

The background of the top half of the cover is an abstract, textured composition. It features a central globe-like shape with a grid pattern, overlaid with golden, ornate arches and patterns that resemble traditional Islamic or Middle Eastern architecture. The color palette is dominated by various shades of teal and blue, with golden highlights and some reddish-orange accents. The overall effect is one of complexity and global interconnectedness.

# TRANSFORMATIONAL EVALUATION

FOR THE GLOBAL CRISES OF OUR TIMES

**Rob D. van den Berg**

**Cristina Magro**

**Marie-Hélène Adrien**

EDITORS



**IDEAS**

KNOWLEDGE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT NETWORKING

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## CHAPTER 6

# Contradictions and Complementarities Between South and North on Transformation in the Anthropocene

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**Abstract.** Emerald Network is an emerging community of evaluation and learning praxis working in the field of international cooperation and development and with Global South consultancy partners. Our evaluation and learning praxis draws on our combined experience in policymaking, design, strategy, finance, implementation and research. Recognizing that we are living through the early Anthropocene – or Capitalocene to be more precise – we seek to contribute to transformative development pathways in service to a just, regenerative, low-carbon, resilient world. In this chapter, we reflect on how our praxis has evolved over the past eight years, sharing stories of success and failure and what we have learned in the service of transformational work. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the role of evaluation praxis in transformational design for sustainable development, focusing on a number of themes that have come to play a central role in our praxis. These include navigating and learning through contradictions and complementarities between Global South and Global North, the centrality of navigating power in these contradictions and complementarities, the value of understanding history and context, the importance of internal praxis and the design and facilitation of adaptive and potentially transformational learning processes.

## Introduction

Much has been written about the need for transformation in the Anthropocene, seeking to define transformation in this context – a context that should be better known as the Capitalocene. Having worked to support the Climate Investment Funds (2019) in developing an understanding of transformation practice, we draw on this framework, which embraces four dimensions, all of which the Climate Investment Funds see as necessary to define transformation:

- *Transformation has relevance.* For Emerald Network, the relevance of our transformational praxis<sup>1</sup> is to contribute to social justice, ecological flourishing and well-being for all.
- *Transformation involves systemic change.* Transformation involves fundamental changes in structures and systems – disrupting these systems and unlocking new pathways to development – and is facilitated through systemic practices.
- *Transformation takes place at scale.* Transformation involves working at scale and taking to scale. Strategies include multiscale development, scaling up, scaling out and scaling deep.
- *Transformation is an enduring, sustainable process.* Transformation involves a long-term, dynamic process that builds capacity to ride out short-term shocks and transcend longer-term stresses.

### Transformation as Systemic Change

In this chapter, our primary focus is on the second dimension of transformation as systemic change and, along with this, the value of leveraging systemic change through systemic interventions. (Alongside this primary focus, the other three dimensions of transformation remain integral to our praxis, and we touch on these in various ways throughout the chapter.)

In foregrounding systemic change, this chapter explores five interlinked themes (complementarities and contradictions, centring power, context and history, designing for transformational learning, internal and external design praxis), which we engage with through the following four lenses. First, we briefly introduce each theme. Second, theoretical background

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<sup>1</sup> We refer throughout to our evaluation and learning practice as ‘praxis’, in the sense of theory-informed practice. We understand evaluation and learning to be shaped by theory as well as experience and work reflexively with this understanding.

on each theme is provided in boxes 6.1 to 6.5. Third, illustrations of these themes as they illuminate particular stories of Emerald Network praxis can be found in the sections that follow, in the latter, Joint Reflections from Our Community of Praxis part of each story. Fourth, in the final section on concluding insights, we return to each of these themes in a discussion of transformational design for evaluation. The reader is invited to review these themes through each of these four lenses.

We start with a brief introduction of each theme.

- *Complementarities and contradictions.* Systems comprise multiple elements, often with complex relationships and feedback loops between them. Working to change system structure and function involves working to shift these relationships, sometimes in radical ways. One approach to thinking about inter-relationships is to work with complementarities and contradictions between the elements – a central theme of this chapter. Complementarities and contradictions are inherent not only in our systems of interest, but also in our own collaborations, where their consideration is integral to what we refer to as internal design praxis (in the fifth theme below).
- *Centring power.* Working with complementarities and contradictions between elements of a system immediately takes us into issues of power. Centring and consciously facilitating power and political relationships and factoring these into transformational design praxis is a second core theme of this chapter and informs our reflections on relationships between the Global South and the Global North – as geographical spaces and as metaphors for unhealthy power disparities.
- *Context and history.* Working with complex systems and their inherent power dynamics requires paying careful attention to context and history – recognizing especially that solutions for complex systems are always specific to their context and history, much more so than for complicated or simple solutions.
- *Designing for transformational learning.* Recognition of the dynamics of complex systems, and the many uncertainties and emergent properties inherent in these, calls for design and evaluation approaches that foreground adaptive learning. In the case of evaluation for transformation – and transformative evaluations – this may also call for designing transformational learning processes.

**Box 6.1 Theorizing Complementarities and Contradictions**

**Complementarities.** The concept of solidarity, which is characterized by relatedness or *ukama*, an essential component of the African philosophy of *ubuntu*, underpins our work with the concept of complementarities. *Ukama* encourages being, thinking and doing with others in the service of the common good and linking past, current and future generations in creating and sharing knowledge, moral values and natural heritage (Murove 2009). We work with three kinds of solidarity that are essential for building complementarities between the Global North and Global South: relational solidarity, which is committed to reciprocity and the act of being with others as part of them; transitive solidarity, which involves taking action to change the way things are in a reflexive process that transforms the agent in the processing of acting and creative solidarity, which is collective learning to reveal new horizons and produce new ways of being together, of making, feeling, creating and loving (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2012).

