

Minutes from meeting in the Council for Development Policy
on 21 March 2024

- Members: Professor Anne Mette Kjær, University of Aarhus (Chair)
Deputy CEO and International Director Jarl Krausing, CONCITO (Deputy Chair) (Agenda items 1-6)
Director for Global Development and Sustainability Marie Gad Hansen, Confederation of Danish Industries (DI)
Director for Nutrition Line Damsgaard, The Danish Agriculture & Food Council
Head of Secretariat Lone Ilum Christiansen, The Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA)
Political Consultant and Project Officer of DAPP Lucas Højbjerg, The Danish Chamber of Commerce
Senior Researcher Adam Moe Fejerskov, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)
Director Charlotte Flindt Pedersen, Danish Foreign Policy Society
Political Director Jonas Manthey Olsen, Danish Youth Council (DUF)
Chief Advisor Mattias Söderberg, DanChurchAid
- MFA: Head of Department Tove Degnbol, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Deputy Head of Department Henrik Larsen, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Head of Section Caroline Busk Ullerup, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
- Agenda item 1: Deputy Head of Department Simon Wandel-Petersen, Department for Green Diplomacy and Climate, KLIMA
Head of Department Birgitte Nygaard Markussen, Department for Humanitarian Action, Civil Society and Engagement, HUMCIV
- Agenda item 2: Head of Department Ketil Karlsen, Department for Africa, Policy and Development, AFRPOL
Deputy Head of Department Casper Stenger Jensen, Department for Africa, Policy and Development, AFRPOL
- Agenda item 3: Security Advisor Anders Sølling, Department for Security and Real Estate, SIKBYG
Security Advisor Danny Kurt Riis Jensen, Embassy of Denmark in Nairobi (Online)
Deputy Head of Mission Alexander Skommer Larsen, Embassy of Denmark in Addis Ababa (Online)
Chief Advisor Jonas Helth Lønborg, Department for Africa, Policy and Development, AFRPOL (Online)

- Agenda item 4: Head of Department Tove Degnbol, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Special Advisor Cecilia Theresa Trischler Gregersen, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Director Ulla Næsby Tawiah, Danida Fellowship Centre
Research Programme Manager Line Richter, Danida Fellowship Centre
- Agenda item 5: Head of Department Tove Degnbol, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Deputy Head of Department Henrik Larsen, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Chief Advisor Eva Brandt Broegaard, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
- Agenda item 6: Special Advisor Kasper Jon Larsen, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Head of Section Josephine Pihl Carlson, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
- Agenda item 7: Ambassador Signe Winding Albjerg, Embassy of Denmark in Kampala (Online)
Deputy Head of Mission Adam Sparre Spliid, Embassy of Denmark in Kampala (Online)

Agenda Item No. 1: Announcements

The Chair opened the meeting by stating that no new grants were to be deliberated. Instead, the meeting would be spent on informing the Council about various issues. On behalf of the Council, she expressed concern about accumulation of agenda items concerning new grants in meetings during the autumn, and she urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to continue efforts to ensure a better timeline for the preparation process of new grants.

She then passed the floor to the Deputy Head of Department for Green Diplomacy and Climate (KLIMA) who gave a brief orientation about the Copenhagen Climate Ministerial which was taking place on 21 and 22 March. The event was organised by Denmark for the third consecutive year, and Ministers and decision makers from more than thirty countries were meeting to discuss central issues related to the upcoming Conference of Parties (COP29) to be held in Azerbaijan in November 2024. Previous experience had shown that initiating early discussions on crucial negotiation topics at the Copenhagen Climate Ministerial could impact the outcomes of the later COP negotiations. For instance, the COP28 commitment to triple global renewables by 2030 was first brought up at the 2023 Copenhagen Climate Ministerial. This year, discussions would focus on climate finance. Key negotiating groups would be present.

Members of the Council from CONCITO and DanChurchAid added that two high-level events had been organised the day before with the participation of the Danish Minister for Development Cooperation and Global Climate Policy, several representatives from countries in the Global South, including the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Samoa, as well as

representatives from civil society, philanthropic organisations, the private sector, and the UN, including the UNFCCC represented by Executive Secretary Simon Stiell. Focus had been on adaptation to the effects of climate change, reform of the international financial architecture, and debt relief. It had been a useful way of bringing together various actors and engage them in issues to be discussed at COP29.

