



Chapter 2

Innovating towards equality in global mission and development

“We all belong together in this world”

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1. Introduction

Between approximately 1492 and 1950, the Western missionary movement emerged from the era of Christendom and followed a territorial model often described as ‘from the West to the rest’ (Vethanayagamony, 2010). This movement was inextricably linked to structures of power, including colonial systems (Longkumer et al., 2016). In recent decades, world Christianity has experienced profound demographic shifts, with a decline in Western Europe and North America and significant growth in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Zurlo et al., 2020). These shifts are partly the result of European expansion and migration, alongside Western missionary efforts (Kim & Kim, 2016).

Scholars have argued that the Western church must undergo a spiritual transformation in order to acknowledge these fundamental changes and their implications for practice (Vethanayagamony, 2010; Longkumer

et al., 2016; Van Gelder, 2013). Increasingly, there is recognition that a new posture is required - one that moves from a missiology of power to a missiology rooted in relationship and vulnerability (Bevans, 2010). This has been a growing concern since the latter half of the 20th century, with churches and mission organisations seeking ways to respond to globally unjust power structures (Biehl, 2016).

Although some progress has been made in shifting from a colonial framework to a post-colonial, globalised approach, the majority of financial resources for mission still reside in the Global North (Johnson & Ross, 2009). Despite widespread affirmation of mission as a movement “from everywhere to everywhere”, it continues to be practised largely within the classical star-shaped model of the historical Western missionary movement - with the centre in the Global North supporting churches and organisations in the Global South and the East through bilateral relations (Biehl, 2016).

Many have emphasised the urgent need to counter asymmetrical power dynamics in the field (Longkumer et al., 2016; Kalu et al., 2010; Duncan, 2007). Yet despite this long-standing awareness, innovative, equitable partnerships have not been widely implemented (Longkumer et al., 2016; Jørgensen & Larsen, 2014). It remains, as Goheen (2022) puts it, an “unfinished agenda”. Thus, even with increasing recognition of the need for new structures, transforming the organisational models of mission remains a significant and ongoing challenge.

The organisations examined in this study also operate within the field of international development cooperation, where faith-based organisations (FBOs) play a significant role (Heist & Cnaan, 2016). This field is marked by power dynamics between wealthy Northern donors and Southern recipients, often perpetuating regimes of inequality. Some scholars argue that the language of partnership is more rhetorical than real (Hayes et al., 2018). Genuine partnership requires shared understanding, mutual trust, sustained commitment, and interdependence. However, these ideals are difficult to realise in practice because of underlying suspicion and asymmetries in resources, institutional capacity, and power between actors in the Global North and South (Baijnath & James, 2014; Eikenberry et al., 2023).

Girei (2016:193) contends that “development management orthodoxy narrows the possibility for NGOs to engage in transformative practice and in social change agendas, while it wittingly or unwittingly supports the expansion of the political and cultural hegemony of western donors”. Similarly, Burchardt (2013) found that the hegemonic influence of donors often reshapes local religious actors to fit technocratic and globally standardised development templates - even when these contradict local religious understandings.

As long as power, financial control, and decision-making authority remain concentrated in the North, paternalism continues to shape partnerships - raising a critical question about how such dynamics can be disrupted in pursuit of truly equitable collaboration (Jørgensen & Larsen, 2014). There is an urgent need for innovation in the ways that partnerships are structured and practised, to foster more just and equal participation in the *missio Dei* (Digni, 2021; Kurlberg & Hoksbergen, 2023).

This study was also motivated by theoretical concerns. Organisational change and innovation are fundamental, enduring issues in management theory and practice (Suddaby et al., 2016), but because of dramatic changes in many dimensions of society, “the need in management theory and practice to understand processes of organization change and innovation has never been greater” (Poole & Van de Ven, 2021:v).

These practical and theoretical concerns motivate this collective case study that investigates how actors in international FBOs innovate towards equal collaboration in global mission and development.

Two FBOs, referred to in this study as Serikat and Muungano, were purposively selected as case studies because they had successfully innovated towards more equitable forms of collaboration. These organisations had developed and implemented new organisational practices, processes, and structures to address pressing social needs - an approach defined in this study as social organisational innovation.

These innovations were driven by core values and centred on reimagining Western-based organisations as global coalitions, in which former partners from the Global South were included as full members, with equal voice

and voting rights in all decisions - ranging from policy and strategy to budgetary matters.

2. Theoretical frameworks

This study applies theoretical perspectives from organisation studies to understand and reflect upon how FBOs can innovate towards more equal organisational forms of collaboration.

2.1 *Social-symbolic perspective from institutional theory*

This perspective describes social reality as consisting of social-symbolic objects, defined as “a combination of discursive, relational and material elements that constitute a meaningful pattern in a social system” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019:24) - including institutions, values, policies, and structures. In organisational life, these objects often appear stable, pragmatic, and taken for granted. However, even if widely accepted, they are not neutral; rather, they shape the distribution of opportunities and benefits within a social system (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

Challenging these social-symbolic objects requires intentional and reflexive efforts (Suddaby et al., 2016; Van Wijk et al., 2019) on the part of organisational actors in order to bring about more equitable and just organisational arrangements. Such transformative efforts represent instances of profound social innovation (Nilsson, 2019).