**Contradictions.** Engeström (2001) theorizes contradictions as historically accumulated structural tensions within and between practices, actors and groups of actors that are available as important sources of transformative learning, change and development. Contradictions are by nature tension laden. They are subterranean and invisible, have a history, are structural and require surfacing, for example from relationships of political and institutionalized power, choice and decision-making power at different scales, and access to and control of material and non-material resources such as knowledge. Confronting contradictions is uncomfortable, but failure to resolve them can worsen situations, so confronting them is critical for bringing about transformational change that goes beyond addressing symptoms.

**Box 6.2 Theorizing Power**

The feminist concept of power, which emphasizes *power with* and *power to* as opposed to *power over* others, has sensitized our evaluation work and our relationships as co-evaluators (Karlberg 2005). This feminist model of power is against conflating power with domination but views power as the human ability to act in concert with others, nurturing and empowering others to produce change (Arendt 1969). We also draw on system theorists such as Boulding (1990) who encourage working with integrative power, which is underpinned by cooperation and reciprocity, a sense of community and the ability to create and pursue desirable things together.

**Box 6.3 Theorizing History and Context as Part of Transformative Praxis**

As our internal praxis matures, the team's experiences converge around common value-based threads. A core perspective for transformation praxis is *centring on the local*, which we used to navigate our way into the Swedish Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) assignment (below), a work of large, multiscalar scope. In centring the local, the impact of change-making becomes one strand within place-specific context and history: a strand that surfaces power legacies, complexity, surprise and fine-tuned responsiveness from outside drivers such as donors and intermediaries.

Theory informs us 'that choices between possible pathways, at different scales and for different groups of people, are shaped by uneven power structures and historical legacies that create their own, often unforeseen change...and that considerations for inclusiveness, place-specific trade-off deliberations, redistributive measures and procedural justice mechanisms [must] facilitate equitable transformation' (Roy et al. 2018).



#### **Box 6.4 Theorizing Design for Transformational Learning**

That ongoing cycles of learning and adaptive management are co-designed, are guided by essential principles and offer a tensile holding framework are some of the emerging insights from our journey of eight years of collaborations towards transformational design.

Theory casts light on the imperative for 'creating environments that enable learning and knowledge management...[with] learning increasingly understood to be the linchpin [of good evaluation]' (STAP 2017). Furthermore, 'jointly practicing the essentials will create a highly adaptive, reflexive, relational, collaborative and impact-oriented form of [design] that has a strong impetus [for evaluation] to engage with action' (Fazey et al. 2018).

#### **Box 6.5 Theorizing Internal and External Praxis**

With our focus on transformative praxis, one of our key assumptions has been that the internal reflective praxis of the consultant team also shapes the outer system of interest. For example, in the Pakistan story below, we purposively bridged from being good consultants to facilitators of transformation while experiencing between us the power play of whose knowledge counts in the contradictions between Indigenous and state and donor priorities.

Theory informs us that 'reflective practice should not shy away from dealing overtly and reflectively with conflicts of views, values, and rationality' and that 'a greater use of reflective practice is advocated in reference not only to [internal praxis] development, but as a means to enhance dialogue, stakeholders' involvement and organisational learning' as external praxis (Kubera 2019).

- *Internal and external design praxis.* Working with transformational learning calls for paying careful attention to what we call internal praxis – processes of individual and team reflection, reflexivity, learning and development – alongside what we do in the external world. In our experience, attending to internal praxis not only enables us to be better practitioners, but can also provide us with vital clues as to what is going on in the systems we are participating and intervening in.

The five themes set out above can be considered principles of design as well as analytical themes. A principles-based approach to evaluation design is especially important in a transformational context, in turn requiring a toolkit of frameworks and approaches that we can apply, for example, to help us understand history, context, outcomes, insights and design and facilitate processes of change and learning. A number of these frameworks and approaches are discussed in this chapter – for example, theory of change, contribution analysis and learning history.

### **Introducing Our Internal Values and Praxis**

Within Emerald Network, we see ourselves as a community of praxis that seeks to contribute to transformative learning for sustainability and social justice. In developing interventions, we deliberately draw on the distributed knowledge and experience of our team, which is multicultural and transdisciplinary. We build our praxis by learning from different streams of evaluation thinking. As a result, we are continuously working on and expanding the boundaries of our collective practice. Our ambition is to feed back into the broader evaluation system.

### **Structure of This Chapter**

This chapter draws on a panel discussion that we designed and held for the IDEAS 2019 Global Assembly in Prague. In transcribing this performance for a book chapter, we sought to remain faithful to the narrative form and structure of the performance while adding structural clarity to increase the accessibility of interweaving descriptive, reflective and theoretical narrative, all of which combine in praxis. To increase this accessibility, we also draw on a narrative format derived from learning history (Bradbury, Roth and Gearty 2015), which is designed to enable the reader to juxtapose multiple voices – of different actors and of descriptive, reflective and theoretical

perspectives. Learning history had already informed our performance; here we take it a step further in shaping the layout of complementary written narratives.

After this introductory section, the chapter follows four stories taken from our collaborative praxis, using these stories to describe the type of evaluative work we do and to illustrate our thesis through the use of evaluator reflections. We set out descriptive narratives first, followed by reflective insights, with the main themes highlighted in italics. Summarizing these reflective insights, the main themes revealed in our transformative evaluation praxis and its role in transformational design for sustainable development are brought together in the final section of the chapter.

