

HOW INGOS ARE DOING DEVELOPMENT DIFFERENTLY



Sean Sheridan

Position Paper

Written by Dave Algozo

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MAKING WAVES IN THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

The [Doing Development Differently \(DDD\) manifesto](#) is an important synthesis of emerging principles and practices in our sector. Its contents were not novel in October 2014, but that first meeting at Harvard both framed and fueled ongoing efforts to change how we approach development. The manifesto turned a loose consortium of actors, each nudging their own organizations in various ways, into a movement.

In the three years since the launch, the DDD brand has reached an increasing number of organizations and professionals. The core conveners have held four more global events: [Manila, April 2015](#); [Stockholm, October 2016](#); [London, November 2016](#); and [Jakarta, March 2017](#). Beyond those events, the framing has helped to shape other influential workshops and panels, academic papers and think tank reports, and countless blog posts.

DDD has spread because it resonates with a wide range of development thinkers and practitioners. Though the early gatherings skewed toward donor staff and academics, and especially those with a focus on governance reform, they articulated concepts and principles with broad applicability across technical areas, organization types, and socio-political contexts. DDD created a conceptual space for a conversation about how the sector and its work are changing.

In different forms, that conversation was already happening inside many INGOs. Internal reformers had been working to align their organizations' approaches with the same principles that inspired the DDD manifesto. Those INGO reformers have made common cause across organizational boundaries, exchanging practices and learning from one another's experiences. Though more work is

needed, they are increasingly making those principles a reality across hundreds of programs and contexts.

This paper aims to share what five INGOs—CARE International, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Mercy Corps, Oxfam, and World Vision—have learned in this work. In their relative absence from the first three years of DDD conversations, they have missed an opportunity to advance the sector toward new and better approaches to development. This paper draws on case studies and analytical work to articulate the specific and unique contributions that INGOs can bring to the global discourse and action around DDD.

UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM INGOs

The contributions that INGOs can make to the DDD movement stem from their positioning within the development sector. Their programmatic experiences and in-house expertise differ from those of academics, think tanks, donor agencies, contractors, and national or local NGOs and community organizations. Naturally, the lessons they learn and their perspectives on DDD differ as well. INGOs' contributions to the conversation fall into three major themes:

Localizing power and ownership in DDD practice.

The DDD manifesto emphasizes the need to address local problems, defined by local people in locally owned processes, legitimized at all levels. To reach the most marginalized people and communities, INGOs wrestle with the power imbalances that often prevent those communities from engaging in development processes. Many INGOs have developed specific practices and techniques that make this possible.

Funding and accountability for adaptation.

Though not mentioned in the manifesto, the effect of funding modalities on adaptation, accountability, and partnerships has been a frequent discussion topic at DDD gatherings. INGOs sit at the center of the rapid cycles of blended design and implementation that characterize DDD practice. They are learning to navigate the constraints set by funding and compliance, while also defining better forms of partnerships that actively encourage adaptation.

Institutionalizing DDD across large agencies.

From the first workshop, the DDD community has wrestled with how to best spread the principles. INGOs have contributed to the public body of knowledge, but the bulk of their effort has been focused on internal reforms. Each organization interprets the DDD principles in terms of their specific mission, contexts, and approaches, increasing the likelihood of the practices taking root across their broad portfolios.

Each theme warrants a deeper dive and a few illustrative examples.

THEME 1: LOCALIZING POWER AND OWNERSHIP IN DDD PRACTICE

The DDD community, along with the overlapping Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) community of practice, has provided an important counterweight to the technocratic, de-politicizing tendencies of the development industry. The incentives to atomize technical areas and wish away politics is strong. Explicitly acknowledging and navigating politics is a necessary step, but an insufficient one.

Political dynamics play out on a deeper structure: the many forms and faces of power.

People and communities that are relatively disempowered—whether due to gender, age, poverty, marginalization, oppression, crisis, or a combination of other factors—are less able to advocate for their needs and interests in political arenas. Their ownership over their own progress is threatened when those with more power control development processes. As noted in the DDD manifesto, differential power makes development more complex and a lack of ownership threatens success.

