EVALUATION
OF DANIDA SUPPORT TO DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH (2008-2018)

EVALUATION OF DANIDA SUPPORT TO DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH (2008–2018)

FCG.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

The following annexes to the Evaluation Report can be downloaded as separate PDF files from evaluation.um.dk.

Ghana Country Case Study Report

Uganda Country Case Study Report

Vietnam Country Case Study Report

Annex A: List of Findings

Annex B: Evaluation Terms of Reference

Annex C: Evaluation Matrix

Annex D: Stakeholder Map

Annex E: Sampling Strategies and Methods

Annex F: List of Persons Interviewed

Annex G: Desk Review Documents

Annex H: Examples of Interview Guides

Annex I: Survey Questionnaire

Annex J: Survey Data

Annex K: Details of the Research Quality Plus (RQ+) Assessment Approach and Sample

Annex L: The Development Research Portfolio: Figures and Data

Annex M: Evolution in Development Research & Cooperation

Annex N: The Evolution of Building Stronger Universities (BSU)

Annex O: Statistics on Research Proposals, Themes, Gender and PhDs (2014-2017)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The evaluation team has received excellent cooperation from all consulted during the evaluation process. We are particularly grateful to the following:

- All persons in Denmark, Ghana, Uganda, Vietnam and around the world who gave their valuable time to share perspectives and experiences with the evaluation team.

- Lars Arne Jensen and other DFC and staff members who provided the evaluation team efficiently and supportively with monitoring data and other essential information.

- Associate Professor Jens Peter Andersen from Århus University's Danish Centre for Studies on Research and Research Policy provided bibliometric analysis based on his earlier data.

- Preliminary results from a forthcoming report "*Opportunities, Challenges – and Bad Weather: Experiences and reflections of African researchers involved in Danida funded research capacity building 1989-2019*" by associate professors Lene Møller Madsen (UCPH, Science Education) and Hanne Kirstine Adriansen (Danish School of Education) were used to triangulate findings.

- Johanna Lindström as Project Manager, as well as Camila Demmou and Samantha Smith of FCG Sweden who assisted with research in support of the evaluation.

We trust that our findings and recommendations will be inspire and deepen reflections on how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Denmark can support development research for the benefit of all involved around the world.

Zenda Ofir (Evaluation Team Leader, South Africa)

Pernille Sørensen (Denmark)

Matti Tedre (Finland)

Adom Baisie Ghartey (Ghana)

Godfrey Kayobyo (Uganda)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AERC	African Economic Research Consortium
BFT	Bistandsfaglig Tjeneste
BSU	Building Stronger Universities
CBS	Copenhagen Business School
CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
DCISM	Danish Centre for International Studies and Human Rights
DCRA	Danish Centre for Research Analysis
DFC	Danida Fellowship Centre
DIIS	Danish Institute for International Studies
DOAJ	Directory of Open Access Journals
EADI	European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes
ELK	Evaluation, Learning and Quality (department in MFA, Denmark)
EQ	Evaluation Question
EVAL	Evaluation Department (department of MFA, Denmark)
FAU	Development Research Association
FCG	Finnish Consulting Group
FFU	Consultative Committee for Development Research
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HRB(A)	Human Rights-Based (Approach)
IDRC	International Development Research Centre (Canada)
IF	Innovation Fund
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
KFU	Kvalitet og Faglighed i Udviklingssamarbejdet
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
OH	Outcome Harvesting
PI	Principal Investigator or Research (project) coordinator
PRCP	Pilot Research Cooperation Programme
QA	Quality Assurance
QAM	Quality Assurance Manager
QMS	Quality Management System
RQ+	Research Quality Plus
RUF	Rådet for Udviklingsforskning
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDU	University of Southern Denmark
SSC	Strategic Sector Cooperation
TORs	Terms of Reference
TQS	Technical Quality Service
TSA	Tjeneste for Sektorielle Anliggender
UCC	University of Cape Coast

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE EVALUATION

This evaluation, commissioned by the Evaluation Department (EVAL) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (MFA), was conducted between June and December 2019 to help shape Danida's future support to development research. It is intended to help Danida and relevant stakeholders to support, conduct and encourage high quality, useful research that strengthen capacities and knowledge for development in priority countries for development cooperation support. Overseen by an independent commission, the evaluation encompassed grants of just over DKK 1.99 billion for 378 projects executed in 49 countries – including 12 among some of the most fragile in the world – through seven major funding channels over a period of 11 years, from 2008 to 2018.