## An Early Collaboration in Pakistan: Facilitating Power and an Unconventional Portfolio

This first story, on which Mehjabeen and John worked together for the first time, is not an evaluation story but is about our role as transformational designers for a portfolio of proposals<sup>2</sup>. In this story, we were challenged to work with and seek to resolve important contradictions that arose from application of our design principles.

### Researchers' Story

The context for this story is that, in 2012, the government of Pakistan approved its first climate change policy – five years in the making. Now Pakistan's Ministry of Climate Change (MoCC) wanted a portfolio of fast-track action proposals in the climate-compatible development space<sup>3</sup> that it could take to potential donors. The MoCC therefore agreed with the regional Asia office of the Climate and Development Knowledge Network that it would commission consultancy work to develop this portfolio – work that John and Mehjabeen won as part of a North–South consortium<sup>4</sup>.

For our praxis, this was a formative story. In addition to working together for the first time, we had to make choices that took us across a transformational bridge and made prominent for our community the centrality of an internal praxis and how to articulate a growing understanding of how our

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<sup>2</sup> For the full story, see Colvin and Abidi-Habib (2013).

<sup>3</sup> The space of intersections between adaptation, mitigation and development.

<sup>4</sup> Global Climate Adaptation Partnership led this consortium in the United Kingdom, working with Hagler Bailly in Pakistan.

internal and external work shapes the choices that we make. Our design experience and the learning that flowed from this story is set out below.

Our design drew on a set of principles around equity, ecological justice and sustainability and brought together an unlikely alliance of institutions that would not normally have collaborated. This included institutions from different sectors, for example those working toward food security, women's empowerment and forestry. It also intentionally convened individuals who were identified as leaders, innovators or climate change experts (and sometimes more than one of these). Together this alliance developed a diverse, unconventional portfolio of climate-related projects based on the long, deep traditions of their work.

The portfolio surprised us in that it opened up a power dynamic with the part of the client system that lay within the federal government and created ambivalence or what we call 'wobbles' in our whole remit. An example of questions that surfaced was: Which knowledge counts: the Indigenous learning that our unlikely alliance brought to the table or the calls that international donors made and the expert knowledge expected to support these? Also, the variation in scale of project size was puzzling to our client.

So, silencing some of the diversity in the portfolio that was presented, the client shifted what they were asking for and requested an expert-led set of tried and tested proposals. These contradictions between our design principles and client preconceptions led to an eventual collapse of our assignment, making us understand that the institutional holding framework that our client system offered was not strong enough to follow through with a transformation agenda. The MoCC was weak in intent and purpose and lacked foresight.

We had other offers to hold together the alliance we had built, as well as generative energies from the members of the alliance, but could not pursue this particular effort. Instead, we gained a reputation that led us to several more allied assignments in Pakistan.

Our process of learning to work with internal design praxis during this assignment led Mehjabeen and John to a series of observations:

- As we faced these challenges and wobbles, we had to attend to how we were working together as a team, as well as to the personal and professional challenges this work brought up – what we came to refer to as our 'internal design praxis' – for a team and within our individual practices.
- We found ourselves needing to structure our collaborative teamwork as a series of rapid adaptive management and learning cycles,

which we also shared with the client; we had to learn to work together in ways that were agile and dexterous.

- Ultimately for this assignment, because the client chose expert knowledge over facilitation of Indigenous knowing, we had to take some tough choices about who we were as professionals in this context and what the right path forward was for us.

Further insights about internal design praxis flowed from this experience. Thus, we articulated this principled choice to ourselves as a choice between being good consultants and stepping into being facilitators of design for transformation. We noted that this choice mirrored the choice that the whole system had to make to reach a transformative space. In other words, although part of the system embodied by unlikely alliances of Indigenous knowledge was ready to design for transformation, the part embodied by the MoCC and its advisors, when faced with this choice, opted to carry on with business as usual. This insight in turn sensitized us to the value of mirroring<sup>5</sup> as a technique to enable us to reflect on the relationship between internal and external praxis.

Risks of losing professional reputation accompanied the high levels of complexity and uncertainty in this work, yet they demanded a transformational approach. In turn, making this choice required that we cross thresholds of fear. It was at times quite scary for us, requiring that we step into a particular kind of leadership that involved foregrounding our knowledge less, facilitating others' knowledge and creating spaces for different knowledge systems to interact.

This also sensitized us to the importance of matching the challenge of facilitating transformational work with the tensile strength of our client system and the degree of holding that this could create<sup>6</sup>.

### Joint Reflections from Our Community of Praxis

In this first story, we note how *contradictions* are surfaced early on, as the principled portfolio rubs up against power dynamics in the federal government, leading to an awkward question: Whose knowledge counts? Here, a contradiction emerges between the indigenous knowledge that the team's

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<sup>5</sup> This technique is also known as shadow consulting (see Hawkins 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie (1997) write about the importance of creating adequate holding frameworks in leading organizations through complex processes of change.

principled approach had invited into the system and the 'expert knowledge' that was the expectation of the MoCC and Climate and Development Knowledge Network. The team was not purposefully excluding expert knowledge but rather holding it in reserve until such time as it might usefully complement indigenous sense-making, but the contradiction between an unconventional portfolio and a conventional institutional holding framework, with the attendant *power dynamics* at play, proved to be more than the system could hold. It is also tempting to ask whether the contradiction between indigenous knowledge (an unconventional portfolio) and expert knowledge (conventional institutional practices) could be framed as a South–North contradiction.

