Balancing power and managing power dynamics

The why, what, and how of a TDR project can be disputed at various times by diverse actors with varying degrees of power. "Power" refers to the capacity of actors to mobilize or control actions, resources, and discourses to achieve their goals. Power influences the formation of discourses and societal structures (institutions) associated with status-related privileges.

Power can be used instrumentally (to *do, achieve* or *prevent* something); coercively (over someone to get them to be submissive to the power-holder's wishes and ideas); or in an emancipatory way (in solidarity with or in support of someone). All forms of power may be needed or used in a project, but how that is done affects whether those involved in the project trust and enjoy each other, or can work productively with each other. Project leaders and participants tend to feel most secure in project teams, when they experience power as something they hold within as a measure of their sense of strength, rather than when it is wielded upon others.

In any collaborative team, there are asymmetric power relations. These power imbalances can be influenced by factors such as gender, race, education, age, seniority, position, class, wealth, and geographical origin, but also – more subtly – by factors such as origination of ideas, acquisition of funding for the project, disciplinary background, and ways of knowing. Such power imbalances can affect project participants' ways of doing, knowing, and being – and importantly, how well they feel respected within a team. To undertake inclusive and plural TDR processes, it is necessary to create deliberate space – repeatedly – for recognizing these power differences, their causes and effects, and addressing them.

It is important to encourage and facilitate contestation of interests, views, and knowledge-claims among all members of the collective, using a range of tools and approaches, on an ongoing basis. Scientists often contribute to reproducing power imbalances by imposing their agendas, approaches, and funding. Deconstructing dichotomies – such as leader-follower, observed-observer, and knower-learner – can help reduce power imbalances among researchers (e.g., from the Global North vs. the Global South), as well as among diverse members of transdisciplinary teams.

Further reading:

- Bammer, Gabriele. 2022. <u>Understanding diversity primer.</u> Integration and Implementation Insights.

- Moser, Susanne C. 2013. <u>Individual Community Empowerment Human Security</u>. *In Changing Environment Human Security: Transformative Approaches Research, Policy Action*, edited by L. Sygna, K. Obrien, and J. Wolf, 279–93. London: Earthscan/Routledge.