The Chair passed the floor to the Head of Department for Humanitarian Action, Civil Society and Engagement (HUMCIV) who gave a brief update on the Danish decision to disburse the scheduled DKK 105 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Several countries had put on hold their support to the organisation due to allegations made against a number of UNRWA's employees by Israeli authorities. Denmark never paused its planned contribution to UNRWA. As agreed in the contract, Denmark disbursed within the first quarter of 2024. The decision stirred much political debate and the key arguments made related to the decision included the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, the special mandate of UNRWA, as well as UNRWA's appropriate and immediate response following Israel's allegations, e.g. dismissal of concerned employees, external review and strengthening of internal review mechanisms.

Members of the Council enquired as to whether MFA was considering increasing the support to UNRWA in light of the humanitarian situation. Members also noted that it was important to hold Israel accountable for its actions and insist on the responsibility of the country for the reconstruction of Gaza.

The Head of HUMCIV noted that more humanitarian support was likely to come from Denmark, but that recipient organisations had not yet been selected.

The Head of Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (LEARNING) informed the Council that the Strategic Framework Agreements for Environment and for Food and Agriculture would be expanded to include Ukraine as a target country. As unallocated funds would be used for this purpose, no new approval process involving the Council would be necessary.

Furthermore, the Head of LEARNING informed the Council about a few changes to quality assurance processes in MFA. Concerning the Programme Committee, a smaller group of staff would attend presentations by units at MFA in Denmark, while the existing broader consultations in the Programme Committee would remain unchanged for presentations by representations. Public consultations would now start at the latest six working days before the meeting and end a week after the meeting. Responses to the public consultation received before the meeting would be discussed at the meeting, while responses received after the meeting would be shared with the presenting unit who would be responsible for taking them into account in the further revision of documents.

Other changes in the quality assurance process included that there would no longer be an obligation to conduct Mid-Term Reviews (MTR) for organisation strategies. Instead, the MFA would engage more actively with the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), which included assessments from more countries, and not from Denmark alone.

Finally, the need for appraisals would be considered on a case by case basis when new funds were added to existing programmes or projects. If an appraisal had recently been conducted and if there was a fair balance between existing and additional funds, a new appraisal would not be conducted, and the Council would not be consulted again.

Members of the Council understood the need to improve the efficiency of the MFA's quality assurance process but pointed out that it would be important that critical comments from appraisals, the Programme Committee and the Council for Development Policy were taken into account when considering possibilities for additional funds, and whether a new appraisal was needed. Members also noted that it would be important to continuously assess whether the narrower consultation for presentations by units at the MFA in Denmark also led to better discussions.

Since no grants were deliberated in the meeting, none of the Members of the Council had conflict of interest in relation to the agenda items.

Agenda Item No. 2: Plan for Denmark's engagement with Africa

For information and discussion

Department for Africa, Policy and Development, AFRPOL

Summary:

The Danish government has decided to launch a new Plan for Denmark's engagement with Africa, based on equal partnerships and an engagement that goes beyond Danish development cooperation. The Plan is expected to be launched in August 2024. Several Members of the Council for Development Policy are involved in the conceptualisation of the Plan in their respective capacities. The Council has also discussed the Plan at several occasions, including with the Minister for Development Cooperation and Global Climate Policy on 22 November 2023.

The Head of Department for Africa, Policy and Development (AFRPOL) thanked the Council for the opportunity to discuss the upcoming Plan for Denmark's engagement with Africa. The input already received from several Members of the Council was valuable to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) work to specify the content of the Plan.

The Plan for Denmark's engagement with Africa was to encompass not only development cooperation, but also other areas. The goal was to engage with African countries in a broader way and with African interests at the centre and at the same time to be open and honest about Denmark's interests. This was not to be understood as a break away from development cooperation, but rather as an attempt to build upon Denmark's many years of experience as a development partner with several African countries.