A second theme, relevant to *transformational design and implementation*, also emerged here. It soon became clear to the team, particularly as they worked through the process of attending to contradictions, that design would need to be expressed through ongoing cycles of adaptive management and learning.

This story also highlighted the team's attendance to *internal praxis*, which was vital to their ability to adapt and called on the application of new skills, such as attending to processes of mirroring. Internal praxis was also called on to guide the team in learning new ways of working together and encountering new areas of professional and personal contradictions and constraints, for example in balancing roles as good consultants and facilitators of transformation. Again, a contradiction between Global South and Global North practices might have been at play here, even as the team sought to bridge and integrate these.

In summary, this assignment created a significant *early developmental moment* for our incipient community of praxis, foreshadowing several of the themes that we explore further in the remainder of this chapter: The team was tested and had to make difficult choices, face the risks and feel the fear – all of which were demanding of internal praxis and led to rapid adaptive management and design. The team was challenged to work with and seek to resolve important contradictions that arose from application of its design principles, which in hindsight appeared to mirror Global South–Global North contradictions in knowledge and institutional practices, as well as in professional identities.

## Evaluating the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance: Centring Transformation and Power in Design

Our second story takes us to Africa and the evaluation of the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA). Picking up a theme from the first story, in this work, we begin to learn about combining our role of good evaluation consultants with that of taking on the responsibilities of facilitating transformation.

### Evaluators' Story

This story is of an evaluation that Mutizwa and John conducted.

ACCRA was a seven-year programme with a focus on adaptation to climate change funded by the U.K. government, coordinated by a consortium of international non-governmental organizations<sup>7</sup> and implemented in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda (Levine, Ludi and Jones 2011).

ACCRA had three objectives:

- Build local adaptive capacity to combat climate change, understood broadly as including assets but also soft factors such as knowledge systems<sup>8</sup>, innovation and flexible, forward-looking decision-making
- Transform multilevel governance systems to enable, rather than constrain, development of local adaptive capacity
- Transform gender relations as part of the above to develop effective, just, gender-just local adaptation practice

The evaluation required us to look back over the seven-year history of ACCRA and to assess outcomes and institutional arrangements at national and international levels. In Ethiopia, we were also asked to look in more depth at the contribution of ACCRA to Ethiopia's transformational pathway to climate-resilient green growth.

The ACCRA evaluation had a strong learning interest. We co-designed the evaluation using a basket of evaluation approaches, summarized in table 6.1, to ensure that we covered transformational aspects (Mukute,

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<sup>7</sup> Consortium members were Oxfam GB, Overseas Development Institute, Care International, Save the Children Alliance and World Vision International.

<sup>8</sup> For example, local climate information systems.

**Table 6.1** Design Approaches Used in Evaluating the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance

Aspect of evaluation covered	Evaluation design approaches used: Systems thinking based					Unit of analysis
	Learning history	Expansive learning (contradictions, agency, learning)	Theory of change	Feminist concept of power	Contribution analysis and process tracing	
History and context						Interacting, nested systems at the local, national, international, local to national, and national to international levels
Voices, power and power relations						
Accountability, learning and influence						
Transformative change mechanisms and processes						
Social, climate and gender justice; adaptive capacity and governance system transformation outcomes						

Note: For each aspect of the evaluation, the shaded cells indicate the approaches used.

Colvin and Baloi 2017). We worked closely with ACCRA partners, including Oxfam GB as the evaluation lead partner, from the outset. Programme implementation was coordinated from Kampala, and the rest of programme-level coordination was done from London.

Our design insights are as follows:

- We found that the use of complementary evaluation methods helped us develop a fuller understanding of what transpired, why and to what effect.
- We established that surfacing and articulating uneven and unhealthy power relations around institutional governance



arrangements is important for transformational designs. Our client embraced these articulations and decided to take this insight forward. Although the phase 3 bid for ACCRA was unsuccessful, the client's learning informed future Oxfam policy and design thinking on resilience, including transformational aspects (Oxfam 2016).

- We also learned that, when evaluating complex systems, power relations, silences and articulations are found not only in obvious places, such as between the Global South and the Global North (e.g. Kampala and London), but also in less obvious parts of the system, such as within households and between local government and the community.

We learned that these less obvious power relations, silences and articulations appear as metaphorical aspects of Global North and Global South.

Further reflections of Mutizwa and John on internal praxis in the ACCRA work are as follows:

- *Mutizwa*: 'This was the first time that John and I had collaborated. We found the process very generative, drawing on a complementary set of practices and approaches that enabled us to produce sufficiently rigorous evidence for accountability purposes while also attending to inclusiveness of different actors and facilitation of learning events and processes.'
- *John*: 'Given the complexity of ACCRA and the multiple levels of governance to be engaged, evaluated and facilitated, inevitably there were moments of tension in our working relationship, particularly arising from uncertainties in the evaluation and/or learning process and how best to address these. At times, one or other of us might feel quite vulnerable in making particular methodological or design choices. For example, at the start of our second period of field work in Addis Ababa, I was very uncertain about how to approach case study selection and sought Mutizwa's emotional as well as intellectual support in making this selection. In facing these dilemmas, we discovered that we could draw on feminist concepts of power to guide us.'

### Joint Reflections from Our Community of Praxis

*Transformational change.* Having the evaluation centred around transformation created an opportunity to track transformation from initial design through implementation and toward impact, including transformative change mechanisms and processes; mechanisms of social, climate and gender justice; and adaptive capacity and governance system transformation outcomes. The ACCRA programme's focus on transforming governance systems, pathways of change and community adaptive capacities largely inspired the transformational interest of the evaluation.

