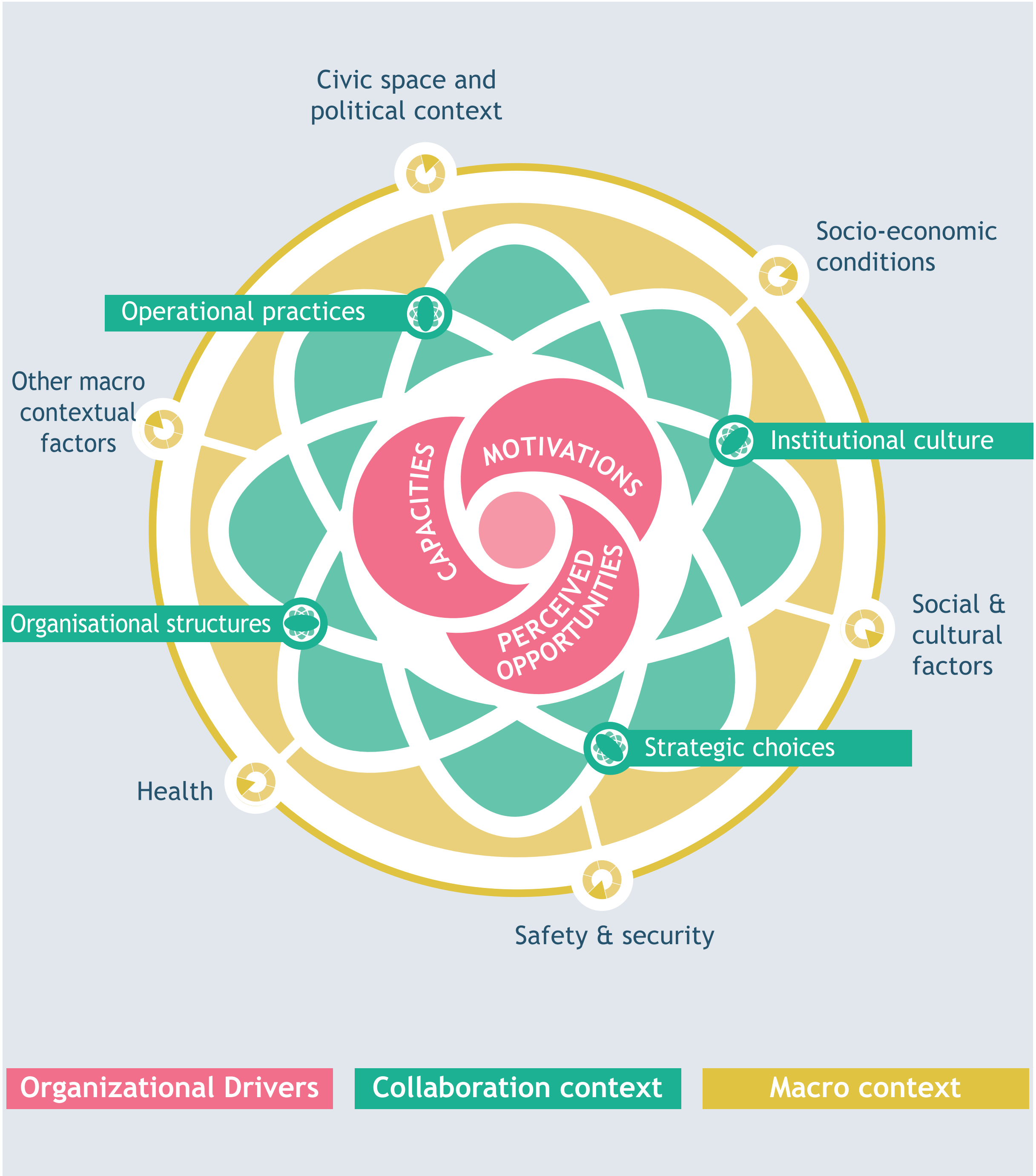
3.1 THE CSO RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

We define the CSO Research Ecosystem as:

> ***A system reflecting the formal and informal linkages and interactions between different actors and conditions involved in facilitation, initiation, development, and carrying out of research by civil society organizations***

The CSO Research Ecosystem consists of those elements that are either conducive or restrictive to research by Southern CSOs. First, the model places in-country organizations in formalized, contract-based collaborations with international CSOs (which will mostly be Northern-based and in control of funding) at the centre. It focuses on internal factors shaping in-country CSOs' engagement with research; conditions we label as organizational drivers. Subsequently, the model looks at the collaboration context of the partnership by analyzing how the set-up of the programme and the relations between partners influences the engagement of organizations with research. Finally, the model considers how external conditions (economic, demographic, social, cultural, and political) influence organizations' decisions on whether or not to engage in research, which is captured in the third dimension of the model as the macro context.

Figure 1. The CSO Research Ecosystem



ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS

First, there are what we call organizational drivers: these are factors internal to the organization that contribute to the decision to conduct research or not, what kind of research, and for what purposes. Here we draw on work by Britton (2005)[21] who discerns three factors that need to be provided to support organizational learning: motive, means, and opportunity. We also draw on the framework by Langer and Weyrauch (2020)[22] that similarly defines three elements for the use of evidence as motivation, opportunities, and capabilities. Our model proposes three conditions that define CSOs' engagement with research: motivations, perceived opportunities, and capacities. Motivations of CSOs to take up research are diverse, ranging from programmatic motivations such as programme development and adaptation, strengthening evidence-based advocacy and building credibility with donors, to personal, intrinsic motivations such as internalizing values and providing inspiration to staff. The second set of organizational drivers concerns capacities. In these, we include knowledge and skills as well as resources such as staff time that can be allocated to research within organizations. The third factor is opportunities organizations perceive for research and research usage in a programme.

These three conditions may influence each other. For example, the extent to which organizations are motivated and the nature of these motivations may at least partly be shaped by organizations' capacities and perceived opportunities in the programme. These can help to make it possible to work on research and identify the potential usefulness of research. Motivations, in turn, may help strengthen research capacities. Motivations and capacities may both also contribute to perceiving opportunities to conduct and use research. For example, having staff available with research and advocacy skills can make it possible to find ways to integrate research into a programme and to monitor the environment (e.g., advocacy targets like the national government) for opportunities and entry points for influencing policy using research results. Perceived opportunities, in turn, can contribute to motivation to do research. Further research may help explore these connections and find additional organizational factors important when it comes to advancing CSO research.