INSIGHT: COMMUNITY-LEVEL OWNERSHIP REQUIRES DEEP AND ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

Compared to donor or research organizations, INGOs are more closely connected to the most disempowered and marginalized communities. Their staff often come from those communities themselves, are embedded within those communities for their programs, or work in daily partnership with community-based organizations over many years. To do development differently at this proximity means working in concert with the community that is meant to benefit. It cannot be that an INGO does development differently on its own, but that the community and INGO together are doing development differently.

This is the essence of community-level ownership: both the sense and the reality that the community sets priorities, finds their own solutions, and directs efforts and resources toward them. INGOs' funding and relative power in these relationships creates a risk of undermining community ownership over development initiatives. Deep and ongoing engagement can overcome that risk.

This engagement usually starts with convening and facilitating conversations, exchanging knowledge and building relationships and trust. These conversations benefit from research and analysis that are themselves owned by the community: better to have inclusive and accessible methods that can be run by front-

line development practitioners and community members together, rather than publishable assessments conducted by external experts. Systematized toolkits can help, but hiring development practitioners with soft skills may be more important.

Examples

World Vision's "Transformational Development"¹ approach illustrates this deep and ongoing engagement. The approach involves locally recruited facilitators who convene working groups to identify what is currently being done in an area, raise awareness around the gaps, set priorities, and develop project plans.

In putting this approach into practice, World Vision has found that broad coalitions can be very effective, but that they take time to build. In fact, the timeframes and pace of the whole process should be adjusted to match the community, both by allowing ample time for the assessment period and by designing projects with longer horizons.²



World Vision International. In Bangladesh, a community creates a shared vision for child well-being and agrees on key short-term priorities: a) to reduce hygiene-related illnesses and b) to end cultural norms that perpetuate child marriage.

Several INGOs have developed methods of analysis that are inclusive and accessible to front-line practitioners and community members. CARE International has sought to make political economy analysis (PEA) more operationally relevant and practical by blending it with participatory learning tools.³ Similarly, IRC's Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit includes field-ready methodologies for social network analysis, scenario planning, and do-no-harm assessment.

INSIGHT: SUSTAINABLE RESULTS STEM FROM SHIFTING POWER AT ALL LEVELS

If disempowerment undermines ownership, and ownership is necessary for progress, then both ownership and progress will remain tenuous until a community builds power. For sustainable results, development must increase a community's power.

INGOs have found that power shifts are needed across multiple dimensions and at all levels—much the way that the DDD manifesto points to a need to legitimize development initiatives at all levels. For the communities, that may start with advocating for themselves at the local levels. With support, they can represent themselves on national and global stages as well. INGOs are well placed to link advocacy and influencing across these levels.

At each level, power manifests in multiple forms: the public and visible kind, as well as more hidden and even internalized forms. Addressing these other forms of power is especially important when working with social movements and on contested issues like gender dynamics, peacebuilding, or accountability.

¹ World Vision's Guidance for Development Programmes. <http://www.wvi.org/development-programmes>.

² World Vision's practices and learning journey for Doing Development Differently. Forthcoming. Draft available at: <http://www.wvi.org/transformational-development/publication/world-visions-practices-and-learning-doing-development>.

³ "Doing political economy analysis better: CARE's experience" (webinar recording). Tom Aston. CARE. 26 January 2016. Available at: <http://gpsaknowledge.org/events/gpsa-webinar-doing-political-economy-analysis-better-cares-experience/>.



Josh Estey/CARE. Women on the Move in Niger.

Examples

In Niger, CARE has supported civil society ownership over advocacy efforts in working with three key organizations representing pastoralists' rights and interests. With advocacy goals set by the civil society partners, CARE provides coaching, introductions, and capacity building in areas like building an evidence base. The partners have expanded their membership six-fold, engaging thousands more people, and have added women to their leadership boards and membership. One partner created a new coalition of a dozen organizations, while another partner established nine new offices to influence across the region. With this new capacity, the partners directed relief to families during the 2014 hungry season, built local conflict resolution forums, brought new evidence to policy processes, and successfully pressured the government to pass new water rights laws.⁴