When organisational actors seek to create, shape, disrupt, or maintain social-symbolic objects, they engage in intentional and reflexive efforts known as social-symbolic work (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). In the literature, such efforts are typically named after the type of social-symbolic object being addressed. In this study, institutional work, values work, and organisation work are applied as theoretical lenses to understand how organisational actors innovate towards more equal collaboration in mission.

Institutional work involves purposeful and reflexive efforts to create, alter, or sustain institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Within institutional theory, the term *institution* is not used the same way as in everyday language where it can describe an older established organisation like a hospital. Here *institution* is defined as a “taken-for-granted and self-policing *convention*

guiding organizational practices” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019:190). This view implies that intentional efforts to change institutions are embedded within and shaped by a complex web of relationships in the social world (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009). From the perspective of institutional work, individual agency is neither fully unconstrained nor entirely absent; it is exercised through reflective engagement with institutional structures to shape these self-policing conventions and habits.

Values work refers to actions that strengthen ongoing processes of knowledge and reflection, infusing organisations with value-driven practices (Gehman et al., 2013). Effective value enquiries involve reflection on real-life situations, encouraging the questioning of previous norms, collaborative identification of needs, and sustained experimental actions. These practices feed further value reflection (Aadland, 2010; Espedal & Carlsen, 2024) and support innovation efforts (Breuer et al., 2022).

Organisation work concerns how organisational actors purposefully and reflexively construct, shape, or disrupt organisational life and arrangements (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). It should not be confused with organisational work - the production of goods or services by the organisation - but rather focuses on shaping the organisation itself as a social-symbolic object.

When institutional, values, and organisation work extend beyond merely addressing immediate challenges - disrupting fundamental social practices and relationships to embody values such as equality and promote agency - these efforts constitute profound social innovations (Nilsson, 2019).

2.2 *Practice architecture*

This framework provides a lens through which to understand and analyse the social practices within an organisation (Kemmis, 2022). It illustrates how social and organisational life are produced, reproduced, and transformed through practices. The framework is grounded in the belief that practices are constituted by three interrelated elements, unified by a common project or purpose.

Sayings refer to the discursive aspects of a practice - such as the language, symbols, and meanings employed within it. *Doings* encompass the physical and material actions carried out as part of the practice. *Relatings* involve the

social interactions and relationships that are established and maintained through the practice.

These sayings, doings, and relating are not isolated activities but are interconnected, and are enabled, constrained, and made possible by the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements present at the site of practice. These arrangements - also referred to as 'practice architecture' - shape the conditions for what can be said, done, and related to within a particular practice.

A visual representation of the practice architecture framework is presented in Figure 1.

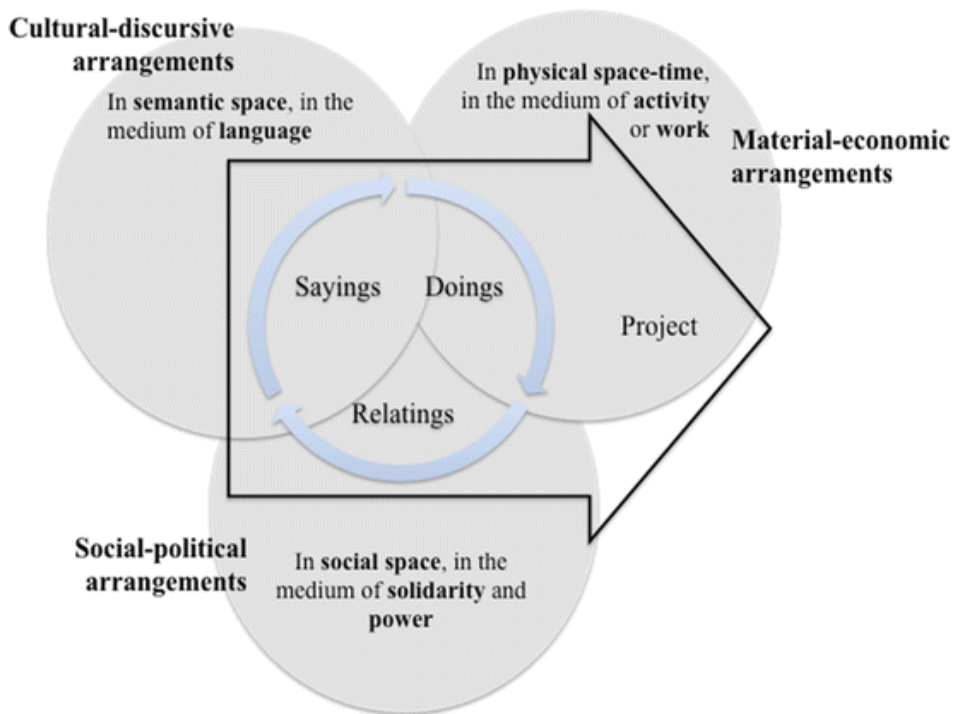


Figure 1: Practice architecture (Source: Mahon et al., 2017)