Responding to 20 evaluation questions and guided by four evaluation criteria, the evaluation combined a mixed methods and systems-informed design with four major components and 15 different methods that included case studies in Ghana, Uganda and Vietnam. The systemic nature of the evaluation was highlighted by the strong focus on factors that have influenced the performance of the portfolio and its contributions towards development impact. Eight guiding principles and a quality assurance process in line with accepted evaluation standards helped to enhance the credibility of the evaluation. The evaluation experienced some limitations that affected the depth to which certain analyses could be done – primarily lack of consolidated portfolio and trends data, lost institutional memory and insufficient time for intensive systematic portfolio analysis and impact tracing.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PORTFOLIO

Danida – represented by EVAL, the Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC) and the Consultative Committee for Development Research (FFU) – has done very well in support of research for development within the boundaries set by its mandate, linkages with development cooperation and limited resources as relatively small international donor. It has supported many valuable, high quality research projects, the vast majority aimed at pertinent opportunities to address development challenges in low-income countries. The low budget allocation of under 1% of the Danish development cooperation budget confirms that development research has a low profile and priority, suffering from an under-appreciation of the importance of knowledge-driven development in the South, and of the value of such support for Denmark.

It has been a challenge to defend and direct the portfolio of grants without a guiding strategy and accompanying strategic tracking of grants and portfolio, and nuanced, consolidated progress and performance monitoring. Yet even in the absence of a formal strategy, the multiple modalities implemented between 2008 and 2014 gave Danida a wider reach and profile in international relationships and enabled it to move towards a much-appreciated South-driven and larger 'programme' approach. Its responsiveness further helped to limit the effect of severe funding cutbacks in 2015 – terminating several modalities but also accelerating efforts to towards more South-driven and SDG-oriented projects. The reversal back to Danish strategic interests in line with the 2017 development cooperation strategy, *The World 2030*, brings both risk and the potential benefit of sharing experiences in balancing interests and power asymmetries between Denmark and Southern partners. This will be increasingly important, given that control over a large majority of the financial allocations as well as the lead research coordinators are still concentrated in Danish institutions. The loss of several modalities of support to international organisations as part of collective donor efforts has also eroded Denmark's soft power in the international research arena.

The 16 overlapping themes fitted well with Danish expertise and societal values; it is therefore a pity that the grants have been managed as separate projects rather than portfolios with projects better connected into coherent bodies of knowledge, say at intersections between food systems, nutrition, health, climate change and green growth. Although a majority of projects addressed narrowly defined topics commonly found in international development, the value for large-scale development was enhanced by the exploration of some 'big picture' systems-informed challenges and attempts to bring leading edge ideas to bear on how to bring a competitive edge to low-income countries or regions.

The SDGs have been considered a priority since 2016, yet at project level linkages often appear contrived, and core concepts such as the indivisibility of the Global Goals, the need for transformation, working with a 'complexity' lens, and focusing on inequality and 'no-one left behind' have not received much attention; and 'gender' remains surprisingly under-represented. At the same time, other important dynamics with the potential to affect development especially in the South – such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, decolonisation debates and new models and narratives around 'development' – have not had a sufficiently high profile.

MEETING KEY OBJECTIVES
'High quality research'. The research supported by Danida was of high quality in terms of technical integrity, relevance and originality. This was confirmed by the very productive publication outputs and above-average citations – and comes as no surprise, as the highly competitive FFU calls for proposals and assessment processes ensures that it is a

low-risk portfolio: quality is the primary criterion for selection, and the competition is fierce, with success rates up to 20% at most.

The portfolio showed much strength in supporting a diversity of relevant problem-solving oriented, context-specific projects that encouraged field experience, including in fragile contexts. But it was much lower with respect to the normative 'research legitimacy' dimension in the RQ+ assessment framework – gender-responsiveness, inclusiveness, alertness to negative consequences, engagement with local knowledge systems, and openness to the voice and concerns of vulnerable populations. Multidisciplinary teams were also common in the more than 220 larger competitive partnership projects. But the need to integrate social science insights into health or natural science-focused projects was not always recognised. This might indicate insufficient awareness of the need for boundary-spanning scientists who can integrate disciplines and apply systems approaches to development policy and practice. The criteria used for assessing proposals thus also risk creating an imbalance between the 'research' and 'development' aspects of development research – raising the question whether Danida might be at risk of supporting 'research in developing countries' rather than 'research for development'.