In terms of *internal and external design praxis*, the ACCRA story highlights a move for us into the evaluation space and into greater complexity, involving many layers of governance and raising attendant uncertainties and even vulnerabilities in praxis. Navigating these spaces effectively required that we adopt *complementary practices and approaches* to discover rigorous evidence, inclusiveness of various actors, facilitation of learning and tracking of transformation. We also benefited from the use of the Global North and Global South as literal and metaphorical dimensions of transformation internally and externally to manage the complex design framework co-constructed for this work. Between evaluation design and implementation of the design, the ACCRA story surfaces the centrality of *complementarities and contradictions* as important learning for transformation. The team pooled their practices and sought to combine them creatively in this complex evaluation but also encountered tension and contradictions between inclusivity, rigour and feasibility. Demands for accountability, learning and influencing also generated contradictions.

The ACCRA evaluation also centred *power and power relations*, in part through analysis of power relations and their transformation and in part through giving space to multiple voices and perspectives, drawing on learning history approaches – two approaches used as the team sought to work overtly with power in the evaluation design. The ACCRA story evaluation work was more explicit than our Pakistani story in theorizing power, drawing on feminist theories of power to surface voices of power and power relations.

Feminist theories of power also proved important in beginning to explore internal praxis within this new team. Already experienced individually, as the new team grappled with the challenge of sharing power in a collaboration, the feminist concept of *power with* proved critical for navigating moments of vulnerability in the face of complexity and key design decisions and for helping to articulate and begin to work through contradictions in internal praxis. This in turn enabled us personally to learn more

about what it means to address and work into power relations between the Global South and the Global North.

## Malawi: Sharpening Approaches in a Different Context and with New Team Members

For our next story, we remain in Africa, focusing this time on an evaluation set in Malawi. The story again involves Mutizwa and John working with an expanded team and joined by Jane from South Africa and Chimwemwe from Malawi (Mukute et al. 2021).

### Evaluators' Story

Malawi's governance systems have failed to hold government to account, causing significant leakage of public funds. Oxfam GB engaged Emerald Network to evaluate a short-term project that piloted building communities' capacities for tracking government development expenditure at the local council level. Seeking to address the failure of local governance to be accountable, a national trust financed the project, and Oxfam in Malawi and two local partner organizations jointly implemented it. The project goal was to enable three district councils to become more accountable, responsive and inclusive in managing local development resources.

The purpose of the evaluation was for Oxfam GB and Oxfam in Malawi to develop a deeper understanding of impact generated through the project's broader contribution and so be able to support programmatic learning. During the inception process, we decided to evaluate the contribution to two focal outcomes:

- District councils are accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective in managing funds.
- Women in these districts are meaningfully empowered to participate in decision-making structures and processes.

We investigated the processes by which these outcomes were generated and assessed the significance of Oxfam's contribution to them. Two learning moments that moved us closer to transformational approaches are discussed below.

In our *first learning moment*, we drew on the ACCRA evaluation to deepen the use of complementary evaluation methods. With reference to

complementarity, the client prescribed a process tracing approach that aligned with the counter-factual approaches used in the ACCRA (Ethiopia) evaluation. The team carefully adapted this approach in the context of the evaluation questions and Malawi, expanding the system of analysis to trace contribution at the national, district and community levels.

Using theory of change to make sense of the landscape of the project, we traced evidence of the outcomes we were focusing on at multiple scales of governance. Although we engaged with stakeholders at multiple scales, we centred the experience of beneficiaries, particularly women, and triangulated this with the voices of government officials – not the other way around. We listened to the beneficiaries, particularly women, to understand how they were experiencing the effectiveness of the governance systems and the project in their own lives. We also adopted a utilization focus to bring clarity to whom the evaluation was for. It was agreed that the evaluation was for Oxfam in Malawi and its local partners. The intention was for insights emerging from the evaluation to be of value, first and foremost, to Oxfam in Malawi and local partners, even though the client was Oxfam GB.

Enabling this complex design, some team members were more experienced with the process tracing approach than others. We set up a dialogue platform within the team that enabled crossover and sharing of experience even within the short time frame during which team members met in Malawi and shared roles and responsibilities based on our individual capabilities. For example, Mutizwa examined national capacity and shared what he learned with Chimwemwe and Jane before we undertook fieldwork in a district. Chimwemwe and Jane knew their roles without having to name them. Chimwemwe, with his deep knowledge of the context and networked relationships with communities, led the fieldwork, and Jane listened for patterns with an eye on gender.

Some contradictions we encountered were that, although our initial intention was for the evaluation insights to catalyse learning for Oxfam in Malawi and local partners, the requirements of the contract quickly led to most dialogues taking place with Oxfam GB. Country-based organizations viewed this as an Oxfam GB evaluation that they were saddled with, which led to the Global North partner being more interested in the results and learning than country-based partners were. The Emerald Network evaluation team was unable to shift this particular power dynamic, which was embedded in the broader Oxfam system and was related to who has the power to call for evaluations, including when they take place. Although Oxfam in Malawi was involved in formulating the two focal outcomes, the

evaluation formed part of Oxfam GB's larger organizational undertaking to better capture and communicate the effectiveness of its work.