The practice of team meetings can illustrate this framework. The sayings include the jargon, meanings, and terminology used within the organisation, the agenda items discussed, and the way that decisions are

communicated. The doings may involve the act of scheduling and attending the meeting, the use of technology to facilitate remote participation, and the process of taking and distributing meeting minutes. The relatings encompass the power dynamics between team members, the norms around participation and decision-making, and the relationships between team members. The practice architecture, in this case, might include the organisational culture that values open communication (cultural-discursive), the availability of a meeting room and video conferencing tools (material-economic), and the hierarchical structure of the organisation (social-political). Through the lens of practice architecture, it is possible to see how these elements and arrangements come together to shape the practices that are involved in conducting team meetings. This understanding can then be used to identify areas for improvement and to guide interventions to transform the practice. A central argument from within this framework is that to change the practice of an organisation, one must address and transform all three elements of the architecture that form practice.

In this study, the social-symbolic work perspective is combined with the practice architecture framework. This allows for the exploration of the diverse and nuanced efforts of organisational actors to innovate towards equality by altering the practice architecture of the organisation.

3. Methods

Considering the research question and relevant literature, I purposively selected global FBOs for their innovation towards equality. Conducting a collective case study (Stake, 2003) enabled me to explore the dynamics and processes within different organisations. Each case illuminated the interpretation of these dynamics in the others, leading to a deeper understanding and sharper theorising than a single case study could provide (Chmiliar, 2010).

3.1 Data collection and analysis

I triangulated data-gathering methods by using interviews, observation, document analysis, and critical group reflections as data sources. I digitally conducted 25 research interviews. Participants were selected based on specific criteria through dialogues with contact persons in the

case organisations. The interviewees varied in gender, nationality, and organisational role; they represented 16 countries across five continents, thus providing rich material. They described the ongoing innovation process, including any significant stops, incidents, or actors. I asked why it was initiated, its effects, what drives, enables, or hinders it, and how they worked to make it happen. I also enquired about their personal experiences and the roles of values and power. I anonymised the organisations and interviewees. To obtain multiple data sources, I analysed more than 2,400 pages of documents and conducted 53 hours of digital participatory observations from online meetings and courses. These data agreed with the interview findings. Additionally, I undertook a 20-hour collaborative process of critical reflection on values and organisational practices over four months at one of the case organisations, as described by Eriksen and Strumińska-Kutra (2022) and visualised in Figure 2.

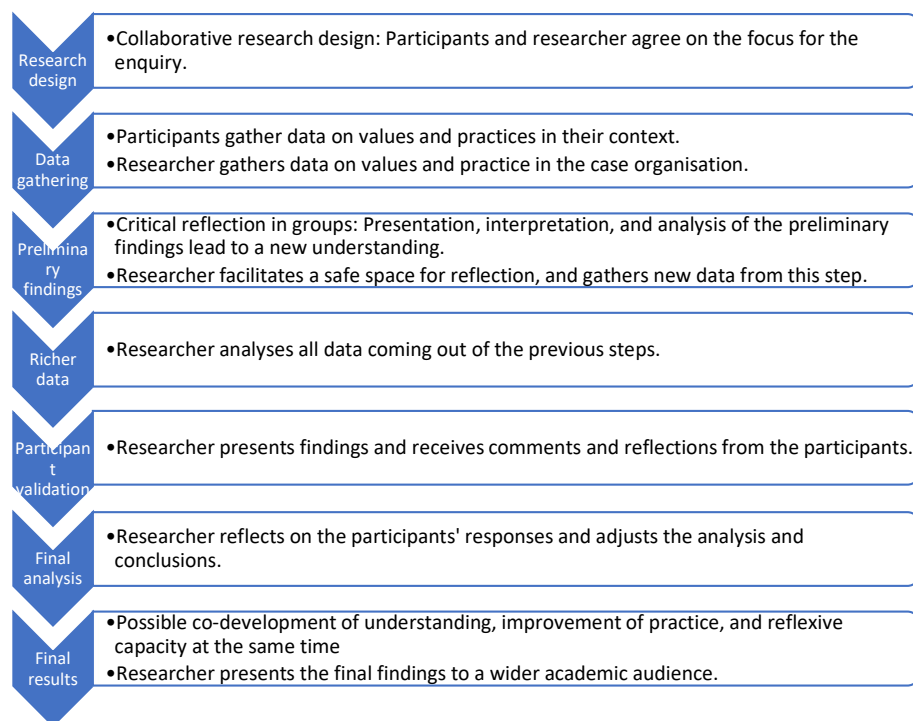


Figure 2: Collaborative research process

The various data collection methods yielded empirical material comprising 3,000 pages of documents, transcribed interviews, and field notes. First, I coded the material and identified the parts relevant to the scope of this study. *NVivo* was used for thematic analysis and systematic coding of the data. The analysis involved revisiting the empirical data and theoretical framework, backtracking, and checking the material until I was satisfied with my justifications of the interviewees' experiences (Rinehart, 2021). This process of oscillating between the data and the literature signals the use of an abductive approach (Golden-Biddle, 2020). In the next phase, I developed first-order concepts and second-order themes and ended up with the aggregated category as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Data structure with first-order concepts, themes, and categories

