TIME | Transforming INGO Models for Equity

Transforming INGO Models for Equity: A Change Initiative

THE STORY OF TIME

The field of global health and development is changing. International organizations (INGOs), including those working to advance sexual and reproductive health, have been called to reflect on their roles within this changing context and are evaluating their added-value. TIME for SRHR began at a time when the principles and values of locally led development (LLD) were coming to the forefront of our sector. In response, a group of SRHR INGO CEOs began to ask big questions:

- What are the defining features of INGO/CSO relationships and power dynamics today?

- What role does language play in building trust and changing behaviors?

- How will ingo roles change across the SRHR sector?

- What does this mean for how INGOs operate?

- What does this mean for how INGOs may need to transform?

Over the last two years, we've listened to our local partners, we've undergone an introspection process, and we've started to seriously consider how we should evolve to meet the moment. Today, we are at a launching point for change, in partnership with those across the sector – local partners, INGOs, funders, academic institutions. We all have a role to play, but it's time to do things differently. There is a new way, a better way, and a more inclusive way. It's not going to be easy, but if we can evolve, we will thrive. Let's do it together.

This Working Out Loud series is a collection of lessons learned, insights, and frameworks that has come out of the work of TIME so far. The goal of the collection is to transparently share our accumulated knowledge, in the hopes that it invites continued discussion, debate, and collaboration.

- The TIME team

* Note: While the work reflected in the TIME body of knowledge was co-created by SRHR INGO professionals, the insights, lessons learned, and frameworks are broadly applicable across all development organizations. This publication is part of the TIME Working out Loud Learning Collection. More stories and publications can be found here.

TIME Transforming INGO Models for Equity

METHODOLOGY

Introspection to Action

TIME is a collaboration-based initiative that seeks to explore how SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) international NGOs can and should rethink how they operate and contribute to equitable development.

PHASE 1
COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING

In 2022 we asked the question "what are the current relationship dynamics between SRHR INGOs and CSOs working in sub-Saharan Africa?" The answers told us that while INGOs will continue to be relevant, they also will need to change.

PHASE 2
BUILDING SRHR INGO CONSENSUS

In response, in 2023 18 SRHR INGOs came together to go through a process of introspection. Recognizing that change is required across multiple levels, we developed a model and established 3 working groups to identify actions that INGOs could take to respond to CSO input and to operationalize LLD.

PHASE 3
TRANSFORMING TOGETHER

The next step is to return to our CSO partners and funders and begin a proactive dialogue around whether these changes will in fact shift power to local entities while ensuring that INGO operating models are relevant, sustainable, and legitimate. We hope that in turn this will lead to a sector-wide transformation process that is well resources and that allows for practical action to shift power, agency, and ownership.

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WHAT ARE THE DEFINING FEATURES OF INGO/CSO RELATIONSHIPS AND POWER DYNAMICS TODAY?

In 2022, TIME conducted 12 key informant in-depth interviews and a deep-dive survey of SRHR international, national, and regional organizations working in sub-Saharan Africa to understand core elements of INGO/CSO collaboration. When asked, CSO respondents shared nuanced viewpoints about the role of INGOs, detailing both positive and negative sentiments.

LACK OF TRUST

INGOs present as not having confidence in locally-based NGOs.

TOKENISM

INGOs fail to actively co-create or support local ownership.

LINGUISTIC INJUSTICE

English language hegemony leaves other language speakers on the margins.

UNHEALTHY COMPETITION

Increased competition for dwindling funds and rivalry among INGOs and local entities.

BENEFICIAL PARTNER

When asked to share how they feel about their partnerships with INGOs, CSOs responded with words like beneficial, capacity strengthening, supportive, progressive, impactful.

INFLUENTIAL ALLY

INGOs have the power to influence, increasing the visibility of local organizations and advocating for increased direct funding.

ACCESS TO FUNDS

Complex donor requirements and flow-down of funding remains inequitable.

RESPONDING TO LOCAL PARTNER PERSPECTIVES

From our findings we have identified several areas of focus that will build a stronger foundation for the journey ahead. These include:

RETHINK INGO APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIPS

Foster relationships built on trust, mutual understand, and respect that are long-term to allow for meaningful collaboration.

TRANSFORM OPERATING MODELS

Reimagine organizational operating models to be more fit-for-purpose.

BUILD STRONG COALITIONS

Support trust-building and common understanding and language to foster genuine, inclusive approaches.

