

Final Management Response & Follow-up Note

Evaluation of the Strategy for Danish Humanitarian Action: 2010 – 2015

This Note summarises the main findings, lessons learned and recommendations from the final Synthesis Report of the Evaluation of the Strategy for Danish Humanitarian Action: 2010 – 2015. It also includes Danida's comments (management response) and follow-up to the evaluation (inserted in italics after each recommendation). Preparation of the management response has been coordinated by the Humanitarian Team in HCP. The Evaluation as such was commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Department in Danida, but conducted by an independent team of consultants under the management of ITAD (UK).

Executive Summary

Background and methodology

Between 2010 and 2014 Denmark provided almost DKK 9.2 billion in humanitarian assistance. During this period annual humanitarian funding increased by 47%, from DKK 1.5 billion in 2010 to DKK 2.2 billion in 2014. The Strategy for Danish Humanitarian Action 2010–2015 sets out the overall objectives, key directions and priorities underpinning this assistance, and the instruments used to implement the Strategy.

In 2014 Danida commissioned Itad to conduct the first comprehensive evaluation of Danida's humanitarian action since 1999. The evaluation has two specific objectives: to inform Danida's decision making and strategic direction when formulating its new Strategy for humanitarian action after 2015; and to document the results achieved under the Strategy.

The synthesis report presents the findings of the evaluation against six overarching evaluation questions, drawing on case study interviews and data collection in South Sudan, Syria and Afghanistan, as well as interviews with Danida and its partners at headquarters level.

Findings

Relevance and flexibility of the Humanitarian Strategy

The Humanitarian Strategy remains relevant despite changes in the humanitarian context, partly because the Strategy was far-sighted in including issues such as vulnerability, resilience and innovation, which have become increasingly important. It is broad in its scope, having 47 priorities, but the Humanitarian Action, Civil Society and Personnel Advisors department (HCP) has identified a hierarchy among them. Also, Danida has made the strategic decision to focus on three areas that have subsequently guided its funding decisions and approach. It has developed longer-term partnerships with a limited number of Danish NGOs and international organisations, focused on protection in conflict-affected contexts (rather than on the strategic direction on climate change and natural hazards), and committed to deeper engagement in selected chronic crises. The evaluation found this decision to be justifiable, particularly the focus on partnerships, which current partners strongly endorsed.

Although Danida is focusing on a limited number of protracted crises, it is able to ensure adequate coverage of its humanitarian assistance through four means: (a) by giving partners flexibility to respond within crisis-affected regions, rather than focusing on specific countries; (b) by allocating flexible funds to NGO partners and UNHCR to respond to sudden-onset crises outside the priority crises; (c) by providing additional funding outside framework agreements for new emergencies; and (d) by providing significant funding to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which responds to acute emergencies as well as under-funded crises.

The evaluation questions emphasised the strategic priorities of targeting assistance to the most vulnerable, gender-sensitive programming, promoting protection from gender-based violence (GBV) and accountability to affected populations. However, partner reporting on these issues is not consistent and do not specifically identify the results achieved. These priorities should be the foundation of good humanitarian programmes so it is not unreasonable for Danida to expect partners to incorporate them into their programming systematically and to demonstrate that they are doing this.

Despite substantial staff cuts, HCP is managing a growing proportion of the aid budget. It also engages in policy dialogue and with the governance of international organisations, and is providing increasing support to Ministers on humanitarian crises. It is able to do this due to the quality of its staff but stretched resources mean that it has not been able to follow up on results to the extent foreseen in the Strategy.

Relevance and effectiveness of Danida's engagement in humanitarian policy dialogue

Denmark's level of engagement in global policy forums and on the boards of international organisations is impressive. As part of its commitment to multilateralism, Denmark has sought to strengthen the work of international organisations and the humanitarian system's effectiveness by taking on leadership roles. Its partnership with UNHCR is a good example of how a relatively small donor can exert considerable influence by combining funding with active involvement from both Copenhagen and Geneva. Denmark currently advocates on a broad range of humanitarian issues, including that of protection in specific crises, which it has raised in several forums, such as during its chairmanship of the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group (HLWG) in 2013. Other donor Missions in Geneva and New York noted that it is difficult to identify the specific contribution of a single donor to policy discussions, but the Solutions Alliance is an interesting example of Denmark combining engagement on the issue of protracted displacement with support for UNHCR to address a particularly challenging problem. This demonstrates that Danida's strong partnerships, which go beyond funding agreements, support its policy work and advocacy role.