Work on the Plan had begun in the summer of 2023 with round table discussions and high-level travel to African countries. A kick-off event had recently been organised with the participation of the Danish Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Minister for Development Cooperation and Global Climate Policy, the Foreign Minister of Kenya and the Chief Minister of Sierra Leone, as well as representatives from civil society. The next steps included extensive

outreach to African countries and the hosting of the Nordic–African Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Copenhagen in May. AFRPOL was aiming for a launch of the Plan in August 2024.

The Head of AFRPOL emphasised that the Plan was to set a new direction for Denmark's engagement in Africa – not just in thought but also in practice - and briefly explained the themes that would be covered in the Plan. He then invited the Council to share their thoughts and questions.

Members of the Council noted that many different countries were interested in engaging in Africa. This meant that Denmark had to offer something of high value to remain interesting to African countries who were generally not interested in picking sides in a geopolitical strife.

African countries had young populations who were looking into a difficult future. Members emphasised the importance of not only discussing youth in light of migration but to focus on job creation in its own right as well as to focus on giving youth a voice. Connections and experiences made as a young person tended to have a lasting impact and it mattered whether experiences made by African youths reflected positively on Denmark and Europe, or instead on countries with other agendas.

Regarding job creation, Members of the Council noted that focus should not only be on youth but also on the existing workforce who often worked under less than ideal conditions. It would be important to review framework conditions for the existing workforce.

Members of the Council appreciated that African countries were finally getting the attention that they deserved - beyond that as recipients of development aid. It would be important to ensure that this broader engagement also meant that funds other than development assistance were used to carry out activities. In this regard, when development funds were spent, it was important to maintain a focus on poverty alleviation which was still a major concern on the African continent. Further, although the focus on Africa beyond development cooperation was welcomed, the knowledge and insights from development cooperation were important to provide a basis on which the Plan for Denmark's engagement with Africa could be developed. It was underlined that for many decades, Denmark had primarily engaged with the continent through development cooperation.

For the Plan to truly serve its purpose and move beyond development cooperation, it would be of utmost importance to engage other ministries and institutions in Denmark. Members of the Council also stressed the importance of remaining engaged in civil society and human rights issues.

Members of the Council further emphasised the need to work from the perspective of the African countries' own visions for the continent. There should not be too much focus on Danish interests in the new or redefined partnerships. In this regard, Members wondered whether Tech played a role in the Plan, and if so, if focus would be on African or Danish innovations.

Finally, Members of the Council wanted to know more about the differences between the Plan for Denmark's engagement with Africa and the upcoming strategy for development cooperation, and whether certain strategic questions would be reflected in both.

The Head of AFRPOL thanked the Council for their insightful comments which would be taken into account in the ongoing drafting of the Plan. Some aspects would, however, only be detailed in the upcoming strategy for development cooperation.

The Chair thanked AFRPOL and asked for a discussion of the upcoming strategy for development cooperation to be added to the agenda of one of the first meetings in the Council in 2025.

Agenda Item No. 3: Travel to Kenya and Ethiopia (Security briefing)

For information and discussion

Department for Security and Real Estate, SIKBYG

Summary: In preparation of the visit in April by the Council for Development Policy to Ethiopia and Kenya, Members of the Council were given a security briefing by the Security Adviser from SIKBYG, supplemented by the Security Adviser based at the Embassy in Nairobi and the Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy in Addis Ababa. The briefing was confidential.

Agenda Item No. 4: Orientation about Danida Development Research Support

For information and discussion

Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING

Summary: The Strategic Guidance Note for Danish Support to Development Research outlines the objective, guiding principles, modalities, management, and monitoring of the support provided to development research. It serves as a document of joint understanding between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which ensures that grants to development research align with political priorities, and Danida Fellowship Centre which manages the support. Support to development research is provided through three main modalities: 1) research collaboration projects between researchers in Denmark and in the Global South (so-called 'FFU projects') aims at producing new knowledge. The projects are selected on competitive basis based on annual calls; 2) the Building Stronger Universities programme focuses on strengthening institutional frameworks for development research at selected partner universities in Africa; and 3) support to the international CGLAR research partnership aims at generating new knowledge and seeking innovative solutions for sustainable food systems transformation in the context of climate change.