BRING FUNDERS INTO CONVERSATIONS

Proactively engage with funders who continue to wield outsized power to reform unfair practices and reduce barriers.

A CHANGE MODEL

TIME is a practical test in operationalizing transformation within a complex system. In 2023, three working groups explored complementary and interconnected elements of change at different levels. Each working group identified a core change that needs to happen at the individual, organizational, or sector level respectively for transformation to occur. They then worked together to develop practical frameworks and tools.

SECTOR: VISION
SRHR INGOs need a **vision of the role INGOs should play in advancing the field of SRHR** to be more equitable, resilient, and accountable.

ORGANIZATION: ROADMAP
SRHR INGOs need an **adaptable, multi-dimensional roadmap to provide guidance and direction** for organizations seeking to transform how they work for greater equity.

INDIVIDUAL: CORE CONCEPTS
SRHR INGO leaders and practitioners need a **common language to be able to discuss and debate the core concepts of why and how they must change** for greater equity.

TIME Overview

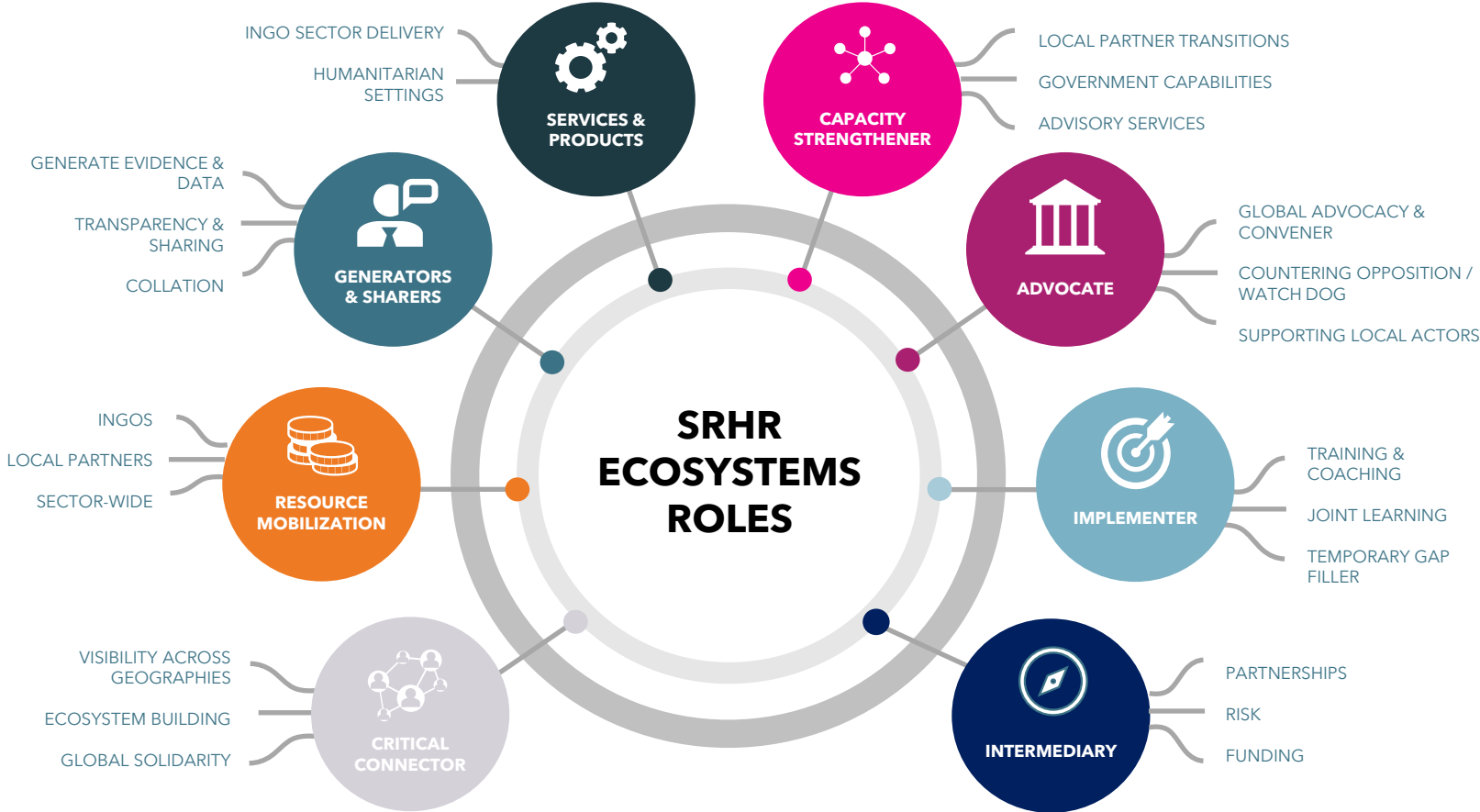# WHAT ROLE DOES LANGUAGE PLAY IN BUILDING TRUST AND CHANGING BEHAVIORS?

