

Reflections of Team Leader Julian Caldecott

On Denmark's willingness to take risks

Question: The report gives several examples of what you call Danida's high – as compared to other donors – willingness to take risks. How do you explain this willingness?

Answer: It is a matter of principles. Denmark had strong core values on 'soft' issues like human rights, democracy, gender etc. and stood firm on them. Persistency, integrity are other words to describe this.

On engagement in conflict-situations

Question: The evaluation gives Denmark high marks for coping with the conflict-situation in Nepal. The Danish Government now wants Danish development cooperation to have a strong focus on countries in conflict. What are the lessons learned from Nepal?

Answer: Don't engage unless you have a very clear picture of the context, including the underlying causes of the conflict. And look beyond frontiers: What is the regional context and interests. In the case of Nepal, you must understand China and India as important stakeholders, not only as states, but also because they host movements, factions and groups, which may or may not enjoy official support, and which have links to movements, factions and groups in Nepal. Be cautious and prepared for a long-term engagement – don't go for quick fixes.

On Denmark as a regional player on Climate Change and Adaptation

Question: Is there anything from decades of Danish presence in Nepal that it would be a pity not to pursue and build on?

Answer: If Denmark wants to, Denmark has the experience, position and knowhow to become a strong supporter of regional efforts to promote adaptation to climate change. There is a clear need for that, and it is entirely up to Denmark, if you want to make use of that position and pursue this opportunity.

Danida's strongest legacy in Nepal is in ...

When asked where Danida leaves behind the strongest legacy in Nepal, evaluation team leader Julian Caldecott's promptly answers:

"Community-based forestry. Being an environmentalist, I may be a bit biased, but the results speak for themselves: Forest cover in Nepal has increased from less than 40% to almost 45% of land area, making Nepal one of a tiny group of countries that have reversed net deforestation, and a world leader in community forestry. It was a national process, but Danida had a uniquely constructive role in a formative period in Nepal's forest governance history in 1999-2005."

Why this success?

And when asked why Danida's engagement in community forestry was so successful, Julian Caldecott says:

"Danida took time to understand the context of forest management in Nepal. They analysed the sector carefully to identify what changes and incentives were needed, and then learned from a succession of interventions. By the end, virtually every forester in Nepal had received training with Danish support, and this had a huge long-term impact on thinking, implementation and legislation.

These efforts focused on encouraging and enabling government and communities to work together on community-based forest management systems that also contributed more broadly to the empowerment of local people.”

The unfortunate exit

Despite the success, Denmark in 2005 decided to exit the environment sector in Nepal, including forestry. An unfortunate decision according to Julian Caldecott and his evaluation team:

“The exit was a political decision in Denmark, not based on environmental concerns. Danida’s withdrawal when the ‘fruits’ of all this were about to ripen was remarked upon with regret by interviewees, despite the important legacy effects that persist to date.”