The Council appreciated the opportunity to get insight into the funding for development research and to comment on the information provided in the documents.

Members of the Council were particularly interested in the results of the research activities supported and requested information on how this was communicated and shared with development practitioners within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, partner organisations, and private companies.

While Members of the Council appreciated efforts to support equal partnerships in the research collaboration projects ('FFU projects') and in the Building Stronger Universities programme, it was asked if more could be done to support the development of academia in Africa. Could researchers in the Global South have a leading role in the partnerships with Danish researchers, and could comparative studies, including both Denmark and countries in the Global South, bring

more equality into the collaboration? The dilemma of wanting to support capacity development of partner research institutions, on the one hand, and for Danish researchers to be dependent themselves on FFU funds, on the other hand, was brought up. Related to this, the limited incentives for Danish researchers to engage in capacity development activities which did not lead to academic publications was mentioned. Members also noted the low success rate of certain Danish universities in the competitive bidding process and it was suggested that the requirement to have partners from the Global South might be a key explanation.

With particular reference to the FFU projects, Members of the Council challenged the decision since 2020 that these projects should have climate change as the overarching theme. It was argued that many other aspects of the Danish development strategy needed research and that important knowledge was lost by having only one theme for the 20 new research projects supported each year. Other Members of the Council found it justified to focus on climate change but underlined the need to link this to other themes. Information on the process of preparing the call text was requested. Also the geographical scope of the FFU projects was criticised by Members of the Council who found that a wider range of countries should be eligible for research activities.

Other questions from Members of the Council regarded the efforts to increase the number of female researchers and the distribution of support to projects within natural and social science, respectively.

The Head of the Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (LEARNING) explained the efforts to ensure equal partnerships between Danish partners and partners based in the Global South. She acknowledged the dilemmas mentioned by Members of the Council, while also noting that the International Cooperation Act was very clear on the objective of strengthening research capacity in the developing countries – not in Denmark.

Concerning the FFU projects, the Head of LEARNING described the theme of climate change as an overarching theme which in the call text was linked to a range of sub-themes, including health, conflict and fragility, migration, etc. Members of the Consultative Committee for Development Research (‘the FFU Committee’) were actively involved in the editing of the call text. The number of eligible countries was considerably higher than suggested by Members of the Council, as both countries with expanded development cooperation and a wide range of countries with Strategic Sector Cooperation were on the list. The distribution on social and natural science in FFU projects was difficult to measure as it was a key criterion for support that the projects should be interdisciplinary.

The Director for Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC) described the activities to ensure that results of the research projects were communicated and accessible to other researchers and development practitioners. In many cases a direct link was established between researchers and potential users of the research from the onset of the projects, and in other cases such links were facilitated by DFC e.g. by linking journalists in the East African region to researchers working on climate change. She also mentioned the Research Portal maintained by DFC and containing information on all FFU projects supported since 2008¹.

¹ [Home | Danida Research Portal \(dfcentre.com\)](https://www.dfccentre.com/)

The DFC Research Programme Manager supplemented by providing information on the encouragement to female researchers in Denmark and in the Global South to engage in research collaboration. She described a recent seminar held in Tanzania where female researchers from 10 countries across Africa had discussed how to promote women in research.

Agenda Item No. 5: Orientation about the Evaluation programme

For information and discussion

Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING

Summary:

The evaluation programme 2024-2025 presents a two-year overview of on-going and planned evaluations and studies, as well as information on recently concluded work. Evaluations are undertaken by contracting independent evaluators through an EU-tender process. The criteria guiding the evaluation programme are stipulated in the Policy for Evaluation of Development Cooperation and include a mix of modalities, large development programmes, countries, trends and themes.

The Council welcomed the annual briefing on the evaluation programme and appreciated the overview that it gave of ongoing and planned evaluations and studies. The activities were found relevant and interesting, and the Council expressed its support to the programme.