We acknowledge and accept that there will never be one definition of a word that everyone accepts. This means that we must:

RESIST JARGON ——● Resist using jargon to defend the status quo by being intentional and specific about what we mean.

EMBRACE NUANCE ——● Get comfortable with nuance.

CONTEXTUALIZE ——● Contextualize the language we are using every time there are different voices in the room. Every space is different.

CHANGE BEHAVIOR ——● Move beyond just changing our word choice, digging deeper to consider how the language we use impacts behavior change.

TIME Overview

HOW WILL INGO ROLES CHANGE ACROSS THE SRHR SECTOR?

The roles outlined will continue to be necessary, but the nature of what is done and who does them will shift over time.

Facilitating the shift between INGOs and CSOs will require deliberate coordination, collaboration, and alignment.

SRHR ECOSYSTEMS ROLES

SERVICES & PRODUCTS
- INGO SECTOR DELIVERY
- HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

CAPACITY STRENGTHENER
- LOCAL PARTNER TRANSITIONS
- GOVERNMENT CAPABILITIES
- ADVISORY SERVICES

GENERATORS & SHARERS
- GENERATE EVIDENCE & DATA
- TRANSPARENCY & SHARING
- COLLATION

ADVOCATE
- GLOBAL ADVOCACY & CONVENER
- COUNTERING OPPOSITION / WATCH DOG
- SUPPORTING LOCAL ACTORS

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION
- INGOS
- LOCAL PARTNERS
- SECTOR-WIDE

IMPLEMENTER
- TRAINING & COACHING
- JOINT LEARNING
- TEMPORARY GAP FILLER

CRITICAL CONNECTOR
- VISIBILITY ACROSS GEOGRAPHIES
- ECOSYSTEM BUILDING
- GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

INTERMEDIARY
- PARTNERSHIPS
- RISK
- FUNDING

TIME Overview

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR HOW INGOS OPERATE?

As part of their operational change, each INGO needs to assess these five key areas.

Are their structures, policies, and practices Equitable? Resilient? Accountable?

SYSTEMS & PROGRAMS

PROGRAMS
How programs and projects are equitably designed and implemented

SYSTEMS
The way in which technology and systems are designed to support LLD outcomes.

RISK & COMPLIANCE

ACCOUNTABILITY
Processes and capabilities to assess how we are changing to adapt and avoid unintended consequences.

RISK
How risk is managed and mitigated across the organization and with partners

FUNDING & FINANCIAL SYSTEMS

PROCUREMENT
Where, who and how an organization outsources products and services.

FUNDING
Diversity of funding sources within an organization's portfolio.

FINANCE
How an organization approaches their costing structures and cost recovery with funders and partners.

ROADMAP
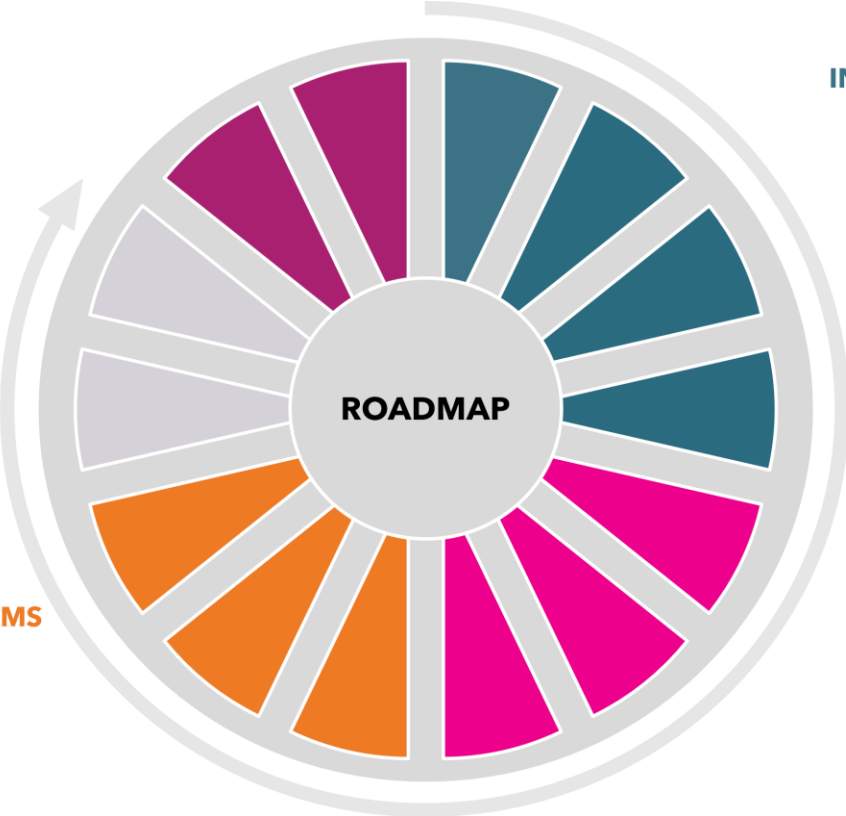
INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