In our *second learning moment*, we worked with feminist concepts of power. With reference to *complementarity*, we found that working with these feminist concepts within the process tracing approach could be deepened in the Malawi case. We explored the contribution the project had made to women's empowerment, in line with the second focal outcome. Our feminist positioning enabled us to avoid falling into the trap of reporting on gender representativity and to inquire into the structural status quo that makes it difficult for women to have influence. Our findings revealed structural deficits that limit women's empowerment even in a country where matrilineal family structures are the norm. This is an example of the metaphor of Global North–Global South power relations at a community and district level. We met and spoke to powerful women at the community level who are continually speaking to power and engaging authorities but still struggling to find the agency needed to shift the system.

*Contradictions* we encountered in this work led us to ask what was missing from our analysis even though we expanded our system of analysis. We found that it was an analysis of how patriarchal systems of governance and traditional cultural systems overpower community systems of matrilineal leadership. The process tracing revealed that the way the project approached the empowerment of women was simplistic and examined empowering the individual with training but not the gender contradictions in the system in which they need to fight and have influence. One project alone cannot handle such systemic problems, and this left us with the question: What role do Global South and Global North organizations need to play to enable this level of coordination?

In this story, there was *complementarity* within the team when it came to working with these structural inequalities, with John and Mutizwa bringing their experience of working with feminist concepts of power into the evaluation from ACCRA, Jane her background in gender work and Chimwemwe his embedded understanding of gender in cultural and political systems in Malawi. We were a split between Northern partners, or the international consultants in the evaluation, and here we include Mutizwa, because he and John were the team players that normally would be seen to be holding the power of approach, and Jane and Chimwemwe as the regional players gathering evidence. The team did not accept this power dynamic that we encounter so often when Global South and Global North evaluators collaborate. The norm is that those who hold the approach or the theoretical position of an evaluation have more control or power over

analysis and results, but rather than certain knowledge and roles being given more power than others, we were able to appreciate our different knowledge as equally valuable and necessary for untangling this complex space.

The Malawi case study works with the concept of the Global North and Global South divide as a metaphor for power relations (both historical and current power relationship) and how these play out in the practice of evaluation rather than a more simplistic view of the Global North–Global South dynamic as a geographic description of unequal power relations. It also suggests that systemic change evaluation designs should consider multilayered complementarities and contradictions.

### **Joint Reflections from Our Community of Praxis**

With its focus on addressing the manifestation of metaphorical Global North–Global South power relations at the local and national levels and tracking the potential for transformational shifts in governance practices, the team was able to deepen the design and evaluation approaches that we had explored in our previous assignments in Pakistan and in the ACCRA evaluation. This involved expanding the process tracing approach that Oxfam GB had developed, enabling us to investigate three interlinked levels of governance but centred on the experience of beneficiaries, particularly women.

Centring power in this evaluation also involved *grounding the feminist concept of power* in the way we evaluated how women were benefiting, enabling us to move beyond Oxfam’s simplistic concept of women’s empowerment to consider some of the *underlying cultural and systemic contradictions*.

These approaches were also reflected in the *further development of our internal praxis*. We were able to build particularly on *new-found complementarities* within the team, enabling us to appreciate different knowledge as equally valuable and necessary for untangling the complexities of power and governance dynamics within an expanded system of analysis. Mutizwa, as team lead, played a vital role in encouraging this equitable co-ownership of process.

## EBA (Sweden): Working with a Global North Country Seeking to Work in Solidarity with the Global South

Our final story takes us to Sweden, where we recently completed an evaluation of long-term climate change investments on the global stage involving four of the five of us – Jane, John, Mehjabeen and Mutizwa (Colvin et al. 2020). Our evaluation of interactions between different layers of governance embraces the contribution of multilateral investments alongside bilateral investments in the context of complex multilevel landscapes, including North–South relationships.

### Evaluators' Story

In early 2020, we completed an ex post evaluation of the Swedish Climate Change Initiative (CCI). CCI, executed from 2009 to 2012, was a demonstration of Sweden's commitment to fast-track climate financing for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Sweden invested 4 billion Swedish krona through CCI, of which 72 per cent was distributed across 17 multilateral funds, 15 per cent to five countries with low adaptive capacity and high vulnerability to climate change and 13 per cent to two regional investments in Africa and Asia. As evaluators, our two main questions were: Has the CCI contributed to sustainable climate change adaptation and mitigation in poor countries and, if so, why, in what ways, and to what extent? What lessons from the CCI can inform Sweden's climate aid today?

This brief challenged us to develop an evaluation design that addressed the complexities inherent in a portfolio of this size. It involved diverse histories, contexts, investments, governance systems and programmes. We also had the challenge of conducting a contribution analysis over a decade. We drew on our accumulated evaluation experience and deepened our evaluation design praxis.

Three features of this evaluation stood out for us and frame this story:

- Our client – the Swedish Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) – accurately perceived us as a niche community of practice that negotiates effectively between the Global South and Global North. We were chosen based on the quality of our proposal, which for us, knitted everything we had learned together. This opened the door for us to a discerning client, one that is conscious of its place as a member of the Global North in the development context.

- The client did something unusual: asked for a 10-year sustainability and contribution analysis. Beyond this request, the terms of reference were open and unprescriptive.
- Based on research within the Swedish system, our client understood the tensions between accountability and learning. One of their own research papers asked why few intended users read and learn from evaluation reports, noting that the greatest learning happened for consultants and not for the intended audience (Reinertsen, Bjørkdahl and McNeill 2017). Also, consultants often developed recommendations for, rather than co-developing recommendations with, the intended users. We responded by offering our learning about this tension, centring a principles-based, utilization-focused approach with learning at the core.