Danida promotes coordination between humanitarian actors through a range of mechanisms. It has also been active in the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative. However, its limited humanitarian presence at field level has restricted its ability to participate actively in policy discussions and donor coordination at country level. In particular, partners responding to the Syria crisis called for Denmark to have a voice at country and/or regional level. This would enable it to promote the GHD principles in a highly politicised context.

Partnership as a key implementing modality

Danida's partners strongly endorsed its partnership approach and were highly appreciative of the quality of its funding (notably its flexibility and support for innovation and new approaches, so that Danida's funding plays a catalytic role). Partners also value the predictability of the framework agreements and emphasised that the quality of Danida's funding set it apart from other donors. While the partnership is based on trust, Danida works to ensure that partners have robust administrative,

financial and reporting systems in place. It places less emphasis on independent verification of the results delivered for affected populations, particularly in the case of international organisations. This is a potential challenge because even strong systems do not always translate into effective programmes. It also makes it more difficult for Danida to base funding levels on performance criteria and to assess whether it is working with the most effective partners.

Danida has been active in promoting the adherence by NGO partners to humanitarian and accountability standards. Although partners do not have to report on their accountability to affected populations, they tend to have mechanisms in place. However, these are not always effective at providing clear information or responding to recipients' concerns. Danida's partners attempt to target humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable and use different tools for this; but they could refine their targeting through more systematic vulnerability analyses.

Follow-up, monitoring and reporting on performance

Danida has four potential mechanisms for assessing partner performance. One of these is engagement on the boards of international organisations, where it has used its position to advocate for the strengthening of systems for reporting results. Danida could, however, complement this with a range of mechanisms for assessing results at field level to go beyond partner self-reporting on the results achieved through its humanitarian funding.

A second mechanism for assessing partner performance is documented results such as annual reports, reviews and evaluations but this has been of limited value for a number of reasons. These include the variations in reporting that make it difficult for Danida to identify and aggregate the results achieved; the provision of NGO reports 11 months after the end of a financial year, which reduces their utility; and the length of some reports, which HCP staff do not have time to read in detail due to other demands.

Danida makes extensive use of the third mechanism of informal, verbal communication to gather information about partner programming and challenges. This is through frequent telephone conversations with NGO partners as well as information gathered through the Geneva and New York Missions.

Danida has limited capacity for using the fourth mechanism, following up on programme delivery at field level because it is difficult for HCP staff members to travel to the field to follow up on projects owing to time constraints and a restricted travel budget. Embassies have little capacity for following up on humanitarian projects and all MFA staff has to comply with security restrictions that make it difficult to travel to project sites in insecure areas. However, it could make greater use of independent reviews and evaluations, whether commissioned by Danida or directly by partners.

Linking emergency and development objectives and activities

There are a number of areas of common ground between the Humanitarian Strategy and policy and strategy documents related to development assistance, including a commitment to respect humanitarian principles and to strengthen linkages between the two forms of assistance. The challenge is to ensure complementary and holistic programming in practice. Currently, humanitarian aid is managed in Copenhagen while Embassies are responsible for development programmes but the programme managers provide input into each other's decision-making processes. This collaboration is facilitated by the fact that Danida focuses both its humanitarian and development assistance on fragile and conflict-affected contexts. But there are also several barriers to ensuring greater cooperation between HCP and the Embassies. These include:

- stretched resources at both levels;
- a lack of clarity about the extent to which Embassies are responsible for following up on humanitarian activities;
- very little sense of joint responsibility for Danida's assistance to a country overall and to following up on results;
- a lack of adequate humanitarian expertise at embassy level.

The country policy and country programme documents represent an opportunity to ensure synergies at programmatic level. While country policy papers cover the full spectrum of Denmark's engagement with a given country, country programme papers tend to cover only the development programme managed at embassy level. The recent Somalia country programme document is an exception and a potential example of how these could promote and reflect a more coordinated approach to the different forms of assistance.

Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles

Danida is highly respected as a donor that adheres to many of the GHD principles. In particular, partners appreciated the timeliness, flexibility and predictability of its funding and its willingness to accept global reports. The Strategy reflects several other GHD principles as well. Like other Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors, Danida channels around 60% of its humanitarian funding through UN agencies and UN-managed pooled funds. However, these partners do not always adhere to the same GHD principles when passing funds on to NGO partners and Danida should take this into consideration during the Strategy revision process.

HCP works with its partners to ensure that they undertake needs assessments and that programming decisions are based on humanitarian needs. While it analyses information on humanitarian needs and funding when selecting priority crises and allocating additional funds to crises, it could document this decision making better to increase transparency.