First-order concepts	Themes	Category
Learning and reflecting together in safe spaces	Innovating the cultural-discursive arrangements	Innovating towards equal collaboration in mission
Refining values and missiological understanding		
Developing new terminology and fundamental statements		
Sharing metaphors and inspiring stories		
New mindset		
New financial routines	Innovating the material-economic arrangements	
Relocating the head office and working remotely on different continents		
All positions are open to everyone, ensuring global and equal representation in decision-making bodies		

First-order concepts	Themes	Category
New bylaws and constitution that provide everyone with an equal voice and vote, a new structure, and new decision-making procedures	Innovating the social-political arrangements	
Opening up all positions for everyone		
New conflict-resolution mechanisms		
New procedures for projects and bilateral partnerships		

3.2 *Participant validation*

To strengthen the validity of my findings, I presented the preliminary results to the participants (Lindheim, 2022). Their reflections and responses enabled additional analyses. Follow-up interviews were conducted to further explore the issues before the final analysis, contributing to a robust evaluation and the transferability of our findings.

3.3 *Ethical considerations and methodological limitations*

This research was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (now SIKT). Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the intended use of the data, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. All participants provided written consent.

Most of the data collection was conducted digitally, which limited non-verbal communication compared to in-person meetings. However, the sessions were recorded, which enhanced the accuracy of my field notes during participant observation. Another limitation was that the interviews were conducted in English, although the interviewees' mother tongues varied. Nevertheless, all participants were accustomed to speaking English and interacting digitally. To minimise the risk of misinterpretation, I mirrored my interpretations back to the interviewees, who generally confirmed the accuracy of my understanding.

4. Findings

Findings from this case study are presented in two parts. First, I offer an overall description of how Muungano and Serikat have innovated towards more equitable collaboration in global mission. Second, I present how they worked to transform the various elements of the organisational practice architecture.

4.1 *Muungano*

Muungano provides essential resources for church-related activities and literacy work. It was founded in North America in the 1940s and subsequently expanded into a centralised, hierarchical, Western-led organisation. Its head office in the Global North directed various country offices, partners, and affiliates across the globe. Within this international structure, only a few founding organisations held voting rights, while newer affiliated organisations from Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, and Latin America were excluded from decision-making.

Through the adoption of new bylaws, Muungano reinvented itself as a global alliance comprising more than 100 locally embedded, self-governing organisations, all holding equal membership status and voting rights - regardless of their size, history, or financial capacity. The revised organisational structure is illustrated in Figure 3.

In this new alliance model, organisations enter into relationship with one another by signing a covenant that articulates the shared values and vision to which they commit. Together, these covenanted organisations constitute the Muungano alliance. Leadership is now exercised by a global board appointed by all members and supported by an alliance leadership team consisting of the executive director, regional directors, special advisors, and administrative staff for areas such as communication and finance. This team operates virtually across multiple continents and countries.

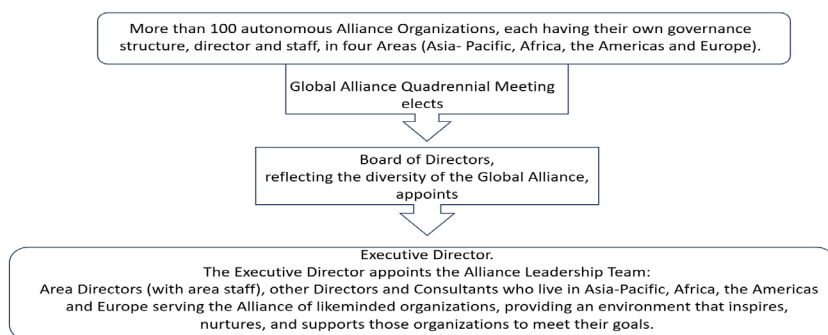


Figure 3: Organisational structure of Muungano after the innovation

The innovation within Muungano can be described as a transformative journey from a hierarchical, Western-oriented, centralised organisation to a polyphonic, polycentric, and decentralised global alliance of autonomous member organisations operating across world Christianity. Throughout this transition, the organisation radically reimaged its bylaws, structures, terminologies, and mental models to facilitate more equal collaboration across the Global North–Global South divide. Key social organisational innovations included: the consolidation of multiple membership categories into a single category granting all members equal voice and vote, regardless of differences in size or financial contribution; the establishment of seven participation streams to enable diverse forms of engagement within the alliance; the downscaling and relocation of the head office from the Global North to the Global South; and the subsequent development of a decentralised leadership structure, with the alliance leadership team operating virtually from offices across multiple continents. Although the organisation remains legally registered in the United States, these innovations reflect a profound mental and structural shift in how Muungano members understand their identity and role in the *missio Dei*.