Oxfam's Raising Her Voice program in Nepal shifted power in multiple forms and across levels. In a country where women face severe discrimination and isolation, the program's main activity was to convene "community discussion classes" with facilitators recruited from the communities. The classes provided spaces for women to improve literacy, share experiences, and build communication and leadership skills. Breaking down women's isolation enabled them to better address domestic violence and gender roles in their homes. At the community level, these spaces led to action plans for tackling various problems, e.g. securing undisbursed village funds for construction of community toilets and other infrastructure. Finally, the program led to a measurable increase in women taking on leadership roles in other local groups, such as parent-teacher associations and ward citizen forums.⁵

⁴ [From Implementing to Coaching: Building Local Civil Society in Niger](#). Emily Janoch, Goni Malam Sale, Issaka Dan Dano. CARE.

⁵ "The Raising Her Voice Nepal Programme." Oxfam Active Citizenship Case Study. Duncan Green. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-raising-her-voice-nepal-programme-338476>. For more on Oxfam's influencing work, see: "World-wide influencing: What is it?" Oxfam Views and Voices. Steve Price-Thomas. <https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/general/influencing/2017/09/world-wide-influencing/>.

THEME 2: FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ADAPTATION

The topic of funding is impossible to avoid in discussions of development approaches. INGOs' position in the development ecosystem means they are often working directly with both the sources of funds and the communities meant to benefit from them. As a result, they often find themselves trying to do development differently while resourcing development in the same old ways. This can lead to some contradictions, which INGOs are learning to address.

Insight: Flexible funding, in one form or another, is needed for DDD

Most development funding involves planning and budgeting practices that constrain how a program adapts in response to local needs. Strict budget lines or the incentives to spend quickly and steadily (through high “burn rates”) often prevent teams from re-allocating resources when pre-planned activities become less relevant and a program needs to change direction. These factors make it much harder to blend design and implementation, to learn and iterate, or to make “small bets” that may be replicated or dropped.

Many DDD practices benefit from some amount of flexibility in funding. However, this can take many forms; completely unrestricted funds are not the only way to resource DDD approaches. Other examples include extended inception/design phases, dedicated funding for innovation and risk-taking, and triggering mechanisms for funding increases or other budget changes.

Examples

An extended inception period allowed the Three Millennium Development Goal project, in Myanmar's Kayah State, to create a more context-specific and adaptable approach. Managed by the IRC and including six health organizations based in different ethnic communities, the project consortium used the six-month inception period to build trust through initial activities and conduct a stakeholder analysis. When the initial funding of \$530,000 was expanded to a two-year grant for \$8 million, the consortium had created specific plans for each health organization, based on the unique needs and capacities of their communities. There was also a flexible funding line, which was later tapped for opportunistic projects like a joint vaccination campaign run by multiple partners.⁶



Peter Biro. IRC supported health care in Kayah, Myanmar

Flexible funding is also important for World Vision's “Transformational Development” approach, which involves significant upfront community engagement prior to specific programs or grants. World Vision funds this work from unrestricted sources, especially through child sponsorship fundraising, and can then use grants for the projects that are identified through the process. This has enabled work with communities over longer time-frames

⁶ [Tailoring Health Programming to Context Variations in Kayah State, Myanmar](#). International Rescue Committee. June 2016.



Theodore Sam/World Vision International. Self Help Groups in India enable women to gain financial independence, strengthen their self-perception and confidence and challenge underlying social norms.

than would be possible solely under grants. The organization is increasingly looking for ways to sustain the approach under shorter-term funding arrangements, especially in fragile contexts.⁷

Insight: Adaptive partnerships go beyond budget lines

Even when funding is flexible—and especially when it is not—the way partners collaborate matters greatly in DDD approaches. Accountability mechanisms can stand in the way of program changes, as when pre-defined output measures cannot be changed to match program pivots, or when onerous compliance or reporting requirements take time and attention away from reflection and learning. On the other hand, partnerships characterized by open communication and sharing can actively encourage reflection, learning, and risk-taking. These dynamics, between a donor and an INGO, are mirrored in the relationships among INGOs, sub-grantees, community-based

organizations, communities, and other partners in a development initiative. Deep and ongoing engagement, as described above, often includes feedback/listening mechanisms that hold INGOs accountable to their partners and the communities they serve. Collaboration across organizations can bring scale to DDD efforts.⁸