Danida's general comments to the evaluation and to the specific recommendations

Danida welcomes the evaluation and its findings and recommendations. They will form an important input into the coming development of a new strategy and the continued development of Danida's relationship with its partners. The evaluation underscores that Danida is a highly respected donor that adheres to many of the Good Humanitarian Donor Principles not least with regards to timeliness, flexibility and predictability. The Humanitarian Strategy is commended for being far-sighted with the inclusion of issues such as vulnerability and resilience. The evaluation supports the way Danida has implemented the far-reaching strategy through a strategic decision to focus on three areas that have subsequently guided funding decisions and approaches: The long term partnerships with selected partners, focus on protection and a commitment to deeper engagement in a limited number of protracted crises.

The Evaluation's findings with regards to Danida's implementation of humanitarian assistance through partners are very positive. Danida welcomes that partners' strongly endorsed this approach and that they appreciated the high quality of the funding – including the high degree of predictability, flexibility and support for innovation and new approaches – which according to the evaluation sets Danida's funding apart from other donors. Danida acknowledges that the emphasis on partners' reporting of results should be strengthened in the future.

Danida also welcomes the Evaluation's finding that Denmark's level of engagement in global policy forums and on the boards of international organisations is impressive. Having made the choice to work through partners this becomes a very important part of contribution to better humanitarian assistance. Currently, the Danish input into the international

debate on improving humanitarian assistance and its delivery builds upon the strong partnerships with humanitarian organisations that go beyond funding and also include policy- and advocacy work. Danida agrees that the input into the international policy debate could be facilitated and enhanced with a stronger presence at the country levels.

There are four main recommendations listed below. Although the recommendations have been targeted at different actors according to who will have primary responsibility for implementation, it is expected that all the recommendations will be implemented through a collaborative approach across MFA departments.

1 Danida should undertake an inclusive consultation process to revise the Strategy and secure buy-in for a revised Strategy that is more focused on a limited set of priorities, which would provide stronger guidance to its humanitarian assistance.

As a general comment, it is to be noted that Danida is planning to conduct a highly inclusive strategy formulation process. This was also the case when the present strategy was formulated in 2008, and the outcome was a strong and valuable sense of ownership behind the Strategy, reaching across the entire humanitarian community in Denmark.

- a) To focus on a limited set of strategic priorities, Danida could select areas that are not being addressed by other donors and build on its comparative advantage. It should also be explicit about what it seeks to achieve through each strategic priority. For example, it could aim to achieve more inclusive or efficient coordination systems by supporting the UN's coordinating role. Then, the strategic priorities could be an organising principle that runs through Danida's advocacy and policy dialogues through its partnership agreements to assessing the results achieved with its funding.

While noting that a stronger focus has already been achieved through existing prioritisation, Danida agrees on the need to focus a new Strategy on a more limited and measurable set of strategic priorities than is the case with the current strategy – and to let these function as an organising principle that guides all types of activities, from policy dialogue to relations with partners.

- b) During the Strategy revision process, Danida should consider how to address emerging issues, particularly from the discussions around the WHS, such as supporting a more localised response, whether incremental change is sufficient to make the current humanitarian system fit for purpose or whether it requires more radical reform, how the humanitarian system can be more adaptable and responsive to new risks and challenges, and how humanitarian and development actors can work together more effectively.

Danida has decided to extend the current strategy until the end of 2016 in order to ensure the ability to address in the revised Strategy relevant emerging issues, in particular from the processes in connection with the World Humanitarian Summit and the Post-2015 development framework. These processes will to a large extent impact on the fundamental characteristics of the international humanitarian landscape, including structures, adaptability and responsiveness to risks and challenges, and they are also likely to result in new approaches to building coherence between humanitarian and development action. The Danish response to emerging issues will be impacted by the processes and their outcomes, and will to the extent possible be included in the revised Strategy. While the need for a more localised response is agreed with respect to natural disasters, further analysis is required with regard to the selection of partners in conflict situations. While a more localised response may have important advantages, e.g. in terms of cost efficiency-, access, as well as sustainability and local ownership, it remains subject to important questions not least regarding upward accountability to donors and through them to taxpayers, and downward, to beneficiaries.

- c) Danida should include indicators in the revised Strategy to help measure the implementation of key priorities. It should also develop an action plan to guide Strategy implementation.

Danida agrees on the need to focus on a more limited range of priorities and to link these to appropriate measurable indicators and a related action plan.