4.2 Serikat

Serikat pursues a holistic mission encompassing advocacy, development, diaconia, and evangelism. Established in the early 19th century, Serikat has evolved from a classic star-like structure - in which European FBOs

supported partners in Africa and Asia - into a communion of approximately 40 churches, where former recipient partners have become full members and co-owners of the organisation (see Figure 4). This transformation led to a new constitution that granted all members an equal voice and vote, with African and Asian member organisations now forming the majority in the General Assembly and the International Council, which determines key matters such as policy, strategy, and budget. This represented a radical shift, especially given that the majority of financial resources still originated in Europe.

Recently, Serikat has seen increased financial contributions from African and Asian members, which has been interpreted as a sign of progress and a step away from the traditional donor–recipient paradigm. A particularly telling example occurred during the floods in Germany in the summer of 2021, when African and Asian Serikat member churches raised substantial funds in solidarity with those affected.

Serikat now actively promotes workforce diversity, with all positions open to all members regardless of geographic origin. It operates with three regional offices - in Europe, Africa, and Asia - although the European office is still often perceived as the head office because of historical legacy. Most staff and functions also remain based in Europe, and the organisation continues to be legally registered there.

Serikat is currently engaged in an ongoing process of reflection on how its identity can remain innovative and relevant in light of the diverse challenges faced across its organisational practices and structures. Central to this process are questions around how its international character can be expressed consistently, and what equal partnership means in practice. Through these innovation efforts, Serikat seeks to advance in global mission with equitable partnerships in which all members are both givers and receivers.

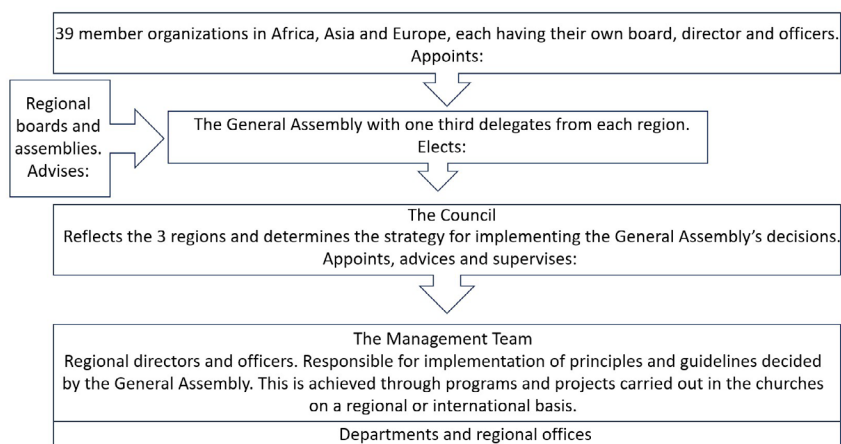


Figure 4: Organisational structure of Serikat as a communion of churches after internationalisation

4.3 Efforts of innovating towards equality

In Serikat and Muungano, the organisational actors engaged in various types of social-symbolic work to shape and innovate different elements of the practice architecture. Some of these key efforts are described below, accompanied by illustrative quotes.

4.3.1 Innovating the cultural-discursive arrangements

In the case, organisations and actors engaged in institutional work and values work to shape the cultural-discursive arrangements, as described below.

4.3.1.1 Learning and reflecting together in safe spaces

In Serikat and Muungano, collective learning and reflection on values and practices in safe spaces were driving efforts towards more equal collaboration, as illustrated by this quote from a board member of Muungano:

The change started was happening as a result of reflections. So, it started by Missiological reflection going through why we do what we

do. What is the biblical basis and working through areas of our values to see. The aim was that this reflection and thinking and discussing would lay the groundwork to say how should we work together. And so the changes came out of these experiences and reflections and sharing and consulting between people from different backgrounds. And so instead of just continuing with this, in a way, the speed boat of the Western organization heading up everything and just letting the world join while we continue. And the[n] you know, the power boat is all fueled with a lot of money and resources and competent staff and computers and people with degrees and all of that. It was a way of saying, let's stop, let's think through things. And what needs to change?

4.3.1.2 Refining values and missiological understanding

This shared process of learning and reflection helped to refine their values and understanding, as illustrated by the following quote from a member of Muungano's global alliance team:

They begin with some reflection on the image of God. And then move to reflection on the mission of God. And the reason I'm saying these two things is that I think it's important for us to realize that our creation in the image of God is so significant because it means that it is the basis for the equal dignity of every human being and that needs to be our starting point in our perception of other people. And then as we participate with others in mission there's also kind of a basis for equal participation in the fact that this is not our mission, not ours. You know, it's not all about our strategy, but it's about that no matter where the believer comes from their point of origin, their current status, whatever. As a believer, we as believers, we are all equally called to participate in what God is doing in the world.