'Capacity development'. As in previous decades, the most visible, significant contribution of Danida's financing has been the development of basic use-focused, applied research capacities of Masters students (in earlier years), PhD students (many in professional capacities in academia or government), some postdoctoral fellows, and other researchers in low-income countries. Although less visible and less frequently articulated, the Danish research community also confirmed valuable benefits for Denmark: the opportunity to gain experience and contribute in places where making a difference really matters; enabling Danish researchers to help solve 'big picture' problems that affect the world and Denmark itself; and gaining essential new skills and insights about working in different cultures and challenging contexts. 'Being Danish' has stood the research community in good stead, especially in the research partnerships and in the management of financial allocations; in both, Danish expertise and attitudes, as well as the opportunities provided to spend time in Denmark, have received much praise from Southern participants.

Danida has also benefitted from supporting institutional capacity development through the Building Stronger Universities (BSU) programme. Here too, Danida and DFC have shown sensitivity to the South, recognising the importance of Southern ownership and control. The way in which BSU II and III have been managed has much improved the chance of success. Inspiring results have been reported and observed in contributions to research agendas both in stronger, 'richer' universities, and in strengthening institutional systems in weaker, less well-resourced

ones. However, Danida's grants are small, and collaboration and synergies with other research funders and even among the different Danida modalities have not been created. The sustainability of the results of the BSU efforts in weaker universities will require a full-fledged evaluation. Challenges and nuances in performance might not be apparent from brief observations. A more nuanced perspective of 'capacity development' might also be needed. This era demands urgent action, mastery of working with ecosystems, and 'glocal' thinking. It also requires 'boundary-spanning scholarship' that works across sector, geographic, demographic, stakeholder and ideological barriers, as well as engagement with the concept of 'decolonisation' of mindsets, and acceptance of new models and narratives for 'development'.

TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT IMPACT
The portfolio of grants supported by Danida since 2008 has several features that support efforts to make a difference through research: problem-oriented, context-sensitive projects (some of which reflect the importance of a systems approach to development), and practical fieldwork that engages potential beneficiaries and users. Some projects also focus on innovations that can assist societies in the South to leapfrog persistent development challenges. Danida's insistence that targeted communication is part of project responsibilities has led to admirable efforts to make research results known among potential users; the 'Positioning for Use' dimension of the RQ+ assessment has received relatively high scores, indicating actionability, timeliness and a diversity of communication methods.

This strong focus on the dissemination of the results of research aimed at solving development problems has undoubtably improved the chance of take-up and use of results in policy and practice – within the limitations faced by researchers in this regard. This is confirmed by a large number of reports of uptake of results – some in national policy and regulations, but most at the level of local communities or institutions. Encouraging uptake and the use of research results appears to work well in the immediate sphere of influence of single projects. Few have reached national or international levels or reached beyond the pilot stage. Also, here the different worlds of researchers, politicians, policymakers and business impede large-scale success. It is no surprise that many of the research teams' communication methods were lacking. Although relevant to policy, problem statements were frequently not closely aligned with the most urgent or important priorities. Potential users were engaged relatively late. With few exceptions there is a lack of relationships or structures where findings can be shared in a systematic way. Low capacities and time prevent many Danish embassies from promoting such efforts, although the new Window 2 modality, linked to the Strategic Sector Cooperation initiatives, might get more attention from sector counsellors. Briefing materials and website content often appeared unappealing and too technical, unlikely to have effectively

reached intended audiences. Websites tend to close down after the end of projects, further limiting communication of the content. In summary, while real impact on 'development', especially at scale, has seldom been achieved, research teams have done much that is valuable in a national context despite significant challenges and limited resources.

INFLUENCES ON SUCCESS

The evaluation identified a number of influences on Danida's efforts to support research in service of development; a framework has been developed to support the assessment and to highlight the importance of dealing with these influences when planning development research initiatives.

At least eight boundaries and imperatives shaping Danish development research and its modalities of support have been important determinants of what Danida could do. Limitations have included diminishing expertise and resources in MFA, which have affected understanding of the relevance and usefulness of proposed projects; the extent to which it has been possible to align with, and support evolving Danish development cooperation efforts; and the limited size and unpredictability of the annual budget for development research amidst political change. The evaluation considers *The World 2030* as providing a fresh opportunity to establish a stable approach to development research over the next decade. Two other important boundaries that have shaped the nature of the research and how it is supported are (i) Danida's efforts to maintain a balance between the interests of Denmark and its partners in the Global South, and (ii) the way in which development research has been conceptualised. The evaluation found the latter to be too limited for the demands of an era defined by the Anthropocene, including climate change, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, shifting geopolitical power and highly intertwined global value chains, problems without borders, and the indivisible Sustainable Development Goals with their demand for transformation, integration, 'no-one left behind' and rebalancing the relationship between humans and nature.