STRUCTURE
Architectural model and organigram of the organization.

LEADERSHIP
Executive team and leaders within the organization that can influence strategic direction and outcomes.

GOVERNANCE
Oversight mechanisms that provide accountability and strategic direction.

PARTNERSHIP
How an organization approaches equitable, strategic partnerships and alliances.
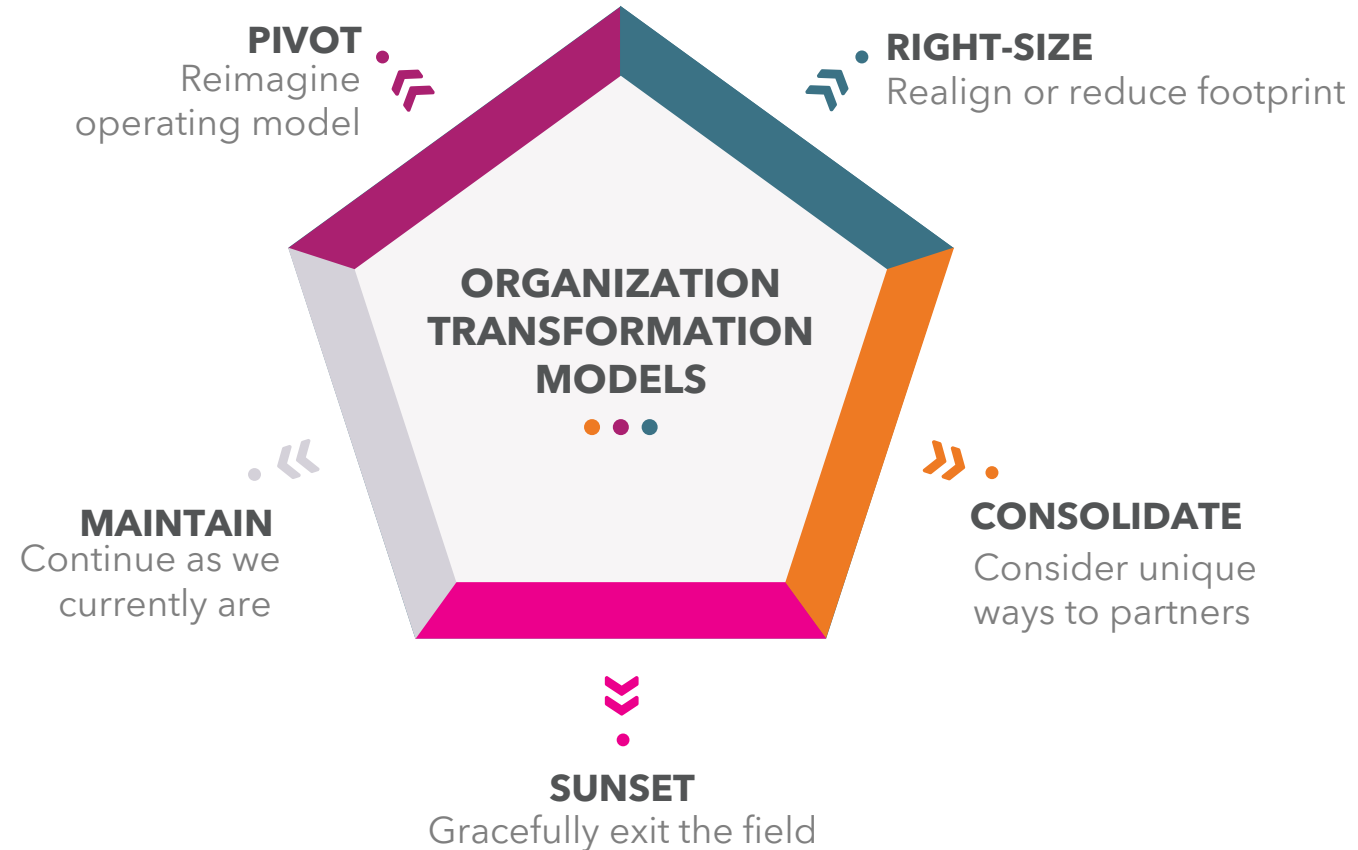
PEOPLE & CULTURE