The Council asked for further information regarding use of and learning from the evaluations, both internally and externally. With regard to external sharing of findings and knowledge, the Council pointed to various possibilities, including reaching out to ‘Verdens Bedste Nyheder’, carry out video interviews, and engage the MFA communication department in order to maximise the value of the evaluation work. Concerning internal learning and use, the Council asked for information on how evaluations are put to use and on how LEARNING works to strengthen learning from and follow up on evaluations. It was suggested that the format for the overview on ongoing and future evaluations and studies could include more information on results not just from evaluations but also from studies and on work related to communication and learning.

The Council gave a number of suggestions concerning issues and themes which could be addressed in future evaluations and studies, either as topics in their own right or as part of broader analyses. These included:

- Vocational training, e.g. in relation to education and to just transition to fossil-free energy;
- Support to resilience with a particular focus on food security;
- Instruments and engagements used by Denmark to influence support provided through multilaterals agencies;
- Intended and unintended impacts of approaches to trade, trade-regulation, and value-chain development, including consequences of EU’s due diligence directive and in relation to carbon markets.
- Collaboration with philanthropic funds which could be addressed either in a separate study or as an aspect of other studies or evaluations.

The Council stressed its interest in continuing to have selected evaluations on the agenda of Council meetings, including potentially the ongoing evaluation of 60 years of development cooperation between Denmark and Tanzania.

The Head the Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (LEARNING) thanked the Council for the many relevant comments and recommendations and passed the floor to the Chief Evaluation Advisor, who said that the advice of the Council would be considered in relation to the future pipeline.

Concerning some of the specific suggestions for future evaluations, the Chief Evaluation Advisor informed that the topic of vocational education was already under consideration in relation to a potential study of Denmark's support to education. Also possibilities for considering philanthropic funds were being discussed, while the issue of Denmark's influence in multilateral arrangements was incorporated in the ongoing joint Nordic evaluation of support to trust funds.

The Advisor gave examples of both internal and external activities in support of communication and learning. She described the process of following up on evaluations by preparing a Management Responses and Follow-up Notes and by assessing the implementation of the Management Response approximately two years after the completion of an evaluation in a meeting chaired by the Secretary of State for Development Policy. Finally, the suggestion to include alternative modes of communication was welcomed by the Advisor, who mentioned that this was already considered in relation to the large evaluation of 60 years of development cooperation with Tanzania.

Agenda Item No. 6: Orientation about OpenAid case studies

For information and discussion

Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING

Summary

In response to the National Audit Office's request to render the financial and reporting data published on the OpenAid platform more comprehensible to the Danish parliament and public, in early 2024 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs re-launched OpenAid as a knowledge platform. Among other improvements, the site now contains more than 100 case studies providing narrative descriptions of selected results from Danish development engagements.

The Special Advisor from the Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (LEARNING) provided a brief presentation of the recent updates to the OpenAid website, including the inclusion of more than 100 case stories describing selected results from the Danish development cooperation. The case stories represented about 20% of the official Danish development cooperation (ODA) disbursements in 2022.

Members of the Council appreciated the inclusion of the case studies, which they found covered a variety of topics, but they also noted that the thorough work of collecting and editing the cases could maybe have been spent on other communication efforts. As a platform for communication to the general public, it was suggested that OpenAid should offer more thematic overviews and provide interactive features so users could compile statistics which they were particularly

interested in. Members of the Council asked who the target audience was and requested data on the number and profile of users visiting the site.

While Members of the Council considered it positive that the Danish civil society organisations with strategic partnership agreements (SPA) had contributed with case stories, they inquired about the selection criteria and what appeared to be a tendency to mainly describe the best examples of the development cooperation.

Finally, Members of the Council asked if development-focused media or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) had used the case studies in wider dissemination efforts.

Responding to the comments from the Council, the Special Advisor from LEARNING explained that OpenAid represented the obligation of MFA to ensure accountability by providing updated information on financial disbursements and results data on Danish development funds. It was a key aspect of this obligation that data was readily available and transparently communicated to the Danish Parliament and public.

Concerning the profile of the users, there had been approximately 20,000 unique visitors per year of which approximately 1/3 were students, 1/3 development professionals, and 1/3 represented the general public.