At least nine tensions were identified as a second set of influencing factors. Where the balance lies in each case is a matter of choice, something Danida has displayed through continuous evolutions in its modalities over the years. Each has benefits as well as trade-offs that can be defended. Examples of tensions that Danida has had to deal with – and that have to be considered in future – include 'freer' versus more directed research; the interests of academia versus society; concentration versus scattering of resources; projects versus programmatic or portfolio approach; short- versus long-term support; collective versus unilateral or bilateral action, strategic (business) interests versus the filling of important knowledge gaps; and convention and comfort versus new models and mindsets around development. Within some of the tensions lie decisions about risk: for example, in choosing to support

'winners' compared to less proven research groups or institutions or investing in fragile versus more stable contexts.

Four important areas with strengths as well as weaknesses were also identified. Danida – in collaboration with DFC and FFU – have shown agility and responsiveness to changes in internal and external contexts, even though some researchers experienced this as creating unwarranted uncertainty. The thematic areas and filling of knowledge gaps relevant to national interests in the South have been well received and have been well aligned with broad policy imperatives in partner countries, even in the absence of systematic efforts in this regard. Yet individual projects seldom managed to address urgent or critical priorities at policy or business level. Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals have been superficially justified, and examples were provided of 'gaming' of the system assessing the relevance of the research.

North-South partnerships were a significant strength, with many examples of very positive and highly productive relationships with many positive outcomes – but also showing signs of unequal power relations, poor institutional processes in recipient universities in the South and in Denmark, and misunderstandings based on different interpretations of dynamics in the very different cultures. Triangular partnerships have shown both what can go wrong – a cluster of projects running in parallel when there is too little in common – and what can be very beneficial when interests intersect, with South-South interactions showing new unexpected opportunities for learning in and about contexts more similar than what can be found in North-South collaborations alone. And despite good potential to harness synergies within Danida's own portfolios, and with other donors, national partners and initiatives, there have been too few examples of connections that could bring greater coherence, complementarities and benefits. This has been exacerbated by Danida's withdrawal in 2015-2016 from international fora and from the collective support of international initiatives.

Organisation and management issues presented the final set of influences on progress and performance. Project delivery was almost consistently delayed, often because of systemic issues in the grant recipient organisations; a vast majority required no-cost extensions of, on average around a year and a half, indicating periods of support too short for the challenges research teams faced. The grants monitoring and evaluation system, though praised for being 'light', was found to have limited utility, in particular with respect to aggregated descriptive, content and performance data that could be used for strategic portfolio planning and management, nuanced and in-depth accountability, knowledge generation and advocacy for development research. And although the support system – consisting primarily of EVAL (now ELK), DFC and FFU – have a clear division in roles and responsibilities, some adjustments are necessary. Both DFC and EVAL require more resources (financial or

human) to ensure that they could fulfil the most effective roles in the system. The role of the DFC can be expanded, with a stronger focus on focus on strategy, connections and evidence sharing with the Ministry by EVAL. Concerns have arisen about the stronger focus during assessment on the 'research' rather than 'development' aspects of proposals – an important issue that in the end affects the positioning of the research for development impact. Finally, the role of FFU is seen as crucial and also in general very well executed. However, the need to ensure that 'relevance' is treated on par with 'quality', the new demands for expertise related to Window 2, and perceptions of potential conflicts of interest – even if just in terms of the optics of processes – require some reconsideration of its membership and ways of operating.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPTIONS

The recommendations flowing from the findings have been structured around four options. They are not cast in stone but are provided to stimulate discussion about possibilities for the future. Blending between them provide good alternatives too, while an explicit niche for Danish development research can be crafted from a focus on one or more thematic areas in line with the society's values and strengths (and as noted in *The World 2030*) combined with a specific way of working or modality of support, as noted for example in the four options that follow.