THE COLLABORATION CONTEXT

Whether the organization's motivations, capacities, and opportunities can be capitalized upon when it comes to doing research within the programme is shaped by the set-up of the programme and the collaborations between the organizations in the partnership.

The collaboration context consists of four interrelated factors: 1) Institutional culture, which concerns the focus of and value placed upon research and learning within the NGO programme and collaborations, 2) Strategic choices, including governance mechanisms and capacity building, 3) Organizational structures that underlie knowledge management within the programme, 4) Operational practices within the programme related to communication, protocols and procedures related to research and other relevant practices. Our conceptualization of these factors was partly inspired by Van Brabant and Patel's work on localization (2018) and further developed through the interaction with organizations in the WNCB programme.[23]

The collaboration context may relate to organizational drivers in different ways, thereby stimulating and supporting research to various degrees. Elements that come into play here are for example the priorities organizations set for programmes, assumptions on research quality they work from, allocation of decision power and funding, and the communication climate. Organizations may be influenced by, but can also mitigate and navigate, constraints and opportunities that arise from the collaboration context, as found in other research.[24]

THE MACRO CONTEXT

Finally, the macro context plays an important role in creating either an enabling or disabling environment for research. The civic space and the openness of government to evidence-based advocacy in a country is one element that can influence the engagement of organizations in research. For example, a state that is more open to civil society influence may provide more opportunities to use research, in turn, shaping organizations' motivation to do research. A state constricting civic space on the other hand by imposing restrictive laws and protocols may create difficulties for research, for example through restricting foreign funding. Other relevant macro-contextual factors are social and cultural conditions, security and safety concerns, and other relevant macro-contextual factors, such as in the context of this research, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. While these factors may enable or restrict CSOs in their engagement of research, organizations can to some extent also navigate the macro context, seeking out and developing ways to mitigate or overcome constraints.[25]

3.2 EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS

While the model was built on existing research, it was developed further based on research into, the *Work: No Child's Business programme.* We applied the model in an analysis of the programme, to establish whether and how different factors shape the ways and extent to which organizations engage in research, and to identify ways in which the factors can be addressed in the programme. Importantly, the analysis of the WNCB programme gives insight into the ways organizations in the programme countries relate to research, while also providing insight in how the conditions provided by the programme and the collaborations involved contribute to this. The empirical material thus shows how the different factors in the model interconnect, showing also the diverse possibilities for advancing research in CSO partnerships through localization.

In the appendix, we provide the empirical foundations for the model in detail, addressing and illustrating with examples the diverse elements we identified. While each programme is unique, many factors will be common across various programmes and contexts. We recommend reading this appendix for deeper insight and inspiration.

4. FACILITATING CSO RESEARCH – PRINCIPLES, PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE AND CONVERSATION STARTERS

4.1 MOVING FROM AN 'EXPERT-DRIVEN MODEL' OF RESEARCH TO A 'FACILITATOR MODEL'

As this guide shows, advancing evidence-based working and research by Southern organizations within CSO partnerships can well start by acknowledging and embracing the diversity of organizations' ways of engagement with research, and the possibilities that this diversity offers. By recognizing that organizations engage in research based on their own organizational drivers, i.e., capacities, perceived opportunities, and motivations, organizations move away from a deficit-oriented perspective of CSO research, where Southern organizations are seen to lack the necessary technical capacities to conduct high-quality research, towards a localization perspective; acknowledging that development should 'reinforce rather than replace local capacities'. Especially for organizations that see themselves as intermediaries between different actors in the development process, and as brokers of knowledge and expertise, it is critical to step back and address questions of power associated with the production of knowledge in order to support locally-led and locally-relevant research.

This shift requires rethinking accountability, ownership, and resources in the partnership in the move from an 'expert-driven model' of research to a 'facilitator model' that allows for more equitable Southern engagement. In this regard, localization is not a goal in itself, but a process to engage organizations in a partnership; engagement that goes beyond mere consultation towards participation, representation and inclusion.

Building on the insights emerging from this research, expressed in the CSO Research Ecosystem model, this guide proposes five key principles for advancing research in CSO partnerships through localization. These principles, each in their own way, seek to build relations on a more equal footing, with research seen as a process involving different actors in the programme in new ways. Each principle offers various opportunities for action, in this chapter described as 'pathways for change', to be explored for relevance and feasibility by organizations in the programme in a way that is to be conversational rather than managerial. Conversation starters, rooted in the different pathways, form entry points for building connections between organizations and levels in the programme and for exploring possibilities, understandings and priorities together to build research in the partnership.

4.2 FIVE KEY LOCALIZATION PRINCIPLES WHEN FACILITATING CSO RESEARCH

The path to localization starts from engaging with those factors that drive research for organizations, and by connecting with these in ways that build a facilitating collaboration context, while maintaining focus on programme objectives. Stimulating CSO research is as such primarily about finding creative ways of connecting between organizations, countries, and levels in the programme.

Five key principles can guide this process, shaping relations and collaborations on new foundations. We present these below. We also present examples of pathways of change that can be taken, working from each of the principles. These pathways relate to the different factors in the CSO Research Ecosystem model. The full overview of pathways for change we identified in the research can be found in table 1.

The pathways have both short-term relevance and long-term vision. Some are quick wins and others are sustained fundamental efforts with more transformative impact.

1. ACKNOWLEDGING AND EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Organizations in CSO partnerships are diverse, ranging from multilateral- and international organizations, to locally-based NGOs and CBOs, and even within those categories there are many differences. When it comes to organizations' engagement with research and the research questions they identify as relevant, Southern-based CSOs can consequently not be seen as a homogeneous group. These diverse organizations are driven by diverse motivations, perceived opportunities, and capacities. This diversity can provide challenges for the program in terms of coordination and harmonization of research practices. However, by recognizing and engaging with these diversities, partnerships can tap the potential and capacities of diverse organizations in a partnership, and thereby encourage and stimulate engagement with research. In this regard, there is also ample scope for support and the development of a research culture within organizations by enhancing skills and capacities that organizations themselves wish to strengthen.