2 Danida should strengthen its focus on results, including field-level follow-up of programme delivery.

- a) HCP needs to define clearly the results on which it expects partners to report. This does not require it to establish a set format for partner reporting but to make it clear to partners if it expects them report at output or outcome level, and whether it expects them to include reporting on how they are targeting assistance to the most vulnerable, ensuring gender-sensitive programming and being accountable to affected populations within their own formats.

Danida agrees to this recommendation and intends to follow up through raising the issue of reporting in a structured dialogue with Danish NGO partners in the near future. The dialogue will include issues related to timing, reporting levels as well as thematic issues. Improvements to the reporting of multilateral partners will, as is already the case, be addressed through a dialogue in their governing bodies and related forums in accordance with GHD principles.

- b) Since HCP does not have the capacity at present to review evaluation reports to identify lessons and issues for follow-up, it should finance a help-desk function. This would involve commissioning consulting organisations and/or academic institutions capable of supporting HCP with analytical and research tasks. HCP could use this for short tasks such as synthesising evaluation findings. It would only pay for the consultants' time that it uses so this would be a cost-effective way to increase its analytical capacity.

Danida will explore the potential of contracting support for analytical and research tasks to the benefit of HCP, other units and possibly also partners. This will include a dialogue with the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that has already established such functions through a consultancy firm.

- c) Danida should work with other donors on joint evaluations, particularly of UN partners and the response to large-scale crises. It should also encourage partners to commission more independent evaluations to support their internal learning.¹

Danida concurs with the recommendation to have joint evaluations of large-scale humanitarian responses, and is also looking into the opportunity to work with in particular UN organisations to evaluate specific issues of joint interest.

¹ This would be in line with the existing strategic priority of 'initiating and supporting relevant evaluations and joint thematic reviews'. The previous evaluation of Danish humanitarian assistance also recommended that monitoring and evaluation be strengthened and used for learning (ETC UK 1999).

Danida will, as is already the case, encourage partners, both among NGOs and UN agencies, to commission more independent evaluations and other types of studies, and to share outcomes with the humanitarian community at large.

- d) Apart from a greater use of evaluations, Danida should strengthen its field-level follow-up on partner performance through a variety of mechanisms. These could include more UFT reviews, ensuring that HCP has greater capacity to travel to the field, working with other donors that have a field presence and fund the same partners, and ensuring that Embassies take responsibility for follow-up on humanitarian assistance.

Danida agrees with the desirability of increased follow up on partner performance in the field, and will continue to explore all possible opportunities and for additional evaluations, reviews and similar quality-assurance initiatives. Where possible, this may also include third party monitoring. Cooperation with embassies already plays an important role in this regard (see point 4)

As a significant portion of Danida funded humanitarian assistance is implemented in areas that are inaccessible for Danish government staff and to quite an extent also for international staff of partners and private companies, Danida as well as fellow donors and partners are confronted with challenges related to quality assurance. These challenges are among the factors driving a number of pertinent initiatives within the international humanitarian community, in many cases with financial support from Danida. These include continued testing of new types of cash-based assistance, remote management and monitoring systems, and not least the development of the new Core Humanitarian Standard.

- e) HCP could increase the utility of NGO reports by requiring them to be submitted earlier in the year, setting a page limit on the humanitarian component of reports, and requesting the inclusion of short sections on key issues, such as lessons learned or the implementation of specific strategic priorities.

Danida agrees to this recommendation and intends to follow up through raising the issue of reporting in a structured dialogue with Danish NGO partners in the near future. The dialogue will include issues related to timing, reporting levels as well as thematic issues.

3 HCP should allocate funding to partners on the basis of performance and ensure that it works with the most effective partners.

- a) HCP should review the programme delivery and results for affected populations achieved by all partners every three to four years (through reviews, independent evaluations and capacity assessments that include programme delivery). Where it identifies problems, it should support partners to improve but also set a clear timetable so that, if partners fail to meet standards within the given time frame, it can find alternative partners.

It is already a standard procedure for Danida to conduct independent assessments and reviews of partners every three to four years, with a particular focus on capacities for programme management, administration and finance. These capacity assessments will be widened to also include assessment of programme delivery. Action to follow-up on findings are discussed during subsequent annual consultations and reviews based on an agreed process action plan.

As regards UN partner organisations, The Central Emergency Response Fund and country-based pooled funds, Denmark works through Governing Boards, Advisory Groups and donor coordination fora to promote independent evaluations and follow-up on assessments of performance.