4.3.1.3 Developing new terminology and fundamental statements

Based on these efforts of communal learning and reflection - which refined core values and deepened their missiological understanding - Muungano developed new terminology, foundational statements, and practical recommendations. As a national director from a North American alliance organisation within Muungano put it:

So often what would happen would be there'd be three or four missiological consultations in various regions (of the world) that would draw people together, to give input. And then all that input would kind of get built up towards setting a new policy or a philosophy statement or practices for kind of best practice recommendations for all the organizations. So all of that helps draw new thinking and to really think deeply about it and say, why do we practice it this way? It was one of the key ways, I think, to challenge Western assumptions the practices that were maybe being assumed that everybody, any new organization would also adopt. But it really didn't make sense that they should, and maybe it didn't even have biblical basis. that had a western church assumption.

In Serikat, similar processes took place as they engaged in discussions around terminology and underlying assumptions, as expressed by their General Secretary:

So at the moment, we have a very intensive discussion on the term of partnership. And I would say the majority of the European people was also thinking that partnership was a wonderful and perfect term. And then the management team came up with a paper that was drafted by our international staff. Some of those who are not from Europe. And the question of this word partnership because partnership is coming from the world of the economy and has a bad connotation in many of the cultures.

4.3.1.4 Developing and sharing metaphors, slogans, and inspiring stories

Part of shaping the cultural-discursive arrangements involved introducing and sharing stories, metaphors, and slogans that conveyed and promoted the emerging missiological understanding within the organisations. For example, in Serikat, the International Council guided a process of communal learning and discovery by critically reflecting on commonly used expressions:

What guides us is this question of our leading body, the council: Do you discover any notion of “we here and they there”? It's so simple. It's so simple. But this is really our guiding motto to think: Are we working and thinking in that direction and acting in that direction? – A regional director in Serikat.

In Serikat, they also share well-known stories that illustrate how things used to be, serving as wake-up calls and inspiration for working towards greater equality and dignity in cross-cultural relations. Now, they aspire to achieve “eye-level contact” in these interactions.

In Muungano, members adopted the metaphor of a journey to help people to understand and navigate the ongoing change process. The former model of Western dominance was likened to a powerboat, symbolising control and unilateral direction. In contrast, the new global alliance - characterised by mutual interdependence and shared leadership - is described as a sailboat, where the crew must collaborate and rely on the wind of the Holy Spirit to move forward.

4.3.1.5 New mindset

These efforts to change the discursive-cultural arrangements resulted in new mindsets, as illustrated by the following quote from an Asian member of the management team in Serikat:

Because we would like to move from the old understanding of mission that North European is superior, they are the first, the old brothers and sisters- And Churches in the south is its younger sisters and brothers, and they always need help from the North. But now it is different. We all are subjects. We help each other so that I think is the internationalization.

The General Secretary of Serikat further highlights that,

We do not have partners, we are members. So we are talking about membership. To be a member also is part of changing the mindset.

This new mindset was demonstrated in the incident when churches in Africa and Asia raised support for victims of the flood in Europe in 2021. This story is now shared as a result of the internationalisation process, “because you hear the people say well, as we have received in the past, we are also in the position where we can give”, stated the General Secretary of Serikat.

4.3.2 *Innovating the material-economic arrangements*

The organisational actors combined the institutional and values work described above with organisational work focused on the “harder” dimensions of the practice architecture - particularly the material-economic arrangements. These efforts and their outcomes are outlined below.

4.3.2.1 New financial routines

Money plays a significant role in partnerships, heavily shaping the dynamics of mission and development work. Consequently, in their efforts to innovate towards more equitable collaboration in mission, Serikat and Muungano undertook the establishment of new financial routines.

In Serikat, this was addressed by creating a unified budget for all activities, regardless of the source of the funds. The General Assembly - comprising equal representation from Europe, Asia, and Africa - determines the amount of membership contributions and approves the budget. This shift was regarded as controversial and radical, particularly because most financial contributions still originate from European members, while African and Asian members now hold a majority in the decision-making bodies. Nevertheless, this change has fostered increased mutuality, as churches in the Global South have raised their financial contributions, now seeing themselves not as partners but as full members.

Another contentious innovation was the decentralisation of financial resource administration. Initially, there were objections rooted in legal constraints, fears of corruption, and assumptions of limited capacity in Africa and Asia. Serikat is now also rethinking how to incorporate non-monetary contributions into their budgeting and accounting practices. They argue that doing so would more accurately reflect the significant contributions from African and Asian members - contributions that are typically invisible within traditional Western budgeting frameworks.

Muungano, by contrast, does not operate with a centralised budget for projects. Member organisations within the alliance collaborate on specific projects, with some acting as funding partners and others as implementing

partners. Nevertheless, Muungano has engaged in substantial reflection on funding and resource distribution in the context of *missio Dei*. Through various missiological consultations, the alliance has developed funding principles centred on generosity and the faithful stewardship of God's resources for God's mission. These principles are intended, in part, to counter the donor–recipient paradigm. As one national director from South America emphasised: “because we are members of this same alliance, the relationship with them [the donors] are equal. But because they are donors, they have guidelines that the other organization who receive the donation must follow”.