RECOGNIZING ORGANIZATIONS' KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS AS KEY DRIVERS FOR RESEARCH

Organizations' interest in engaging in research is to a large extent rooted in the knowledge questions that emerge from their work. Doing research to answer these questions helps organizations to develop effective programmes, optimize advocacy opportunities, develop their organizations, support the development of their staff and empower communities. Recognition of these knowledge questions as legitimate foundations for research is a key starting point to advance research, as it builds on organizations' own motivation to strengthen their work.

CREATING SPACE FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESEARCH

Recognising diversity also entails creating space for diverse forms of research, including both formal as well as informal research methodologies. Creating space for informal research and support for documentation of evidence gathered through such research can help develop research and research capacities of organizations. By giving recognition to research that is being conducted by community-based organizations and smaller organizations can strengthen the research culture in these organizations.

CREATING SPACE FOR ADDRESSING QUESTIONS EMERGING AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF THE PROGRAMME

Another pathway for change is to acknowledge questions emerging within a specific country context may have relevance across contexts and for the programme at large. Identifying and building on complementarities and common purposes can provide interesting opportunities for international advocacy, especially when global advocates join such explorations and contribute to finding meaningful direction for relevant research questions in the partnership. It also enables participation of diverse organizations in research within a programme, help learning across levels, and can create space for diverse and unexpected insights to emerge.

2. STRENGTHENING AND BUILDING ON EXISTING CAPACITIES

Building on existing and contextually relevant capacities encourages local ownership of the research agenda and local leadership when it comes to engagement in research. This can be stimulated by implementing the following pathways for change.

INVEST IN RESEARCH CAPACITIES

Recognizing existing research capacities, including less formalized capacities and context-specific approaches, is a meaningful starting point for research capacity strengthening. Based on self-defined capacity needs, with support from technical experts, research capacity strengthening can be more locally-led and connected with organizational perspectives of what is realistic and meaningful for them.

STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY CAPACITIES

For many organizations, motivation to do research is directly linked to their advocacy objectives. Investing in building advocacy capacity, such as knowing how to engage with policymakers and policy processes to increase the impact of their work. can potentially increase the motivation to do research and the effectiveness of research usage.

CO-CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Developing knowledge management mechanisms and systems together with organizations in the Global South, both at programme and organizational level, enables the creation of a more inclusive and accessible platform for sharing resources and knowledge. Rather than focusing solely on creating new knowledge, opportunities for the usage of existing research and evidence from the programme can be explored. Support can be provided for documenting, curating, and publishing of existing research, including informal research such as testimonies and stories.

In addition, by relying more on Southern-based expertise, organizations can use and build on existing research in contextually relevant ways. Engaging with Southern-based knowledge institutes could further enhance the quality of research and capacity of in-country organizations to engage in evidence-based working.

3. FACILITATING EXCHANGE AND LEARNING TO BUILD MUTUALITY

In CSO partnerships that are implemented across contexts, it becomes significant to learn from each other's experiences to weave patterns of similarities and differences. This can also help build trust and transparency amongst organizations in the partnership.

FINDING WAYS OF CONNECTING 'LOCAL AND GLOBAL' THAT BUILD MUTUALITY

Collective exploration of the nature and relevance of organizations' knowledge questions across contexts can help build shared learning and research agendas. A programme's Theory of Change can in this regard act as a guiding tool and opportunity for discussion between partners, for identifying programme-relevant questions that have connections to realities and perspectives at different levels of a programme.

STIMULATING EXCHANGE ON ORGANIZATION-LEVEL RESEARCH ACROSS CONTEXTS AND LEVELS

To advance localization of research, it is important to create space for South-South exchange and learning in CSO partnerships. Facilitating linking and learning workshops between organizations can as such help identify collective lessons learned through diverse forms of research, and their potential usages at different levels. In addition, organizing international research and learning workshops that centre on existing knowledge questions of organizations in the Global South ¬- exploring these, their relevance for the programme at different levels, and challenges in answering them – can enable the co-creation of a shared learning and research agenda and builds upon the expertise and insights from different organizations in the partnership.

4. ADDRESSING QUESTIONS OF POWER

Power differentials between actors at different levels of the programme shape decision-making regarding research and therefore need to be addressed within CSO partnerships. Enabling local leadership and promoting locally-led learning agendas can stimulate participation and ownership among Southern organizations thereby promoting engagement in research.

CREATING GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS THAT ENCOURAGE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

Involving Southern organizations in decision-making regarding research procedures and protocols does not only make the research process more decentralized and participatory, but can at the same time create space for new and innovative research questions and learnings. Setting up inclusive governance mechanisms that are based on complementarity rather than consensus, can further stimulate research engagement and innovation and promote local ownership of the research agenda.

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORE AD-HOC AND INVOLVED SUPPORT

Providing guidance and support in the development of research proposals, such as technical and writing support can enable particularly smaller organizations to work on their contextually defined knowledge questions and needs within the programme. Encouraging capacity building and offering guidance throughout the research process can further strengthen organizations confidence and capacities to include research as an important part of the programme.

5. DIVERSIFYING FUNDING MECHANISMS

Having a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to funding CSO research can limit the engagement with research of organizations within the partnership, in particular small, less formalized or less well-resourced organizations. To advance research of Southern CSOs, diversities between organizations and contexts in which they operate need to be acknowledged when setting up procedures and protocols for allocation of research funding.

PROVIDING FUNDING FOR DEDICATED RESEARCH STAFF AND CORE FUNDING OF SOUTHERN-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

An important dimension to consider when it comes to funding CSO research is to provide ongoing financial support for building institutional research capacity within organizations. Allocating programme budget based on the needs and requirements of the individual organization can support organizations in their motivation to invest time and resources in doing research and embed research within the organization.