CULTURE
How to build an environment of trust and shared values.

TALENT
Recruitment, retention and professional development of staff.

COMPENSATION
Approach to equitable compensation of all staff.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR HOW INGOS MAY NEED TO TRANSFORM?

Changes to roles will require changes to operating models. Each INGO will need to make the right decisions for themselves.

PIVOT
Reimagine operating model

RIGHT-SIZE
Realign or reduce footprint

ORGANIZATION TRANSFORMATION MODELS

MAINTAIN
Continue as we currently are

CONSOLIDATE
Consider unique ways to partners

SUNSET
Gracefully exit the field

HARD TRUTHS

While a growing number of INGOs recognize the need for transformation within the field of global health and development and are on their own journeys to move from talk to action, the work of TIME has brought to the fore some deep seated barriers to meaningful change. There will need to be a collective acknowledgement of these hard truths for real progress to be made.

COMPETING MOTIVATIONS

INGOs actively seeking to transform how they work do so for multiple reasons. Increasing impact, aligning work to values, and maintaining relevance, legitimacy, and sustainability are all valid and yet oftentimes competing intrinsic motivations.

DONOR RISK APPETITE

Although many donors have indicated their intention to move funding closer to the work, there continues to be limited risk appetite for change.

TRANSPARENCY

INGOs are not always willing to share their approaches and intentions openly with other INGO and local partners. This can create misalignment and unintended consequences.

OWNERSHIP

Although this phase of the project was focused on introspection within INGOs, we must now look to build a broader platform for engagement across global, regional and local NGOs.

LESSONS LEARNED

In more than 20 working group sessions in 2023, INGO leaders and practitioners worked together to consider how INGOs should and could transform. Unsurprisingly, the process was not always a smooth one. The working groups discussed, debated, and disagreed. At times, the TIME project team got stuck, and had to go back to its original mandate and reframe, rescope, and try to facilitate progress in a different way. We called these moments 'failing forward' because they allowed us to learn something new about each other, the work, and most importantly, the process of change.

Here are the top eight themes and lessons learned.

PROCESS VS. OUTCOME.
The process is the project. Collective action, requires collective understanding.

INTROSPECTION VS. ACTION.
Finding the balance between introspection and action is necessary.

INCLUSION VS. EXCLUSION.
Who is at the table and who should be at the table is still a struggle.

VELOCITY VS. DELIBERATION.
Everything takes more time and resources than you think.

ALTRUISM VS. REALISM.
Change may only be idealistic and altruistic, if incentives are not in place.

INDIVIDUAL VS. ORGANIZATION VS. SECTOR.
Change must happen at all levels, and it must be interconnected.

INCREMENTALISM VS. RADICAL CHANGE.
There is room to change the system from within and to rebuild the system itself.

EMERGENCE VS. SCALABILITY.
Embracing pockets of innovation will deter against analysis paralysis.

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ACCELERATION AGENDA

So, what's next? Building an agenda to accelerate sector-wide transformation will require:

STRUCTURAL REFORMS

INGO reforms require funding support, likely from philanthropic sources. This must be matched with resourcing to NNGOs for capacity growth, thus creating a system of hydraulics that allows INGOs to transfer roles and responsibilities to NNGOs effectively.

NNGO ENGAGEMENT

We need a planned process for engagement and refinement across all working group outcomes through a global consultation process. Regional and country dialogues also need to be supported across INGO and NNGO actors.

COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY

Collective advocacy is necessary to address the evolving environment:
(1) Elevated approach to opposition; (2) Donor engagement on LLD and funding; (3) Global advocacy for SRHR within broader development agendas.

ORGANIZATION BUY-IN

Organizations need to be part of the process, both within and across agencies to support sector-wide change. This conversation needs to shift from beyond the C-suite to organizational leadership.

TIME PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

BECAUSE IT'S…

TIME