Examples

Though more focused on humanitarian relief, Mercy Corps' South and Central Syria program illustrates the possibilities for adaptive partnerships, even in a challenging operating environment. In-country program partners, ranging from established local NGOs to more informal networks, would propose projects based on the needs they saw on the ground. The Mercy Corps team would work with them to craft context-appropriate compliance measures, so that they could access aid funding from major donors, and would also provide ongoing coaching to improve documentation over time. In addition, Mercy Corps built a context analysis

⁷ World Vision's practices and learning journey for Doing Development Differently. Forthcoming. Draft available at: <http://www.wvi.org/transformational-development/publication/world-visions-practices-and-learning-doing-development>.

⁸ For examples of consortium-based feedback/listening mechanisms, see the Listen Learn Act Project (<https://www.danchurchaid.org/about-us/quality-assurance/the-listen-learn-act-project>) and the Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms pilot (<http://feedbackmechanisms>).

team—leveraging informant networks within Syria, social media reports, and observations from partners—that identified both risks and opportunities for partners’ activities.⁹

THEME 3: INSTITUTIONALIZING DDD ACROSS LARGE AGENCIES

The DDD movement ultimately aims to drop its last “D”: making the approaches no longer “different”, but rather the norm. This requires spreading the principles and practices beyond especially talented practitioners or pockets-of-excellence, until they reach across the sector. As large organizations working on multiple issues in multiple contexts, INGOs have approached this objective in various ways.



Sean Sheridan. Community educators for the Centre for Liberian Assistance mobilize for a community outreach on the dangers of Ebola as part of an ambitious experiment in adaptive management at Mercy Corps.

Insight: Adaptive management provides common practices and tools for DDD across an agency

DDD and adaptive management are often discussed interchangeably. They make a powerful combination. INGOs have used adaptive management to enable blended design and implementation through cycles of planning, acting, learning, and revising—enacting one of the core DDD principles.

However, adaptive management is missing DDD’s emphasis on locally defined problems, local ownership, and power. Many adaptive management practices could, in theory, be applied to non-DDD ends.

Some INGOs have found that the analysis and learning practices of adaptive management are amenable to the DDD priorities of local ownership. Practices like outcome mapping, multi-stakeholder learning reviews, or listening/feedback mechanisms help to decenter donor accountability, shifting programs toward community accountability. With these additions, adaptive management provides a set of tools that systematize and share DDD principles across technical areas and geographic contexts.

Examples

Drawing on a set of six case studies from market systems development, health programming, and humanitarian relief, IRC and Mercy Corps crafted a framework for adaptive management called ADAPT (analysis-driven agile programming techniques). It included lessons under five themes: dynamic and collaborative teams; appropriate data and reflective analysis; responsive decision-making and action; agile and integrated operations; and trusting and flexible partnerships. Both agencies have used the framework (and refined it) to encourage adaptive management in other programs.¹⁰

⁹ [Ensuring Contextual Awareness and Flexible Partnership in South and Central Syria](#). Mercy Corps. July 2016

¹⁰ [Adapting Aid: Lessons from Six Case Studies](#). IRC and Mercy Corps. July 2016.

Insight: Organizational learning can draw on the multiple sectors and contexts where INGOs operate

Each INGO is composed of diverse experts, working in multiple contexts, with various program approaches underway at any given time. This scope creates a massive pipeline of experiences for internal learning about how to make DDD principles a reality.

For example, sectoral experts that are especially good at doing one type of analysis may be able to share their skills with other sectors. Similarly, data or technology tools developed to support adaptive management in one program can be shared with others. And differential learning about which approaches work in which types of contexts can draw on a large pool of data.

For internal knowledge management and learning, INGOs utilize everything from communities of practice to staff secondments to internal blogs. These mechanisms have helped them to gather and then share learning around DDD principles and practices. Tacit knowledge flows more quickly within an organization than it does between organizations, building to explicit findings and knowledge products that can be shared more easily with external audiences. Other large agencies struggling to promote DDD internally could learn from INGOs' approaches.