4.3.2.2 Relocating and redefining the head office, and opening up all positions

Moving towards equal collaboration in their mission, Serikat as well as Muungano decided to change the physical set-up of their organisations to better reflect their new identities as global entities. Muungano moved their head office from the US to Singapore, before transitioning to a decentralised structure where everyone in the alliance's global leadership team works from different locations. Currently, the alliance does not have a physical office or other property, but it is still legally registered in the US. Serikat has three regional offices, although most people still perceive the office in Europe as the head office. The General Secretary does not refer to a headquarters and emphasises that in the future, more workers will be based in different locations. In line with this more decentralised structure, all positions are advertised internationally, and they consider whether a position must be placed in Europe or if it can be located in the office in Africa or Asia. Another initiative in Serikat is their annual planning week, where they meet from the three regions to discuss ideas. Their efforts to change the material and economic arrangements reflect their new understanding and identity as global mission organisations.

However, remnants of older mindsets concerning financial and legal matters remain evident in their relationships and interactions. As one of the regional directors in Serikat observes: “Structures and traditions of paternalism and

maternalism are also a challenge. We are not in paradise... and there is also the economic gap between the haves and the have nots and all of those in between. That is still a challenge". A similar concern is voiced within Muungano, where a member of the global alliance team notes:

The power dynamics related to perceptions of one part of the world of another part of the world, the whole funding issue makes it very difficult to have a truly mutual relationship.

4.3.3 Innovating the social-political arrangements

Serikat and Muungano have implemented significant changes in their socio-political structures. Building on the efforts outlined above, they undertook organisational reforms focused on revising bylaws and formal procedures. Some of these initiatives and their outcomes are outlined below.

4.3.3.1 New bylaws providing all with equal voice and vote, new structure, new decision-making procedures

Because of the new missiological understanding of the equal sending and participation in the *missio Dei*, the founding organisations from Europe and North America chose to relinquish their power and exclusive voting rights. They unanimously agreed to amend the bylaws and redefine the corporate identity in order to include former partners in the Global South as full, formal members with equal voice and vote. The new organisational structure stands as the definitive formal expression of the radical innovation towards equitable collaboration in global mission that Serikat and Muungano have undertaken.

4.3.3.2 New procedures for projects and bilateral partnerships

In line with their new missiological understanding and their redefined corporate identity as a global communion, Serikat has established new procedures for deciding which projects to support and undertake. Through global consultations and collaborative processes, they have developed formal partnership guidelines and procedures for integrating these into daily partnership work. This includes fostering South–South partnerships as well

as North–South collaborations. Although Muungano has retained bilateral arrangements for project collaborations and has not developed common procedures for project selection like Serikat, it too has altered how its members work together on projects.

There is this progression. Muungano started as a Western organization and then they changed to international organization and then to an alliance, you know. So we are learning in this journey how to do things better. Yeah, because in the in the past, the missionary coming he will do everything. You know, he has all the knowledge and the funding and all that. But now we learn to do things different, you know, we have qualified people on the ground. That are ready to take over the leadership of the projects, you know, and of course, they have their own way of doing things. We run projects less and less, the projects are run by the local communities, local boards, and we come and provide services. - National director in an East European alliance organization.

4.3.3.3 New conflict-resolution mechanisms

In a global, decentralised, polycentric alliance like Muungano, mechanisms have been developed following Third Space principles (e.g. commitment to mutual respect, learning, influence, and shared benefit). The Third Space is further characterised by confidentiality; respect for cultural issues; participants' willingness to engage in open dialogue; a desire to seek outcomes that benefit all involved parties; transparency; and trust built through the process being followed. In situations where such dialogue proves difficult, a more formal mediation process may be considered.

4.4 *Values-driven innovation*

When exploring the efforts of organisational actors to innovate towards equal collaboration in mission, I found that they did not merely focus on values in missiological reflections but intentionally sought to translate these new insights and refined values into principles and innovative practices. The following excerpts illustrate this values-driven innovation approach:

I think it's just putting into practice ecumene, the whole basic idea of human ecumenical. We all belong together in this world. I think Christianity knew that all people belong together from the beginning on, and now is a time to put it into a new kind of praxis (A regional director in Serikat).

Take a bit of time to think about the significance of the dignity of every human being because of our creation in the image of God and the equal participation we're called to, because this is God's mission by his spirit, not ours. And, you know, if it were someone in an organization, say, just begin the journey of allowing these two things to soak into how you operate on a daily basis (A member of the global alliance leadership team in Muungano).

5. Discussion

Reflecting on their values, ultimate goals, and the developments in world Christianity, Serikat and Muungano both innovated towards equality in attitudes, structures, and organisational practices. The new organisational structures and processes established to rebalance the power gaps in the organisations represent a radical shift. In light of the dynamics of these fields, it is clear that moving away from a star-like structure - where power and resources originate in the Global North and bilaterally support partners in the Global South - to a global association where members from the Global South form the majority in bodies deciding on policies, strategy, and budget is more than just an organisational change; it is a radical social organisational innovation that disrupts entrenched dynamics of asymmetry and inequality in the field.