The Special Advisor explained that through the case studies, the MFA aimed to build an available catalogue of results stories that could be used in various contexts, including in the Annual report to Parliament on the trends in Danish development cooperation. Case studies were used by Danish embassies in social media communication and by Danish SPA partners in their communication.

Concerning criteria for selecting the case studies, cases authored by the MFA had been selected according to their relevance to the current three development strategy pillars, country of implementation, and the financial size of the project. LEARNING was aware of the risk of positive bias in the case development process and had actively encouraged authors to describe challenges and lessons learned. By displaying both indicators and case studies, the OpenAid site offered a combination of more factual data and qualitative information.

Agenda Item No. 7: Annual Stocktaking of the Denmark-Uganda Strategic Framework 2023-2028 (USF)

For information and discussion

Embassy of Denmark in Kampala

Summary

The vision of the Denmark-Uganda Strategic Framework 2023-2028 (USF) is to strengthen regional and national stability and prosperity by supporting Uganda in achieving a green, sustainable and inclusive economic transformation, respecting human rights, while continuing to host refugees from neighbouring countries. The three underlying strategic objectives focus on green, sustainable and inclusive economic transformation; sustainable and durable solutions for refugees and refugee affected areas; and strengthening democratic values, protection of human rights and civic space. Since the presentation of the Strategic Framework to the Council in 2023, a bilateral development programme of DKK 650 Million has been developed and approved supporting the strategic objectives.

Overall, the political situation and context remains relatively stable but a number of pre-identified risks are emerging, not least in the build up to the 2026 elections, regional instability, and climate related risks.

The Council commended the Embassy in Kampala for an interesting and well written annual stocktaking report. Members of the Council also praised the strong and explicit focus on localisation as well as rights in the Danish engagement. This was relevant and critical in the Ugandan context. Questions were raised as to whether the Danish engagement was sufficiently flexible and whether the Embassy had the necessary capacity to address the volatile human rights situation. Concern was also expressed regarding the larger and smaller climate-related shocks which Uganda was facing on a continues basis, and how Denmark could act on climate related loss and damage.

Members of the Council underlined the importance of the linkages between the development efforts on the one hand and the work of the Trade Council and the Investment Fund for Developing Countries (IFU) on the other. They enquired about the commercial interests in Uganda in light of the unstable regional context and asked which sectors were of particular interest to Danish companies and investors in Uganda. Concern was expressed regarding the impact of the European Union's sustainability regulation on Uganda's ability to trade with Europe, and members asked whether the Embassy would support the preparation of Ugandan stakeholders for the new regulation to mitigate the potential negative impact.

Members of the Council requested further information on how the Danish engagement would address the massive need for job creation, especially among the youth. This was highlighted as a key challenge in the strategic framework, but Members of the Council wanted to know how it would be reflected in the actual projects under the bilateral development programme. Furthermore, Members asked how the Embassy worked with its Youth Sounding Board.

Members of the Council expressed an interest in the transition from the previous development programme, in particular flagship projects like aBi Development, the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) and the Northern Uganda Resilience Initiative (NURI), to the projects under the new bilateral development programme. It was important to build on previous lessons and successes.

Members of the Council noted the challenging political situation in Uganda, not least in terms of the human rights situation, pressure on civil society, and in relation to the Anti-Homosexuality Act. They recognised that the pragmatic approach taken in the Strategic Framework and by the Embassy with a balance between constructive and critical engagement seemed sound. At the same time, they requested further elaboration regarding the space for dialogue with Uganda's government on sensitive topics and the potential scenarios towards the 2026 elections. Members also enquired about consequences for Uganda of the evolving conflicts in the region, incl. DR Congo and Sudan. Finally, updates on Uganda's planned oil extraction, as well as a status for the Danida Sustainable Infrastructure Finance water project were requested.