Option 1 – **Strengthening Core Capacities**, argues for maintaining the status quo in Window 1 and BSU by focusing on further strengthening of the main strengths of Danida's research support over several decades – namely in developing individual and institutional research capacities to generate problem-solving knowledge of value to development. Based on weaknesses and opportunities identified during the evaluation, this option provides a set of six major areas for improvement, each with three practical actions. The six areas are (i) developing a strategy and portfolio approach; (ii) explicitly defining the concept of 'development research' fit for this era; (iii) balancing short-term support with long-term field-building in critical areas; (iv) improving both the definition of, and criteria for assessing research quality while also attending to weaknesses in the 'legitimacy' dimension; (v) strengthening the monitoring and evaluation system to serve a more strategic accountability, knowledge building and advocacy function, and (vi) improving the development research system consisting of the key agencies EVAL/ELK, DFC and FFU with their links to the Ministry and its embassies. While much can be done with realignment of existing resources, some additional funding and time will be required for special studies and more use-focused working with evidence at a portfolio level.

While still building on the elements of Option 1, **Option 2 – Strengthening the Chance of Development Impact** shifts emphasis to how best to position the research supported by Danida to increase the chance that it will make a significant difference at a scale commensurate with

national and even transnational interests. It proposes mechanisms to learn from experience as well as state of the art in how this is done, with additional resources for more intensive and systematic efforts to embed such approaches in the way that development research is done and supported.

Option 3 – Harnessing Research for Danish Development Cooperation argues for very close alignment with the spirit and actions of *The World 2030*, while avoiding pitfalls from past efforts to align development research with development cooperation. The focus will shift to a refined Window 2 that embodies support to selected middle income countries, while at the same time shifting to research in more fragile contexts through triangular cooperation and the formation of coalitions at a scale that can help diminish risk and increase the chance of impact and sustainability of results in challenging contexts. This option is a significant departure from the current approach and will require significant commitment of expertise and resources by the research community as well as by MFA, and in particular the embassies, to shape support in the interests of both Danish and Southern stakeholders in equal measure.

Option 4 – Partnering for Collective Power calls for a comprehensive shift away from bilateral support to initiating, participating in, and/or supporting international coalitions, partnerships and networks that work on transnational, regional and global issues – but with a special focus on the Global South. Returning to some of what was done in earlier modalities, it also opens new opportunities for participation in collective financing through funders' forums; for collective research action in support of global priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals; for South-based research coalitions; or for regional collaborative strategies linked to the AU, EU and OECD for example, in which Southern (and Danish) researchers can be supported to participate. This option will require a radical shift away from what is done at present.

A list of the main findings of the evaluation is found in Annex A , which can be downloaded from evaluation.um.dk

1 THE EVALUATION

1.1 Introduction

Denmark's commitment to supporting an evidence-based approach to development in the Global South has been on display for more than five decades, in particular through funding allocated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) flowing through Danida[1]. Its support has spanned a large number of countries and fields with two consistent aims: (i) contributing to the generation of high quality knowledge, and (ii) strengthening the capacities of individuals and institutions involved in development research.

In May 2019, the Evaluation Department (then EVAL) of the Ministry selected and commissioned a team to conduct a strategic evaluation of Danida's support to development research provided from 2008 to 2018. A commission was appointed to oversee the evaluation and ensure its independence from EVAL, which has also served since 2016 as the overall strategic manager of the portfolio under review. The evaluation was conceptualised as a forward-looking effort, learning from the past in order to recommend future strategies aimed at maximising the value of research for development. It was intended to (i) distil strategic issues that point the way forward; (ii) provide insights into how to ensure high quality research and foster the most productive research partnerships; (iii) facilitate prioritisation of development research and responsiveness to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and (iv) consider how to respond to critical development issues in low income or fragile countries that risk being left behind. The Terms of Reference for the evaluation are provided in Annex B.

Primary intended users of the evaluation results: Danida the Evaluation Department, (EVAL), now Evaluation, Learning and Quality (ELK); the Consultative Committee for Development Research (FFU); the Research Management Team at the Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC); Danida/MFA staff concerned with development cooperation and research; and the Danish research community at large.

---

1   'Danida' will be used for ease of reference throughout this report, while recognising that it is the development arm and integral part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Secondary intended users of the evaluation of the evaluation results: Grantees and other producers and users of research in general and development research in particular, in both Denmark and partner countries in the Global South; as well as members of the general public interested in Danida's performance and impact.

1.2   Approach and methodology

FACTORS THAT DETERMINED THE EVALUATION DESIGN
The evaluation design combined a mixed-methods and systems-informed design. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used, and their results integrated, the systemic nature of the research enterprise considered throughout, and the evolving logic of the modalities and channels of support over the 11 years considered. Five factors guided the design selection and details:

One, the objectives, purpose and intended use of the evaluation.
Although not structured as a full-fledged utilisation-focused evaluation, the utility and potential use of the evaluation were uppermost in the minds of the evaluation team. The learning-oriented nature of the evaluation demanded a special emphasis on qualitative information supported by quantitative data, and on patterns that could be inform the future.