CREATING SPACE FOR FLEXIBLE FUNDING BASED ON EMERGING NEEDS AND QUESTIONS

Research within CSO partnerships can have more relevance for Southern-based organizations by creating space for emerging, organization-relevant research questions. Providing research funding opportunities on a rolling basis and allowing funding applications for short-term projects with direct relevance for organizations, can enable organizations to address research needs and questions as they emerge, thereby increasing their relevance for the programme. Such projects may lead to surprising new insights as they are rooted in contextually defined knowledge questions, and vantage points, and can help strengthen research capacity and research culture in organizations.

4.3 CONVERSATION STARTERS

Advancing CSO research through a process of localization requires different engagement with partners; departing from a managerial approach to CSO partnerships to a facilitators' model as described in this guide. Creating space for open and reflective discussions between organizations in the Global North and the Global South about what is needed to stimulate and support evidence-based working in the partnership, is in this regard an important start of this process. organizations

Conversation starters form entry points for building connections between organizations and levels in the programme. Engaging with and listening to organizations by jointly exploring possibilities, understandings, and priorities within the CSO Research Ecosystem can as such not only build research engagement, but also more general engagement and commitment in the partnership.

In the table below, a broad range of pathways for change are presented together with stimulating questions to engage in conversations about advancing research in CSO collaborations through localization. The pathways and conversation starters address the different factors in the CSO Research Ecosystem Model. Multiple factors influencing organizations' engagement with research can thus be taken up.

	PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE	CONVERSATION STARTERS
ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS		
Motivation	Recognizing organizations' motivations as key drivers for research	- What motivates partners to do research? - How can research help partners in their programme development and adaptation? - How can engagement in research increase the personal development of program staff?
	Empowering organizations with research by exploring the partnering context	- How can organizations use research in their relation-building activities with key stakeholders from the community, civil society, and policymakers?
Capacities	Strengthening organizations' capacity by building on what is already there	-Which capacities are already available at the partner organization's level? - Which capacities would partners like to strengthen?
	Investing in research capacities	- How can the programme strengthen local partners' capacities when it comes to research? - How can a setup be created where partners can build mutual capacities?
	Investing in evidence-based advocacy capacities	- How can the programme strengthen local partners' capacities when it comes to research?
Perceived opportunities	Creating space for addressing questions emerging at different levels of the program	- How would partners like to use the envisioned research? For what purpose? - What are the knowledge questions partners have when it comes to their work? - What are the key knowledge gaps that partners identify to do research on?
	Creating space for different types of research including more informal approa-ches and methodologies	- What type of research are partners already engaged in and how do they document their findings? - How can (informal) research practices and documentation efforts be supported? - How can data emerging from informal practices be converted into research output and evidence for advocacy efforts?
COLLABORATION CONTEXT		
Institutional culture	Support a culture of learning and exchange within the partnership	- To what extent do organizations feel that research is a priority in the partnership? - Is research valued by senior management of the programme? - To what extent does the programme create awards or incentives for research?
	Connecting local and global that builds mutuality	- How can the programme connect the local learnings and practices to global needs? - Can there be ways of learning from the ground that can add value to the program at the global level?

	Simulating exchange across contexts, including South-South learning	- What kind of opportunities can be created to stimulate learning between Southern-based partners? - In what ways can research findings and practices be shared across contexts?
Strategic choices	Promoting local ownership and leader-ship by setting up inclusive governance mechanisms	- To what extent are partners involved in determining the programme's learning agenda? - To what extent does the partnership support ownership and leadership of local partners? - How are choices made regarding which research questions are relevant in the context of the programme?
	Work towards complementarity rather than consensus	- To what extent are dissonant views acknowledged and encouraged within the partnership?
	Collective exploration of the Theory of Change as a guiding tool for research	- To what extent are the Theory of Change assumptions, strategies, and objectives relevant across contexts, and where is there room for local adaptation? - To what extent can partners use and adapt the programme's Theory of Change based on their contextually-defined research questions?
Organizational structure	Jointly develop organizational structures that are conducive to research in the programme	- To what extent are existing organizational configurations such as working groups or knowledge hubs conducive to the research culture of in-country partners?
	Co-creation of knowledge management systems and sharing platforms	- How can the accessibility of resources for partners be enhanced by the programme? - How can platforms be created for sharing and translating relevant vernacular resources? - In what ways can the programme build upon existing resources in the countries together with local universities and research institutes?
Operational practices	Gear presence, focus and requirements of research opportunities, and assumptions underlying these towards locally defined research needs	- How can research processes i.e., procedures and guidelines in the partnership be constructed in a way that maximizes organizations' motivations, capacities, and opportunities?
	Promoting a two-sided communication stream that invites questions and is based on trust and transparency in the partnership	- How is the communication being perceived by partner organizations and how can the communication climate be improved upon in the partnership? - To what extent do partners experience transparency in the programme; how can it be strengthened?
	Providing opportunities for engagement in other languages than English	- To what extent is there a need and space for alternative language protocols?
	Providing dedicated staff/funding to CSOs to invest in research	- To what extent are available human resources within the partnership sufficient to conduct research? - Where is there scope for further core funding and investment in the organization?
	Creating space for flexible funding based on emerging research needs and questions	- How can flexible funding opportunities for research be created?

MACRO CONTEXT		
Civic space & openness of the government	Analyze to what extent civic space and the openness of government influences the CSO engagement in research and how challenges can be navigated or mitigated	- Are there constricting laws and regulations hampering organizations to do research? - How can organizations engage with policymakers in a way that maximizes evidence-based advocacy efforts? -How can the partnership help organizations cultivate relations with advocacy targets?
Socioeconomic conditions	Determine how country-specific socio-economic conditions influence research	- Which socioeconomic conditions hamper engagement in research and how can these conditions be navigated?
Social and cultural factors	Identify social and cultural issues, such as local traditions and gender-specific issues that influence the engagement in research	- To what extent do local norms and traditions encourage or hamper research? - To what extent does gender play a role when it comes to research? - How can organizations build the trust needed in communities to engage in research?
Safety & security	Collectively identify safety and security risks and determine the need for standard operating procedures to safeguard programme staff	- Are there safety issues that hamper organizations to do research? - How can the partnership support organizations in mitigating risk factors? - How can the partnership be sensitive to a contextual assessment of risks and security?
Health	Determine which health risks might affect the partnership and how the programme can support organizations in mitigation	- To what extent do organizations experience health risks and related challenges when it comes to research? - How can the programme support organizations in navigating the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic?
Other macro-contextual factors	Collectively identify external factors (potentially) restricting research and strategize on how to navigate or mitigate those	- Which other macro contextual factors influence or hamper the uptake of research by partners and how can these be navigated?