The Ambassador concurred with the Council that the political situation in Uganda was challenging in many ways. For now, the current situation in fact allowed room for civil society to operate relatively actively and for the international community to have critical dialogue with government. Moving towards the 2026 elections, however, this situation would certainly become

more difficult and the civic and political space was anticipated to shrink. It was therefore found important to use the current space as much as possible to build relations and leverage. In terms of dialogue between international partners and government, the Ambassador emphasised that despite the challenging political environment and many disagreements, it was possible to have an open and constructive dialogue on difficult topics, including the Anti-Homosexuality Act on which Denmark had raised the issue at all levels of Government. The Ambassador also found it important for international partners to support platforms for dialogue between civil society and the government at this point in time.

With respect to trade and investment, Uganda was of increasing interest to private sector actors, including from Denmark, due to its relative stability compared with the rest of the region. The Government of Uganda put great emphasis on business and had made attempts to improve the business environment to attract more investments. Sectors of specific interest to Denmark included especially agriculture and agri-business as well as water technologies. The Ambassador agreed that the new European Union sustainability regulation could create challenges for Ugandan businesses. The Embassy was actively engaged with key partners to help address these challenges, not least in preparing Ugandan stakeholders for the EU Deforestation Directive which imposed strict requirements on coffee and timber products.

Regarding the transition from the previous to the new bilateral development programme, the Ambassador explained that the new programme was built on lessons learned. The new programme on accountability, civic engagement and rights covered the same thematic areas as the former Democratic Governance Facility but was smaller in terms of budget and expected numbers of partners as well as number of supporting donors. It was also very different in terms of management set-up since the new programme was implemented directly by a Management Unit at the Embassy and not by a decentralised unit. This new set-up was expected to be better safeguarded as well as enabling the Embassy to navigate in the changing political environment and to adapt programming accordingly. The previous NURI programme was succeeded by the new Uganda Refugee Resilience Initiative (URRI). There were many similarities but URRI had a stronger focus on climate change adaptation, environment as well as gender equality and would also be implemented by a NGO-consortia through a call for proposal process rather than a decentralised unit with advisors as was the case for NURI.

On regional developments, the Ambassador confirmed that Uganda was challenged by an increasing refugee influx, primarily from the conflict in DRC, South Sudan, and increasingly Sudan. Fewer would go back to their home countries due to the consistently high level of conflict. Humanitarian assistance was declining, while numbers of refugees were going up, posing a significant threat to the welcoming and progressive Ugandan refugee model.

On the question of involvement of the Youth Sounding Board, the Ambassador explained that the board had been consulted in the development of the strategic frame as well as subsequently in the programming. A new sounding board with representatives from the new programmes was under formation and would as a new feature also include a broader call to get more innovative and critical perspectives included.

The Deputy Head of Mission recognised the importance of job creation in Uganda and clarified that youth and jobs were at the heart of several projects under the bilateral development

programme. The aBi Development and URRI engagements, for instance, had a specific focus on youth, livelihoods and job creation. Regarding climate shocks, he emphasised that the climate and environment agendas were prominent across most projects with a targeted focus on strengthening resilience, not least in URRI, aBi Development and aBi Finance. Examples of concrete activities included drought resistant crops to solar-driven irrigation. Also, the Embassy was cognisant of the need to address climate-induced loss and damage, and early warning mechanisms would be considered as an area for support in the Danish engagement in Uganda.

The Deputy Head of Mission clarified that the Wakiso Water Treatment project was still under development by Danida Sustainable Infrastructure Finance in coordination with the Embassy. Currently, a number of legal matters were under consideration. Despite having ended the water sector programme support in 2018, Denmark was still strongly engaged in the water sector in Uganda with not only the major DSIF project but also through URRI, SPA partners and projects under Danida Green Business Partnerships with involvement of private sector such as Grundfos and Tulima Solar.

Finally, in terms of Uganda's future role as an oil-producing country, the Deputy Head Mission explained that preparations were at an advanced stage. The project had been subject to allegations of human rights violations, as also reflected in the 2022 resolution of the European Parliament, not least in relation to land rights and environment. The project is based on a consortium of Total Energies, a Chinese company and the Government of Uganda and aims at actual commercial production by end 2025. The consortium is yet to complete the final financing arrangements for the pipeline, however. In relation to environmental aspects, Denmark supports civil society actors working on environmental accountability.

Agenda Item No. 8: Any Other Business

No issues were raised under this agenda item.