Our evaluation challenges included the following:

- We had to bridge the relationship between Sweden's investment in its multilateral portfolio, involving board-level, global influencing and ground realities in different countries, referred to as 'the nuts and bolts of adaptation'. There was also a regional component to this multilevel relationship.
- Mirroring this, we had to bridge the relationship between the MFA, which is responsible for managing the multilateral portfolio, and Sida, which manages the bilateral portfolio.
- We had to research and construct 10-year contribution stories across this multilevel landscape, spanning the Global North and Global South. This included how to surface the significance and influence of CCI's principles-based approach, carefully constructed around the work of an international commission – the Commission on Climate Change and Development (CCCCD) – focusing on climate change adaptation. Within this, we would need to determine Sweden's leadership role, style and particular qualities.

Another evaluation realm required understanding the values and risks of this large surge in funding, making explicit the choices and understanding the nature of negotiations among its own key stakeholders that Sweden encountered in assembling a coherent investment portfolio for this funding surge.

Each of the challenges above entailed contradictions. We were able to draw on our joint experience as a community of praxis, including our learning-based design experience, and a proposed set of principles for



co-designing the process. With a utilization-focused learning approach, this would involve emergence and the need for adaptive management. We proposed a co-design approach with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG), and our client agreed. The ERG then became our holding framework, offering tensile strength and complementarities to match the difficulty of the task. It allowed us to draw from a diverse evaluation toolkit compiled from our varied, complementary and sometimes contradictory skills.

Immediately, we identified a place of entry by grounding our evaluative research in bilateral country case studies. We visited Mali and Cambodia for deep research and developed a bilateral portfolio analysis. We found, for example, that national climate funds were particularly important for change at the national level; in Mali, these have strengthened national ownership of climate practices to include subnational and local systems through operationalization of the Mali decentralization policy.

We also moved up a level to evaluate a challenging portfolio of CCI investments for regional Africa with investment at a whole-continent level, including transboundary challenges of shared resources. In this process, we developed tools to grasp and understand such a large portfolio of scale, sectors and interlinking pathways.

Simultaneously, we undertook two initial multilateral case studies – of the Global Fund for Disaster Reduction and Recovery and the Forest Investment Program – to begin to analyse the 70 per cent of the CCI portfolio with a multilateral focus, worth 2.9 billion krona. This allowed us to test a methodology for developing decadal process tracing and contribution analysis stories across global funds.

Finally, in a further learning loop with the ERG, we undertook a full portfolio analysis of 17 multilateral funds and programmes, drawing on four of these as in-depth case studies<sup>9</sup> and the remainder as shallower rapid reviews.

In summary, a critical design insight of this evaluation, with its breadth and complexity and global-to-local scale, was that, in a reversal of investment size, we studied the smaller, national case studies first and only subsequently considered the larger, multilateral case studies. This reversal was aligned with a core theme of the CCCD, which highlighted the importance of adaptations at the local, contextual level, and it allowed us to begin

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<sup>9</sup> These included case studies of the Adaptation Fund and the Clean Technology Fund in addition to the Global Fund for Disaster Reduction and Recovery and the Forest Investment Program case studies.

by studying local context and history as framing conditions for successful adaptation.

After observing maladaptation and successful adaptation at this smaller scale, our ability to enquire critically as to what the multilateral funds were doing and the possible repercussions of their decisions was enhanced.

Having analysed Sweden's quality, style and culture of leadership at the national and regional levels, we were better able to investigate Sweden's unique value addition at the global multilateral board level, adopting an approach that also stemmed from our commitment to understanding context and history.

Our major insight from this for transformational work is the value of centring on the local and working up and out from there. Impacts from climate change are felt at the local level, and that is where change must happen. All the other levels must revolve around this. To be equitable in good adaptation, we surfaced the imperative to centre the local first.

### **Joint Reflections from Our Community of Praxis**

In this story, we can see an interweaving of all five of the themes explored in the previous stories and an emergence of all of our learning for transformation.

One strong theme is design for transformational learning. Here, a principled approach that included co-design with the ERG created adequate space over an 18-month period for ERG members – in particular those from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) – to engage effectively with a complex set of questions and findings related to transformational design and practice for climate-resilient responses. An important feature of this learning process was that it was cross-organizational as well as individual (with a series of seminars that the MFA, Sida and EBA convened at the end of the assignment seeking to widen and extend this cross-organizational learning process).

The value of centring on the local and working up and out from there was also a significant aspect of our emerging methodology, which was enabled through the principles-based co-design approach and its affordances for emergence and adaptation in design. In line with the emphasis of the findings of the CCCD that local and contextual responsiveness is critical for climate adaptation, we were able to centre subaltern and Global South experiences through case studies in Cambodia, Ethiopia and Mali before attempting an analysis of CCI's multilateral portfolio – an important

reversal that enabled us to illuminate contradictions between global, multilateral approaches and different investment strategies at the national and local levels. Once again, we drew on our feminist analysis of power to inform these early design decisions, which also resonated with the client.

Centring the local also required drawing on our previous experiences of local engagement in multiple countries and how this starting point can lead to multiscaled analysis of complementarities and contradictions. Having Global South and Global North polarities in our team for this assignment, as well as our experience in bridging these, fostered the requisite internal praxis and holding framework for this demanding, global-to-local evaluation assignment.

## Concluding Insights

This chapter has drawn on a conceptualization of transformation that foregrounds systemic change in what we originally framed as the Anthropocene context. Looking back, we are convinced that, in renaming the context, which shows meta-level external reflexivity and shapes our work, we embrace the concept of Capitalocene in place of Anthropocene. Capitalocene clarifies that it is not the whole of humanity that is responsible for the current crises; rather, capitalism is (Moore 2015). Fortunately, this realization does not change our story, because capitalism largely defines relationships between the Global South and Global North. Through a series of stories from our community of praxis, we have illuminated several themes that we see as critical to transformational design, with a primary focus on transformational design for evaluation of and for systemic transformation.