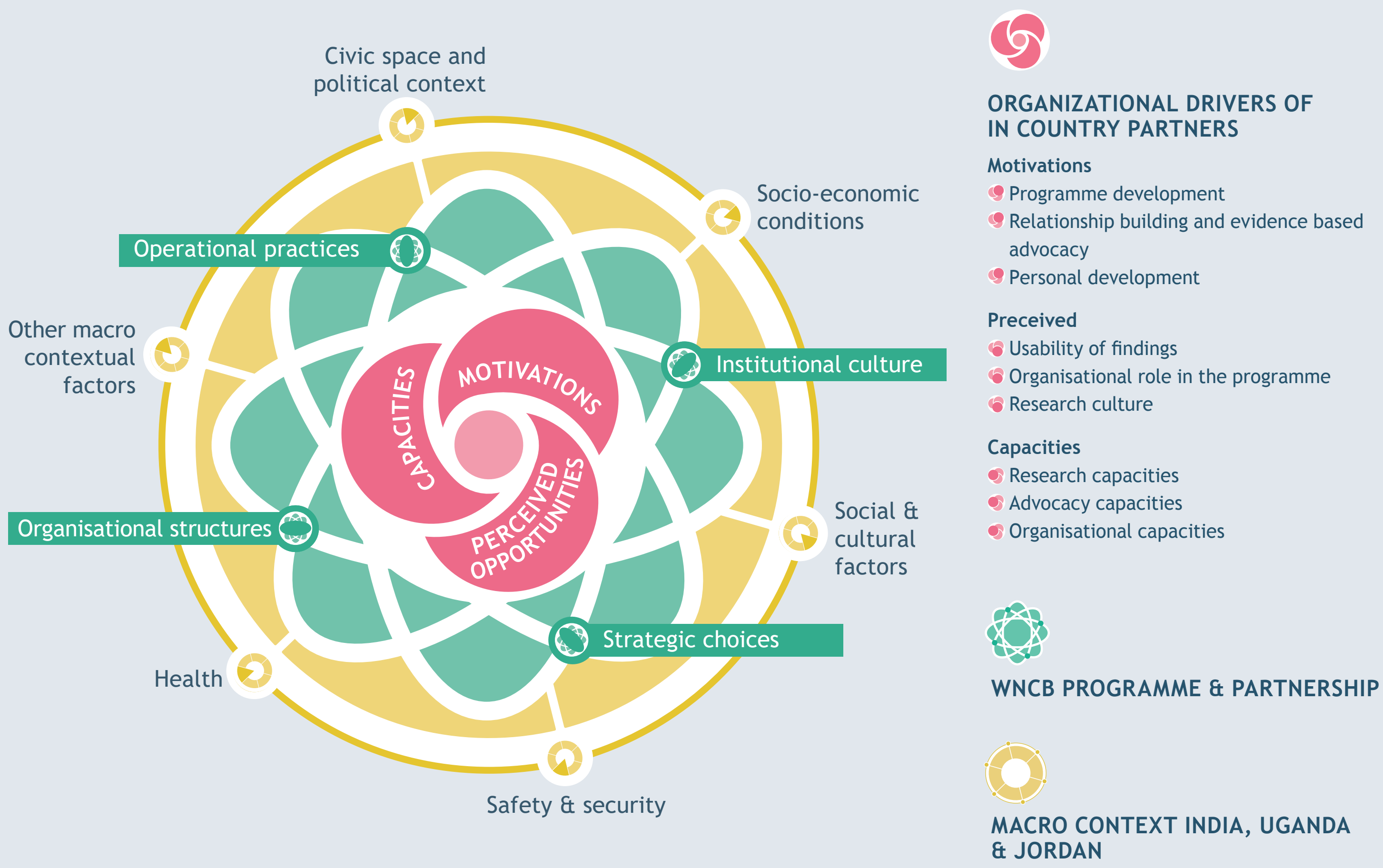
APPENDIX. EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THE WORK: *NO CHILD'S BUSINESS* PROGRAMME

THE CSO RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM OF THE WNCB PROGRAMME

The strategic partnership Work: No Child's Business (running from 2019-2024) is led by an Alliance of Save the Children Netherlands, UNICEF Netherlands and the Stop Child Labour Coalition (SLC). On behalf of the SLC, Hivos is the lead organization and is responsible for hosting the programme management unit. Together, the Alliance partners have a strong global presence and existing networks of national and local implementing offices and partners in the six programme countries. Evidence-based working is promoted within the partnership to strengthen evidence-based advocacy and increase programme effectiveness.

Within the programme the research working group (RWG) is responsible for ensuring that quality research is delivered in the programme. The members consist of Netherlands-based staff of the three main Alliance partners. The working group coordinates the partnerships' research activities and develops the research strategy of the programme, advises organizations on research-related issues, and strengthens capacity across the WNCB partnership. At the time of our research, the RWG

Figure 2. The CSO Research Ecosystem of the WNCB programme



had a dedicated annual budget to spend on research and research-related activities such as trainings and other capacity development interventions. In-country organizations had the opportunity to apply for research funding with the RWG by sending in a research proposal for child labour related research. Our research was commissioned by the RWG to support the advancement of research in the programme, as well as localization.

In this chapter we look at how Southern organizations engage with research within the context of the WNCB programme, and their specific country context. These insights are based primarily on interviews with staff of in-country organizations in the three countries under study (Jordan, Uganda and India), and on a desk review of important WNCB programme-related documentation. By analyzing the different elements of the ecosystem how and to what extent a conducive CSO Research ecosystem is facilitated by the WNCB programme this chapter offers lessons for organizations who are grappling with the same issues related to stimulating research within CSO partnerships.

ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS

MOTIVATIONS

For the Southern-based organizations in the programme, motivations to engage in research are grounded in their self-defined knowledge needs. The knowledge questions they raise typically emerge within the context of their work. For example, interviewees raised questions such as: What are the main reasons that child labour has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic in our area? What are the social norms that make children go to work? How can we address child labour in the tourism sector? What have been successful approaches in taking children out of the mines? Finding

answers to these questions is important to organizations because it can help them understand the problems they are seeking to address, improve their programmes and interventions and strengthen their position toward other relevant stakeholders, thereby also increasing their advocacy potential. In addition, we also found a strong personal component in the motivation of organizations to do research, which is to build the intrinsic motivation of staff members.

Knowledge building and theorizing for programme development and adaptation

One of the key motivating factors for organizations to do research is to build their knowledge and understanding of issues related to child labour so they can use this to develop and improve the programme in terms of interventions and approaches underlying these. In the interviews, organizations shared different types of knowledge questions that they would like to address. Knowledge questions typically express knowledge needs emerging within the context of their need develop, implement and adapt their programmes. Not directly connected to a research project, they are to be distinguished from research questions. Knowledge questions and interviewees' reflections on these indicate that these questions directly link with a wide range of relevant programme purposes. For example, questions around how particular social norms or cultural traditions push children towards child labour for example occupy many organizations. Whereas in some communities, child labour is seen as 'character-building' for boys to become 'real men', in other communities, it is mainly girls who are pushed towards finding a job or becoming homeworkers to provide for their new family as the result of a teen pregnancy or child marriage. The perception of the (lack of a) benefit of education is also seen as an important contributing factor to the push of children into labour, especially in combination with the economic status of the parents whereby poverty could feed into this.

Doing research into these issues increases organizations' ability to understand the environment they work in and the dimensions at play, and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. As one programme officer recognised:

> ***'We are all still learning and want to achieve progress in our work by designing better interventions and avoiding challenges wherever we can. Gathering and sharing knowledge is crucial to achieving that.'***

Building relations with other actors

Another motivation for organizations to engage in research is that evidence can be used in relating to other stakeholders. Doing research can increase the organizations' credibility and legitimacy to work with external stakeholders such as community actors, businesses, and donors and build their social capital vis-a-vis other NGOs as it gives them 'something valuable to share', thereby empowering them. One programme officer from India said:

> ***'Global organizations look for evidence from the ground which they can then use to advocate for policy interventions at the global level. They therefore want to partner with organizations who can give them this evidence.'***

An organization from Jordan elaborated on this and said that doing their own research makes them better positioned to apply for international funding and allows them to take a more prominent role in programme and strategy development rather than just be an 'implementing partner'.

> ***'Having our own data gives us more power because then we can show potential donors that our interventions work, and we can ask them to invest in our programmes instead of imposing interventions onto us.'***

Strengthening evidence-based advocacy

Many organizations also see research as valuable in the context of their advocacy. By providing evidence on the scale and demographic factors related to child labour, for example, policymakers might be more inclined to work with the organization to eradicate child labour, thereby strengthening their advocacy potential. In addition, conducting research into child labour laws and regulations and related policy or implementation gaps, allows organizations to better target their advocacy efforts, thereby increasing their chances of success when it comes to policy influencing, agenda-setting and monitoring of policy implementation. This perspective from one of the staff members from a partner organization situates the importance of evidence for advocacy illustrates this:

> ***The motivation and intention for a majority of our studies is to present our case to the government and other stakeholders, not only of the present state of affairs in child labour but also make relevant action-based recommendations to address some of the gaps in policy implementation. This requires strong backing based on evidence.***

Community empowerment

Some organizations see research as helpful for empowering the communities they work with, allowing community actors to claim their rights and increasing awareness. As a programme officer working with the communities explained,

> ***'It is with the help of data that we collect on the number of children who are vulnerable or can be potentially pushed to take up labour that we can develop ways to empower the community to become vigilant and change the situation.'***

In the course of their programme, in their everyday work, organizations also witness practical examples of how child labour is addressed in communities. Staff in India learnt how young girls exercise their agency by refusing to get married and stand up for themselves, thereby taking away important enabling conditions for child labour. Stories like this are converted into inspirational case studies by organization staff and shared in other areas where child marriages occur to inspire and empower communities to protect their rights.

Personal development

Another motivator to do research is personal development of staff. Research can provide inspiration to staff members that their work is 'meaningful' and 'has a real impact'. It also helps with '*seeing the bigger picture of their work'*, realizing that all individual efforts lead to a collective impact in reducing child labour in their region or country as several staff members shared.

Finally, engaging in research is also seen as an opportunity to strengthen one's own research capacities and skills which provides them with transferable skills that can be used both within the programme and beyond, helping them in future work endeavours and their upward mobility.

CAPACITIES

The way organizations perceive the knowledge and skills that are required by the programme to do research and how they assess their own capacities, also plays a role in the decision to engage in research or not. In this regard, organizations identified three main capacities as being important: 1) research and technical expertise, 2) advocacy-related capacities, and 3) organizational capacities.

Research capacities

When it comes to research capacities partner organizations indicate there is a lack of 'technical expertise' with programme staff, such as experience in and the ability to do a literature review, conduct interviews, data analysis, systematic documentation, and academic writing. Formulating interesting research questions and writing good research proposals is also frequently mentioned as a limiting factor to engage in research. One of the organization staff shared the lack of technical expertise when it comes to conducting interviews and analyzing data:

> ***'When it comes to gathering and analyzing qualitative data, it requires specific expertise and skills and while our staff has a strong experience with the community, it does not automatically translate to asking the right questions and then using proper methods to analyze it. Even when they can do this on occasions, it becomes difficult to systematically explain how they arrived at relevant findings.'***

However, at the same time, other more informal research capacities that organizations have are often overlooked. For example, the ability to build trusting relations with constituents and formulate sophisticated context-relevant research questions based on everyday work experience and practical, contextual expertise may often go unnoticed by partners in an international programme. This limits the potential of organizations to capitalize on these capacities through research.