Two, the evaluation criteria and questions. The evaluation was focused by 20 evaluation questions (see Evaluation Matrix, Annex C) posed in the Terms of Reference, with the assumption that the necessary insights can be obtained by assessing Danida's research portfolio and the support system guiding development research in terms of four evaluation criteria – their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and contribution towards development impact.

Three, the systemic nature of what was to be evaluated. An assessment of Danida's contributions had to recognise the relationships and other interconnections between the relevant actors within and outside the scientific domain. As development research is concerned with influencing policy and practice, it is not an academic enterprise divorced from societal concerns and social goals, and stakeholders interact across geographic, sector, disciplinary, and ideological boundaries.

This had several implications for the evaluation: The target for analyses was the identification of *patterns* emerging from (triangulated) data. *Boundaries* were established for data collection, analysis and synthesis by considering Danida's definition of development research, the evaluation questions, the stakeholder groupings (Annex D), an analysis of the grants portfolio and its funding channels and the timescale of the evaluation (11 years, between Jan 2008 and Dec 2018). *Perspectives* were

considered across stakeholder groupings to ensure that diverse voices and experiences from Denmark and the Global South informed the evaluation in equal measure. *Relationships* between the different components under evaluation were considered – between the different parts of the development research support system in Denmark, the partners and other stakeholders in the South, and the scientific, political and policy environments within which they were connected. *Influences on progress and success*, as well as *mostly implicit 'theories of change'* had to be analysed – in the absence of a development research strategy, the logic underlying each modality and funding channel had to be understood.

Four, risks to the success of the evaluation. Constraints had to be considered to enable mitigating steps that could help safeguard the credibility of both the evaluation process and its results.

Five, principles guiding the evaluation. Eight principles guided the design and implementation of the evaluation (sidebar).

THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Two interconnected systems made up the objects of the evaluation (the 'evaluands'): (i) The system within which Danida's support to development research was embedded, consisting of the policies, strategies and institutional actors involved in both development cooperation and development research; and (ii) Danida's approach to supporting development research through partnerships between institutions in Denmark and the South, embodied in the funding channels, the grant portfolios and their content. As a result, the data collection framework was based on the four main components captured in the box below, connecting the contexts in which the research was supported, the objectives of the research portfolio (generating quality research and developing research capacities), and the contributions made as a result. In line with a systems approach, the evaluation emphasised analysis of the factors that had a positive or negative influence on performance and progress towards development impact.

SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

- Danida's support to development research over **11 years** (Jan 2008 to Dec 2018) to a total amount of **DKK 1 991 520 473.**

- **Seven channels (implementation modalities)** since 2008, with emphasis on three still ongoing.

- A total of **378 projects,** both completed and ongoing.

- Research conducted in **49 countries,** with three – Ghana, Uganda and Vietnam – used as case studies for in-depth analysis.

- **Some emphasis on Africa,** given that 75% of Danida's research budget was allocated to projects aimed at African challenges.

FOUR FRAMEWORK COMPONENTS GUIDED DATA COLLECTION

Component 1 - Context analysis. Contexts in Denmark and internationally, due to their influence on achievements and impact. In the Global South, contexts were studied in three case study countries.

Component 2 - Research Quality Plus (RQ+). Based on the key objective of knowledge generation for application in order to effect change in countries in the Global South, 'quality' research takes on a specific meaning when dealing with development. A novel assessment framework was used for this purpose.

Component 3 - Capacity development. Based on the second key objective, requiring a focus on examining capacity development at both individual and institutional levels.

Component 4 - Achievements and impact. Understanding the achievements and changes – outcomes and impacts – brought about through Danida's support to development research, complemented by the reasons for the extent of progress towards success.

1.3   Methods

The evaluation was conducted in three phases, between 1 June and 31 December 2019. Details are in the annexes to this report: the collection and analysis methods (Annex E), persons interviewed (Annex F), reviewed documents (Annex G), examples of interview guides (Annex H), and the survey questionnaire (Annex I) with the most relevant survey results (Annex J).