Using a social-symbolic work perspective, we can explore the diverse and nuanced efforts of organisational actors as they innovate towards equality in global mission. Institutional work and values work both address the cultural-discursive dimension, including the institutions and values on which organisations rely for their understanding of the world and their evaluations of appropriate behaviours (Micelotta et al., 2021). These, in turn, guide the organisation work that shapes the material-economic and social-political arrangements of a specific organisation and provides it with legitimacy.

Institutional work and values work can either hinder or drive social organisational innovation, as changes at the institutional level may prescribe or proscribe organisational templates, thereby regulating what forms of organisational innovation are considered legitimate (Micelotta et al., 2021). In the case organisations, their shared reflection on values, purpose, and the shifting context of world Christianity led them to recognise the need to change their organisational structures and procedures as part of their organisation work. By combining these different forms of work, they have been able to innovate towards more equal collaboration in global mission.

According to Wilkinson and Kemmis (2015), organisational actors seeking to innovate the practices of leading and organising by focusing solely on transforming knowledge, values, or attitudes may encounter difficulties because the organisational structure, procedures, and power relations can hinder the implementation of such innovations in practice. Innovative efforts may also fail if they are directed only towards structural experimentation while overlooking values and the soft power of culture, guiding conventions, and terminology. To truly transform organisational practice, the cultural-discursive dimensions and the material-economic and social-political dimensions that shape organisational life must be addressed (Micelotta et al., 2021; Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015).

In the case organisations, all three elements of the practice architecture were addressed. Common learning and reflection in safe spaces across significant diversity facilitated missiological reflection and the development of new understandings, which were expressed in new terminology and foundational statements adopted by the global board. These efforts of shared reflection and learning are examples of institutional work and values work, which produced new missiological understandings that profoundly transformed the cultural-discursive dimension of the practice architecture. This, in turn, gave legitimacy to subsequent organisation work that resulted in changes in the material-economic and socio-political dimensions of the practice architecture - such as new bylaws, structures, decision-making processes, financial procedures, and HR (human resources) regulations.

Further, Muungano dismantled the material-economic and socio-political arrangements by shifting from a central headquarters in the US to a model where global leaders across five continents work virtually from their homes.

Since the organisational structure was reimagined into a global alliance, there was no longer any interest in, need for, or possibility of control-and-command-style leadership. Instead, the leadership style transformed into one of humble, servant leadership. For Muungano, this meant that global leaders would facilitate reflection and dialogue around shared values and how these could be expressed in practice, rather than correcting or instructing member organisations on how to act.

The “soft” innovations and changes in values and institutions shaping practice are expressed and reinforced within the organisational arrangements. This combination of different types of social-symbolic work contributes to innovating and transforming the entire architecture of cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that shape practice (Kemmis, 2022). Together, institutional and values work primarily address the cultural-discursive dimension of the architecture, while organisation work expresses and reinforces these “soft” changes by rearranging the material-economic and social-political structures - what can be termed “hard changes”. However, in the messy reality of organisational life, these delineations are not so clear-cut, and it is the integration of these types of work that is essential for transforming the architecture that shapes organisational practice.

This implies that when organisational actors seek to innovate how they organise and lead towards more equal relationships, it is not sufficient merely to change the attitudes and knowledge of individuals; it also requires transforming the other elements of the practice architectures that support the interconnected practices of leading and organising (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015).

These combined efforts may transform the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political conditions of the practice architecture that shapes organisational practice (Kemmis, 2022). If organisational actors focus solely on innovating values or transforming attitudes, they may encounter difficulties, as the material-economic and social-political conditions can hinder the implementation of these innovations. Conversely, if innovative efforts are directed only towards structural experimentation while overlooking values and the soft power of culture and terminology, innovation and change efforts towards equal collaboration in global mission may also falter.

The findings from the cases point to the need for values-driven innovation work that combines “soft” and “hard” changes to establish a practice architecture that supports equal collaboration. As these efforts of institutional, values, and organisation work go beyond fixing concrete problems to disrupt social practices and relationships within the organisation - seeking instead to reflect values such as equality and enhance agency - they stand as expressions of profound social innovation (Nilsson, 2019). From this discussion, I would argue that the integration of different types of social-symbolic work, each addressing distinct dimensions of the practice architecture, is crucial for innovating towards equal collaboration in global mission and development.

6. Conclusion

This study shows how global mission and development organisations have been able to innovate towards equal collaboration. Conceptualising social organisational innovation as comprising different types of social-symbolic work targeting each dimension of the practice architecture is a theoretical contribution. This study also offers an empirical contribution by describing new and more equal forms of partnership that respond to a pressing call from the field. These innovations carry promising implications, as other studies have highlighted the significance of such innovations (Eriksen & Løvaas, 2022). On a broader level, since all organisations are values-based (Friedland, 2013) and compelled to address current global challenges (Gümüşay et al., 2022) and work towards the Sustainable Development Goals,¹ I argue that the findings of this study are transferrable and relevant to other nonprofit, governmental, and for-profit organisations engaged in global partnerships.

1 www.sdgs.un.org/goals

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