Advocacy capacities

Knowing how policy processes and policymakers work is also deemed a critical skill to have when it comes to evidence-based working as the usability of research is largely determined by the potential to contribute towards advocacy objectives. Working closely with relevant government officials and having a (basic) understanding of the laws and regulations related to child labour in the country is therefore deemed crucial to be able to identify policy gaps and providing useful evidence to address these. Building organizations' strategic and analytical capacities to build and use evidence for advocacy is identified as an important capacity to develop further. As one staff member mentioned:

> ***'We need to know how different government processes work so we can contribute to these. We don't want opportunities for engagement to find us unaware and unprepared. We need to be aware of the different policies and different policy gaps so that we as a team can so that we can make a contribution that is well planned for.'***

Organizational capacities

The final set of capacities concerns the resources within the organization that either hamper or enable organizations to do research. One key area is the way organizations engage in knowledge management and documentation of existing evidence and how this knowledge is transferred within the organization. Many organizations indicate a lack of documentation of evidence, thereby losing important information for the programme. Especially when it comes to information on less tangible aspects such as community attitudes, systematic documentation has not been part of their activities, making it difficult for organizations to implement changes on the basis of learnings in the programme. In addition, high staff turnover within the programme is identified as a limiting factor when it comes to doing research. As one staff member recognized:

> ***'We have had a lot of staff changes in this programme. Most of the people who started this project are no longer here and part of the story disappeared with them. This makes it difficult for us to build on what has been done.'***

PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to the motivations and capacities of organizations to do research, there also needs to be a perceived opportunity to engage in research. To what extent do organizations feel they have the space to engage in research? And to what extent do they feel this is useful and feasible within the context of their work? In this regard, several factors appear to stimulate or hamper the process of research in an organization.

Learning culture

Whether organizations feel they can engage in research is related to the value and priority that is given to learning within the organization and the allocation of financial and human resources to conduct research. Although the interviewed staff of the organizations appear genuinely interested to do research and learn more in the context of their work, research seems not to be part of the organizational culture of most of the organizations. Very few organizations have a dedicated research unit or research officer, which limits the opportunity to do research. Within their work, implementation of programme activities and engagement with policy actors seem to be given priority. Engagement with research is therefore often ad-hoc, based on the direct relevance for programme deliverables which limits sustained engagement with knowledge gaps and research interests. The lack of a research culture is sometimes also attributed to the location of the organization and the communities they engage with. One of the staff members of an organization situated in a remote district in India said:

> ***'A large number of the staff are themselves from marginalized communities who struggle for everyday survival and meeting the needs of the communities becomes the main priority. The staff here is not professionally qualified with research expertise and people with such expertise are reluctant to work in these areas for a long period of time.'***

Usability of findings

The perception of the potential usability of the findings is an important factor for organizations to decide whether or not to engage in research. Organizations consider the potential value of research results in their advocacy efforts, in their relations with other stakeholders, or the possibility of helping in the organizational development. Connecting research to specific programmatic and advocacy objectives in order to increase the usability of the findings could therefore be an important factor to stimulate the engagement of research. For example, organizations collect evidence of child labour in local businesses and use this evidence to influence the owners of local business to stop employing children. Organizations view this type of engagement as having an immediate effect.

Organizational role

Another determining factor is the organization's role in the partnerships. For lead organizations and institutionally research-driven organizations, it seems easier to find research opportunities and comply with programme procedures and research protocols. However, for smaller organizations it proves more difficult to take up research as they have limited decision-making power within the partnership. Several organizations with limited staff and working in remote areas also suggested a lack of expertise within organizations to write research proposals within a set of parameters.

Availability of resources

One of the main limiting factors mentioned by organizations is the lack of time and resources to invest in research. Many organizations raised concerns about the workload of staff involved in the WNCB programme as most project officers are involved in several projects within the organization and have, as such, many responsibilities to fulfil. Within the programme, formal requirements on top of implementation of activities, mean that there is little time left for additional research within the scope of their work. In addition, financial resources to invest in outsourcing part of the technical expertise or invest in the internal research capacity even if available were not accessible for many organizations as they were not aware of such options thereby limiting the opportunity to do research.

COLLABORATION CONTEXT

In addition to the organizational drivers, the decision to engage in research is also influenced by the collaboration context, which is here related to the set-up of the WNCB programme and the partnerships between the Alliance partners in the Global North and the in-country organizations. To establish how the set-up of the WNCB programme and related partnerships influence the engagement of research by in-country organizations, we analyzed the collaboration context on the basis of the four dimensions specified in the model: 1) institutional culture, 2) strategic choices, 3) organizational structures and 4) operational practices.

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

The engagement of in-country organizations in research is influenced by the value that is placed upon research in the programme, the priority that is given to the production of knowledge and the resources that are made available for research. Within the WNCB programme, research is deemed important to increase the programme's effectiveness and to strengthen evidence-based advocacy efforts regarding child labour policies. Sharing of knowledge and information is in this regard mentioned as a critical aspect in ensuring the benefit of lessons learned and the possibility to drive adaptive management where needed.

Many in-country organizations expressed interest in opportunities to exchange knowledge and learnings between countries. Especially questions around research methodologies, shared research questions, challenges in the research process, and strategies to overcome these and relevant results from other contexts were deemed useful. However, the current set-up of the programme doesn't seem to cater fully to this need and knowledge sharing seems to be project and proposal-based rather than institutionalized in the programme.

There is an opportunity for organizations to attend research webinars organized by the programme, but these seem to be targeting only the lead organizations of the in-country organizations and focus on capacity building; training organizations in certain 'relevant' research skills rather than assessing existing capacities and facilitating exchange between organizations. Capacity development as such seems to be characterized by a 'transfer of knowledge' from North to South which focuses on 'teaching' instead of learning. This approach risks reinforcing knowledge asymmetries and an expression of what knowledge is perceived as legitimate; thereby rejecting other knowledge in the process.

STRATEGIC CHOICES

Another relevant aspect when it comes to advancing and localizing research is the governance and decision-making structures within the programme. Within the WNCB programme the Research Working Group is responsible for ensuring that quality research is delivered within the programme. The members consist of Netherlands-based staff of the three main Alliance partners who are responsible for setting the guidelines and framework for research proposals, thereby determining which conditions research projects need to adhere to be considered relevant and legitimate.