The mixed methods design made it possible to use factual quantitative, descriptive and perceptual data to uncover contrasting perspectives and patterns. Denmark and three case study countries in the South provided in-depth insights, but coverage was extended as wide as possible through a stakeholder survey of all available contact details of researchers supported by Danida over the past decade, complemented by key stakeholder interviews and portfolio analyses for each funding modality. A series of methods were used to facilitate data collection and analysis (Figure 1). Outcomes harvesting for change analysis was not pursued, but the Research Quality Plus (RQ+) Assessment Framework (Annex K) of 25 projects (around 20% of the suitable projects), bibliometric analyses of 1,202 papers in the Web of Science from 133 individual projects, informed assessment of the quality of the research, while lessons from recent studies of individual and institutional research capacity strengthening efforts were used to inform the capacity development component. In the absence of a coherent strategy and given the significant evolution in funding channels, theories of change were not retrospectively developed, but the reasoning behind each modality and

its evolution was considered. Stakeholder perspectives and information for triangulation were obtained from 208 semi-structured, purposefully selected interviewees (Annex F) and 339 survey respondents (44% response rate from all those for whom DFC had contact details, supported by snowball sampling; details of the survey in Annexes I and J). Triangulation between the different methods and between sources helped strengthened the credibility of the findings, and in case studies RAG (Red, Amber, Green) maps were used to help ensure sufficient triangulation. Interaction with FFU members during one of their regular meetings, with a group of scientists from the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), and participation in a DIIS seminar organised on development research provided further information.

FIGURE 1: DATA COLLECTION AND VERIFICATION METHODS USED DURING THE EVALUATION (SEE ALSO ANNEX E)

Verification of detail & findings	Face to face, on-line & email verification with stakeholders — Consistent triangulation throughout evaluation process, incl. RAG mapping		
	Strengthening findings and their use		
Purposive selection of persons & projects	RQ+ analysis (25 projects), based on research quality rubric ratings	Comparative country case studies in Ghana, Uganda & Vietnam - context analyses, portfolio reviews, in-depth study of selected projects	Semi-structured interviews & group discussions (208 persons)
	Deepening understanding		
Complementary context & whole portfolio analyses	Bibliometric analysis — Context analysis - Denmark	On-line stakeholder survey with open & closed questions (339 respondents; 44% response rate)	FFU Window 1 application calls mapping
Basic secondary data review	Timeline/evolution tracing — Systematic document review	Whole portfolio review (378 projects in 49 countries)	Stakeholder mapping — Review of funding channels' logic

Analysis and synthesis. Data and interviews were shared between evaluation team members. Basic on-line survey software and spreadsheets for data capture and analysis were considered sufficient. Analyses were done deductively and inductively, as appropriate – searching for emerging insights and patterns was balanced by the use of existing frameworks such as the RQ+ Assessment Framework and the reasoning underlying each funding channel. Details of the sampling strategies and data collection methods are provided in Annex E.

1.4   Challenges and limitations

The challenges and limitations encountered limited the depth to which certain aspects could be explored. Despite this, the terms of refer-

ence could be fulfilled with findings based on credible evidence and plausible evaluative reasoning. The constraints noted here highlight the opportunities posed by more in-depth evaluations of targeted aspects, particularly the uptake, use and influence of the research results within and outside the academic or scientific environment; the evaluation team **recommends** that EVAL/ELK considers a dedicated outcomes evaluation as part of a strategic evaluation portfolio.

i. Only very limited consolidated data typically used for trends tracking, portfolio management or strategic decision-making[2] were available. Within the available time and resources, it was not possible to conduct the whole portfolio analyses necessary to fill this gap.

ii. Limited contact details and loss of institutional memory were problems due to the rather long period under evaluation (2008-2018) and the emphasis on already completed projects. Furthermore, only a limited number of Vietnamese stakeholders, especially from the government, could be reached, in part as a result of missing contact details and subsequent failure to trace key persons – a situation compounded by a period of illness of the Vietnamese team member.

iii. Roughly one in three publications could not be included in the bibliometric analysis due to reasons beyond the control of the evaluation[3], while the RQ+ analysis was limited to 25 already completed projects and to project documentation only. Hence, the analysis looked at what was planned, done and reported, but not at extra steps that might have been taken in practice yet not reflected in plans and reports.

iv. Extensive efforts to find patterns arising from data were made, using triangulation between sources and between methods wherever possible. However, the opportunity to do so was often limited due to the scope of the evaluation. Subsets of projects had to be

---

2   For example, the number of postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows and other outputs by country or modality; the percentage of female project coordinators, researchers or postgraduate students over the full period of support; or more in-depth analyses such as the extent to which expected cross-cutting priorities such as gender-responsiveness or a human-rights based approach were reflected in projects.