Within the coming year, this will be further reinforced with the future requirement for NGO partners to undergo external certification, based on the newly developed Core Humanitarian Standard, and once the required independent certification mechanism has been established. This will, in itself, lead to greater emphasis on programme delivery and accountability to beneficiaries. These initiatives may be supplemented by additional field level quality assurance, subject to available resources and the ability to overcome security/ related hindrances.

In the slightly longer term, it is envisaged to introduce a process whereby partners have to regularly renew their strategic agreements with Danida, based on open and transparent application processes that will also include a mechanism for establishing funding levels. Performance aspects in terms of effective delivery will be included in the assessment leading to the establishment of funding levels.

- b) HCP should consider opening up its special calls for proposals to non-framework NGOs that have been quality assured by another reliable donor in order to ensure that it is working with the most appropriate NGO partners in a given crisis.

HCP is currently taking steps to investigate the feasibility of setting up a separate funding window for non-framework NGOs that hold relevant humanitarian capacity and expertise.

- c) As part of the Strategy revision process, Danida should consider whether its level of humanitarian funding to UN agencies is appropriate, given that they often fail to pass on the benefits of Danida's adherence to the GHD principles to their implementing partners.

As it is, there is no pre-determined level of funding for UN agencies or any other type of partners apart from what is pre-determined for partnership agreements and core contributions as per the Danish Finance Bill. For funding decisions regarding the non-allocated funds, HCP will always base its decisions on an analysis of the capacities of different partners and the needs for extra assistance. The issue of UN agencies adhering to GHD principles in their relations with implementing partners is dealt with on a regular basis as part of the continuing strategic dialogue between Danida and the agencies in question, in particular UNHCR and WFP.

4 Danida should ensure greater complementarity between its humanitarian and development assistance.

- a) Danida should strengthen capacity within Embassies to follow up on Danida-funded humanitarian assistance and engage in field-level humanitarian policy dialogue and donor coordination in major crises. It should implement the Ambassadors' recommendations for fragile states on promoting synergies between its different forms of assistance and could consider mechanisms such as posting programme managers or advisors funded or co-funded by the humanitarian budget line to Embassies in countries or regions with major humanitarian crises.

A task force for Fragile States led by the Ambassador for Fragile States and composed of representatives from all departments involved in Danish Assistance to such states has been set up in late February 2015. The overall objective of the task force is to ensure greater coherence and synergies across instruments, policies and guidelines. The work includes a revision of programme guidelines, recommendations regarding staff security and posting

policies. Outcomes from the task force will be subject to broader consultations within the ministry followed by final endorsement by senior management.

Funding or co-funding programme managers or advisors to selected Embassies from the humanitarian budget line would be in conflict with applicable budgetary policies, guidelines and ceilings for the government as a whole.

- b) Danida should consider fostering greater collaboration between different actors working in a particular crisis through the use of task forces, such as the Afghanistan Task Force. The task forces should not be used simply as an information-sharing mechanism but to promote coordination and better follow-up of Danida-funded interventions.

Under the overall guidance of the task force for Fragile States, efforts will be made to improve guidelines and procedures for programming and coordination in specific crises. The possibility to form country specific task forces to ensure semi-annual strategic discussions between embassies and the MFA Copenhagen also including humanitarian assistance and issues will be pursued.

- c) MFA senior management should make it clear to Ambassadors and Embassy staff if it expects them to take responsibility for monitoring humanitarian projects and ensure that humanitarian responsibilities are included in the job description of at least one staff member. This would address the challenge of a lack of clarity about the extent to which Embassies have this responsibility.

The dialogue on the role of the Embassies vis-à-vis the monitoring of humanitarian activities is on-going and is a part of the regular dialogue between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant embassies on strategic priority setting and resource-management.

- d) HCP should share information on funding to humanitarian partners consistently with Embassies in countries covered by the priority crises to facilitate follow-up of Danida-funded humanitarian interventions.

Information sharing is already happening but a more formalised system for regular information sharing may be considered.

- e) The MFA should ensure that Embassy staff working on development assistance in countries with humanitarian crises understands the interconnections between vulnerability, stability, strengthening state capacity, development assistance and humanitarian action, through training if necessary. This would support them to work more effectively in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Short training courses on such thematic areas are already being offered to staff that are to be posted to embassies covering fragile states. There are continuing efforts to improve the curriculum and to introduce new, targeted training programmes. In 2015, for instance, a new course on risk assessment has been offered. Further initiatives of this nature, e.g. in the field of international humanitarian law, will be considered together with involved departments.