The first two of these themes, which are closely interwoven, are concerned with the *centrality of navigating power* in South–North *complementarities and contradictions*. In Pakistan, we worked with contradictions between expert and indigenous knowledge and the power dynamics that shaped these. In each of our evaluations, we applied feminist concepts of power in several ways – in analysing power relations and their transformation, in giving space to multiple voices and perspectives and in informing the complementarities and contradictions in our internal praxis as a team. In the Malawi and EBA evaluations, we centred local and women’s voices and experiences within much larger systems of analysis to reveal complementarities and contradictions within multilevel governance systems and their design.

Analysing and navigating power in South–North complementarities and contradictions requires a good understanding of *history and context*.

In the ACCRA and EBA evaluations, we used learning history as a praxis for building and narrating historical context, and through the EBA evaluation, we gained critical insight into the importance of centring the local for transformation praxis, in retrospect drawing on this methodologically in the emergent evaluation design as we sought to navigate a complex portfolio of multilevel governance shaped by multilateral and bilateral investments.

We also experienced the value of *good internal praxis* within the team, enabling us to act as skilled facilitators of transformational (evaluation) processes. Underpinned by North–South complementarities and contradictions, internal praxis in some stories called on us to face our fears and vulnerabilities and to navigate these together, guided by feminist concepts of *power with* and *power to*. Internal praxis also invited us to work with mirroring as a way to understand and engage with (hidden) dynamics in the external system of interest and helped us rebalance the significance of multiple voices in the evaluation process, centring around the local and subaltern while also recognizing the value of bridging multiple levels and between hegemonic and subaltern knowledges and ways of knowing.

A core aspect of praxis that comes to the fore in these stories, with particular relevance for transformational evaluation processes, is the design and facilitation of *adaptive and potentially transformational learning processes*. Although contradictions of ownership in the Malawi story prevented us from effectively positioning learning, adaptive learning was a core feature of the other three stories and was perhaps most effective in the EBA evaluation. Here, the introduction and expansion of effective cross-institutional learning depended on three factors – the openness and receptivity of the client, our own individual and collaborative skills as facilitation practitioners and our joint ability with the client to create an effective institutional holding framework.

In a COVID world, where the pandemic is already exacerbating poverty and inequity, the five themes presented here as underpinning design for transformation as systemic change become even more central to global-to-local responses. The shocks and uncertainties of the pandemic and the need for an accelerated global response to climate change require engagement with the types of complementarities and contradictions between the Global North and the Global South that we have been recounting in this chapter.

Now, more than ever, our story reminds us of the crucial role of good internal praxis as we are called upon to face our fears and vulnerabilities and to navigate these together, embracing diversity and power differentials and guided by feminist concepts of *power with* and *power to*. By honing relevant

skills, assumptions and framings, leadership teams, collaboratives and social movements seeking to address global-to-local problems such as the pandemic and climate change will be better equipped to navigate power in South–North complementarities and contradictions.

When the evaluation community is called upon to look back on these times and reflect on how we collectively addressed these global problems, our learning also shows us that an understanding of history and context must play a central role in making sense of complexity. Furthermore, this calls upon evaluators to become researchers and facilitators, not only to delve deeply into knowledge systems, but also to centre the design and facilitation of adaptive and potentially transformational learning processes at the heart of evaluation praxis in the service of transformation.

A final conclusion is that, in all of the above, it remains important to continually weave theory and practice together. In this chapter, we have sought to demonstrate how we practice this as a community of networked professionals. We have explored transformation within our own work together as a niche community of praxis, as well as in our evaluation and design work with stakeholders and partners. We have shared our story of growth, failure and maturing through our exploratory work and trust that this will resonate for others. In this spirit, we offer it to anyone who identifies as being on a similar journey or would like to start one. In the new world we now inhabit, our stories of growth, failure and maturing become valuable tools and perspectives for the journey ahead, where our collective abilities to reflect on our own humanity in the context of complex global situations must take centre stage.

## Acknowledgements

This chapter is the result of a collaboration in which leadership continually shifted between different members of our community of praxis. We have therefore listed authors in alphabetical order, intended to denote a non-hierarchical author contribution.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the enormous challenges humanity is facing. It has been facilitated by other crises as climate change, biodiversity loss, economic exploitation, and increased inequity and inequality. The UN Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change call for transformational change of our societies, our economies and our interaction with the environment. Evaluation is tasked to bring rigorous evidence to support transformation at all levels, from local to global. This book explores how the future of the evaluation profession can take shape in 18 chapters from authors from all over the world, from North and South, East and West, and from Indigenous and Decolonized voices to integrative perspectives for a truly sustainable future. It builds on what was discussed at the IDEAS Global Assembly in October 2019 in Prague and follows through by opening trajectories towards supporting transformation aimed at solving the global crises of our times.

*By combining practical experiences with perspectives drawn from new initiatives, this book offers invaluable insights into how evaluation can be transformed to support transformational change on the global stage.*

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Janett Salvador, Co-founder of ACEVAL, Former Treasurer of ReLAC

*This book offers original, visionary discourse and critical perspectives on the challenges evaluation is facing in the post COVID-19 pandemic era.*

Doha Abdelhamid, Member of the Egyptian Academy of Scientific Research and Technology

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