Within this framework, the in-country lead organizations and organizations with better research capacities, resources and outreach are consequently placed in a 'gatekeeper' position, exacerbating unequal power dimensions between lead organizations and 'implementing partners' in the programme. As a result, many of the questions that smaller NGOs and CBOs formulate don't get prioritized, thereby limiting the potential of context-specific and relevant research questions.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

The set-up of the working group as a discrete research unit within the programme has the advantage of the allocation of dedicated time and resources to stimulating evidence-based working within the WNCB programme and providing research guidance and advice to staff across the partnership. However, as the members of the research working group have only 16 hours a week (divided over four staff members) to spend on all research-related activities, this does not leave a lot of time for additional support activities and strategic planning among the team. The lack of time for engagement was also mentioned by staff of in-country organizations who felt overwhelmed by having to work and comply with seven different working groups within the programme. Time constraints and the resulting lack of in-depth conversations between the working group and the in-country organizations seem to limit the stimulation of research within the programme.

OPERATIONAL PRACTICES

The overall perception of the in-country organizations was one of appreciation about the opportunity provided by the WNCB to support research within the programme. However, when reflecting on the support provided to the organizations from the WNCB programme, in some respects there seems to be a mismatch between expectations and perceptions of the RWG and needs and capacities of local organizations.

Another potentially limiting factor to send in research proposals is the use of English as the lingua franca of the programme and support by the RWG. Non-anglophone organizations might experience difficulties as a result of this. Whether providing opportunities for engagement in other languages would enable organizations to engage more effectively in research opportunities might be worth exploring further.

Communication climate

Although research support and guidance seem to be available can be requested by the organizations; awareness of this opportunity with in-country organizations is missing. Most organizations do not seem to know how to approach the Research working group and what they can expect in terms of support. This results in organizations handing in proposals near the deadline, leaving little space for reflection and guidance, as one of the staff members reflected:

> ***'The process of communication is channelled through the country lead organizations via emails making it difficult for all in-country partners to understand their relevance. Unless a discussion is followed around the communication, it just remains an email in the inbox of partners, with little deliberation and reflection.'***

While seeking to support, the communication climate within the WNCB programme also seems to be geared towards compliance rather than facilitation or co-production of research. In addition, there seems to be a perceived lack of transparency and clarity about research objectives and advocacy usage within the programme. This goes at the expense of trust and potential efficiency as organizations do not seem to know how their research can best contribute to global advocacy goals thereby potentially missing important opportunities for impact.

MACRO CONTEXT

In addition to the programme specific factors that influence the research environment, there are also external, contextual factors that influence the research climate in countries and organizations.

CIVIC SPACE AND STATE OPENNESS

Advocacy towards the government on child labour-related laws and regulations is one of the key areas of intervention of the WNCB programme. Organizations use evidence from research to diverse degrees in their engagements with government agencies. In Jordan, for example, coordination of activities and advocacy towards relevant ministries is a crucial aspect of the organizations' work and determines the engagement with research. The openness of the state towards such collaborations is as such crucial for the advocacy potential of organizations, and as such influences their engagement with research. In India and Uganda, there has been a shift in the way governments relate towards CSOs and their work in recent years, putting more stringent laws and regulations in place that define the ways CSOs can engage in lobby and advocacy. This has led organizations to re-evaluate their advocacy strategies and focus on dialogue with the government rather than being 'too critical' or 'opposing' the policies of the government. Some organizations in India, for example, have modified how they engage in advocacy on child labour, taking up to a 'more constructive' and 'supportive' role, changing the need for evidence and thereby the engagement in research towards less critical ways.

SOCIO-CULTURAL CONDITIONS

In addition to the political context, there are also social and cultural factors that influence organizations' engagement in research. Organizations are working in rural, semi-urban, and urban settings, which culturally bring different sets of realities. For organizations working in rural areas in India for example, there are important cultural barriers connected to caste, ethnicity, and gender along with religious beliefs and practices among communities that make engagement with research challenging in multiple ways.

In addition, as organizations explain, there is often a distrust towards 'outsiders' of the community, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, and researchers might find it difficult to engage with community actors in the research process. Consequently, organizations mainly engage in data collection through Community Based Organizations and collaborate with important community actors such as locally-based 'child protection committees, 'community influencers' and local leaders.

Another barrier for research is that community members might be scared to share information with programme staff, because they are afraid of repercussions from the government. For example, children selling items at traffic lights generally do not want to be found as this is providing them with a livelihood. In addition, parents of working children expressed fears of reprimands from the Ministry of Labour for not sending their children to school, making it difficult to engage these actors in the research process.

SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES

There have also been some security challenges related to the safety of staff engaged in research. Especially when it comes to workplaces that employ children or dealing with child trafficking networks, there are often criminals involved, which makes it dangerous for staff to do their work and engage in research in the area. Some organizations also work in regions where there are non-state actors engaged in a violent conflict with the state authorities and administration, which poses security challenges to the organizations. To be able to protect staff, organizations would have to arrange private security which isn't budgeted for in the programme and therefore often leads to disengagement from research.

Similarly, there are regions within the programme that are closely connected to interstate or international borders making these hot spots for inflow and outflow of people and continuous migration along with target zones for trafficking of children. For organizations that work in these areas, child labour cannot be disassociated with trafficking or migration, and thus most important knowledge questions are linked to them.

COVID-RELATED CONSTRAINTS

Finally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has presented a lot of challenges to organizations when it comes to doing research. Organizations have had to re-strategize their goals and priorities- 'going into survival mode' as some programme staff described it- along with ways to adapt to a completely new situation resulting in delays in the programme. The lockdowns and curfews in countries meant that it was difficult, and in some cases nearly impossible, to go out into the field to gather data and conduct interviews and focus group discussions within communities. In addition, organizations located in remote areas often conditions struggled with network connectivity and had difficulty with familiarizing themselves with the usage of new technology to talk to organizations and communities. Moreover, the pandemic also influenced the trust building with communities negatively, as one country officer in Jordan explains: 'The mask mandate meant we could not talk face to face to people and as such put a barrier between interviewer and interviewee which wasn't good for the trust building'. Finally, COVID-19 infections among staff have also put a strain on organizations, and measures to contain the spread of the virus in the organizations meant that most of the staff has had to work remotely for consecutive periods. This had adverse effects on the communication and coordination within the team and thereby negatively influenced organizations' research.

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