

## Nurturing Collaboration

### Report Summary 2025

People's Economy focuses on facilitating bottom up economic change work.

We work to create better conditions for communities experiencing economic injustice to achieve economic change. We believe that economic systems change requires effective and equitable relationships between grassroots groups and national new economy organisations (NEOs).

Our experience has been that relationships are often disconnected and extractive.

The paper is an attempt to distill key themes from 38 conversations with individuals in grassroots groups doing economic change work, NEOs, and other individuals with relevant experience.

It is a snapshot of the wider sector. Much of the analysis is not new but is hopefully instructive in designing what follows. The issues described are not unique to the new economy sector, nor are they a recent phenomenon.

#### **Our learnings from grassroots groups:**

- Grassroots groups inhabit a different world to that of NEOs, have a different language and approaches to change.
- Grassroots groups don't feel valued or respected by national organisations and describe an extractive relationship.
- There is limited appetite for collaboration with national organisations. Grassroots groups showed interest in building links with other grassroots groups; and bringing in nationals (not just NEOs) once there is collective strength and they know what they want.
- Some groups have 'bridgers'; individuals who can translate between the grassroots & national contexts.
- Grassroots groups face major barriers to collaboration that need to be accounted for in any work going forward.

#### **From NEOs:**

- We observed four models of change across nationals: think tanks, hybrids, long-term community organising/community building, place-based collaboration.
- Think tanks dominate & are not best placed to collaborate effectively & equitably with grassroots communities. A number of think tanks have begun to develop a

hybrid model, working more closely with communities. There are benefits and challenges to the hybrid model.

- We understand there to be four types of collaboration at play: Deep Collaboration, Partnership, Cooperation, Information & Consultation.
- NEOs face challenges: capacity, funding, challenges of working with groups with little paid capacity, lack of awareness of groups.
- NEOs want to network & share practice amongst themselves.
- As with grassroots groups, nationals have individuals who can act as bridges and supporters for grassroots work.

#### **From other actors:**

- Look beyond the 'new economy sector' - we were encouraged to think more creatively about collaborations with grassroots groups, looking at who can and will enable change, not to assume that it is just a 'grassroots-national' relationship.
- The importance of place - we heard about the importance of work with grassroots communities that are facing both economic and democratic challenges, places far away from the centres of power and those areas where inputs would reap greater rewards for local communities.
- Draw upon the ingredients for effective and equitable collaboration: from clarity of the offer through to the importance of field builders and sufficient resourcing.

Our conclusions are that trust is low, connections are weak, and the appetite to collaborate is currently quite limited given previous experiences and other priorities.

There is a pattern of extractive relationships which are a feature of systems, structures and cultures that platform to certain voices, experiences and knowledge.

We believe that extraction will continue to take place unless grassroots groups are in the driving seat of any attempt to build relationships with national organisations.

We don't think facilitating connections is enough in itself given the power differentials. We need to build the strength, collective voice and profile of grassroots groups as a community.

**We set out four options for work going forward**, all of which depend on properly resourcing grassroots groups to engage and hopefully steward what comes next.

1. **Grassroots Assembly:** growing a network of grassroots groups to become a space for thinking, learning, peer support, providing a collective voice that connects to national policy making, building awareness for the work of grassroots groups amongst national organisations and ultimately creating effective and equitable connections.  
The Assembly could create relationships across areas and develop focus issues based on the steer from grassroots groups. People's Economy is interested in hosting such a network which could build upon our existing relationships with grassroots groups to connect with others doing economic change work.

2. **To connect & convene the bridgers & translators** within grassroots groups and NEOs through a co-designed series of sessions which provide a space to build relationships, share learning and experiences, develop and test approaches to collaboration that are effective and equitable.
3. **Support the work of the 'hybrids'**, those NEOs that have begun to develop closer connections with grassroots communities but may not have embedded the approach more widely in their organisation. We would need to ensure that this option is rooted in the priorities of the grassroots communities and how to strengthen and enhance this work.
4. **Support to enable NEOs** that are located in the information & consultation, and cooperation quadrants of the typology to move towards deeper collaboration.

**Of these, we think we are best positioned to support 1 and 2, if there is agreement and interest in sharing ownership from the groups that contributed.**

Our next steps are rooted in listening and planning based on what grassroots groups tell us. If you're interested in connecting with this project, contact [Michael.Pitchford@peopleseconomyuk.org](mailto:Michael.Pitchford@peopleseconomyuk.org).