Examples

Building on the ADAPT partnership with IRC, Mercy Corps has disseminated adaptive management in several ways. For example, the program support team has incorporated adaptive approaches into the agency's standard program management toolkits and training,

now branded APM@MC: "adaptive program management at Mercy Corps". The ADAPT partnership has also provided the basis for an assessment methodology called AdaptScan, through which teams can identify the factors that make them most adaptive, and make plans for improving their adaptive capacities.¹¹

Insight: Institutionalizing DDD takes an organizational change process

In order to institutionalize the practices of adaptive management and spread the learning drawn from pursuing DDD in multiple contexts and sectors, INGOs have pursued various initiatives that amount to organizational change processes, even when they are not formalized as such. These occur at three levels.

First, at the individual level: large agencies need to inspire and equip practitioners for a new way of approaching their work. INGOs have used a combination of internal evangelizing, elevating good examples, training, and new hiring standards. The soft skills are often the most important: communication, comfort with ambiguity, humility. Toolkits or trainings can help with these, but staff selection matters greatly as well.

Second, at the organizational level: those individual practitioners, once inspired and equipped, frequently trip over organizational hurdles. These might come from finance, operations, or compliance procedures, but also from program management requirements or organizational culture. INGOs have found ways to loosen those constraints. DDD principles suggest a DDD approach to change: work with staff from across the agency to define new policies and procedures; support test cases; adapt and scale up the successes.

¹¹ [Agility and Evolution: How Mercy Corps Adapts at the Organizational Level](#). Mercy Corps. July 2017.



Colors of Nairobi. By Waceke Kamau (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0], via Wikimedia Commons

And finally, at the governance level: INGOs have long faced critiques of being driven by (mostly northern) donor interests, at the expense of autonomy in the (mostly southern) countries where they operate. They have responded by decentralizing implementation authority to country offices, increasing efforts to hire staff who are nationals of those countries, elevating the influence of country offices and southern-based affiliates in global decision-making, and creating greater accountability to the communities they serve. A few have moved their global headquarters to the global south.

Examples

World Vision's "Transformational Development" approach has its roots in a board-level policy from the early 2000s. However, it has gone through a few shifts since then: after a drift into overly broad programming, the organization narrowed its focus to child well-being in the late 2000s. More recently, a re-introduction of

the Transformational Development approach to has helped teams to be more holistic in tackling the root causes and considering sustainability concerns that surround child well-being. Ongoing efforts aim to make the principles and practices more consistent across the agency.

Both Oxfam and CARE have shifted to decentralized confederation models at the global level. Oxfam International is in the process of moving its secretariat from Oxford to Nairobi—a move that the executive director has linked to the need to be more globally balanced.¹² ActionAid International made a similar move from London to Johannesburg in 2004.

Over two dozen major INGOs have signed on to the [Accountable Now](#) commitments, agreeing to follow and report annually on 12 areas related to transparency and accountability, including justice and equality, women's rights and gender equality, people-drive work, strong partnerships, open organizations, and more.

¹² "[Oxfam International signs historic deal to move to Nairobi, Kenya.](#)" *Oxfam International Blog*. Winnie Byanyima. July 2016.



Aubrey Wade/Oxfam. Tika Darlami participates in a meeting of the 'Nari Utthan' (women ascending) Community Discussion Class.

AREAS FOR COLLABORATION

Drawing from a relatively small set of case studies and prior analytical work, this paper is naturally incomplete. The five INGOs who contributed to this document plan to continue the conversation around the overarching question: How can voices from INGOs contribute more to DDD conversations? Though it was beyond this paper's scope, there is also a clear need to include voices from national NGOs, community-based organizations, and other members of civil society.

Specific questions under each theme include:

- **Localizing power and ownership in DDD practice:** How might we link power shifts from the community level through to elite/

ministerial levels, so that they reinforce one another? How can these links help to scale and sustain ownership?

- **Funding and accountability for adaptation:** What types of flexible funding mechanisms, design and planning approaches, and partnership structures can best encourage collaborative DDD across agencies? And how do these vary by funding contexts, sectoral areas, and other factors?
- **Institutionalizing DDD across large agencies:** What governance, administrative, operational, and other shifts need to happen in development institutions of all kinds to institutionalize of DDD approaches? How can voices and perspectives from the global south be valued in these shifts?