3   DFC's list of publications contained 1,526 unique items, of which 1,449 had correct digital object identifiers (DOI). Of these, 1,056 (73%) were found in the Web of Science. After 100 non-citable items (editorials, abstracts, comments) were removed, 959 publications were left for analysis (63% of DFC's list). Due to the long period since the closing of many of the projects, DFC could not consistently track all publications emanating from the research; for the study, around one third of the projects had fully updated publication lists.

selected for the different types of analyses, and with large numbers of project involved might not reflect all important aspects of the whole portfolio. Triangulation using document, interview and survey data had to take the place of independent observations of changes in behaviour or output, or the use of research findings. In some cases, information sources were too limited for in-depth analyses of experiences per funding channel.

v. Outcome harvesting methodology could not be applied due to time constraints to gather project stakeholders for consultation around certain outcomes. The impact data analyses therefore lack the robustness that tracing and triangulation in full-fledged outcome harvesting process would have made possible.

1.5   Organisation of the report

All the evaluation questions were addressed through the use of the four criteria and situated against the four context analyses done in Denmark, Ghana, Uganda and Vietnam. Although the report is not structured according to the evaluation questions, it responds to all through a set of findings that addresses the features of the portfolio of grants, the achievements resulting from the support, and the factors that have influenced these achievements. Instead of a separate chapter on the context for this work in Denmark and in the case study countries, key aspects are woven throughout. Conclusions to each chapter have been incorporated into the Executive Briefing, a somewhat longer version of the more conventional executive summary

Chapter 1 introduces the evaluation, its methodology and limitations.

Chapter 2 describes key features and content of the grant or project portfolio (or to be precise, set of portfolios) as it was constituted and evolved between 2008 and 2018.

Chapter 3 focuses on the performance and achievements of the portfolio and assesses the extent to which the two key objectives were achieved.

Chapter 4 discusses how well the research was positioned for uptake and use, with examples of emerging contributions and outcomes on the road to development impact.

Chapter 5 frames influences on the portfolio's performance and contributions towards development impact and analyses the boundaries and imperatives that direct Danida's support to development research.

Chapter 6 discusses further sets of influencing factors related to strengths and weaknesses as well as tensions and trade-offs that have to be considered in the design of the portfolio.

Chapter 7 addresses a final set of influencing factors related to the organisation and processes guide and manage the strategic direction as well as administration of the portfolio.

Chapter 8 highlights practical recommendations that can help Danida to improve the quality, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of its work within the boundaries in which it has to operate, and improvements it can make. Four interconnected options are also highlighted to stimulate discussion about a suitable strategic direction for Danida's research development support in future.

Fifteen annexes serve as companion documents to the report.

2 DANIDA'S DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE DANIDA'S DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PORTFOLIO, 2008-2018

- Danida's funding strategies have evolve through occasional influential reviews especially in 2001, 2006 and 2013; a new strategy devised in 2014 was only implemented for a short while.

- Political and other pressures have caused shifts in MFA priorities, expertise and financing and countries, as well as well as five main shifts in funding modalities. Since 2017, the shift to South-driven projects has been turned around to align more with MFA's strategic sector cooperation.

- Denmark places 11th of 15 bi- and multilateral donors to development research, and 14th to higher education in the South (Chapter 4).

- One funding channel, the competitive FFU Window 1, encompassed 202 of the 378 projects funded – 58% of the total budget of DKK 1.99 billion allocated over 11 years.

- Four funding channels came to an end between 2014 and 2016, two have continued (FFU Window 1 and BSU); the most recent, FFU Window 2, is the result of a shift to Danish strategic interests.

- 16 thematic areas have been funding priorities, with most investment in health and agriculture, followed by natural resource management and 'state building, governance and civil society'; climate change has also been significant, with 'conflict, peace and security' prominent in fragile states.

- There were 59 triangular projects out of 223 partnership projects (W1 and W2) – three in Latin America, five in Asia, 40 in Africa, and 11 across continents.

- Lead institutions included 16 from Denmark and 21 from the South, primarily universities and public research institutes, with the University of Copenhagen the largest beneficiary with 20% of the awarded funding for 96 projects across 43 departments.

- Institutions in Denmark received three times more funding to manage than the South, but 60% of North-driven grants have to be spent in the South.

- Support to strengthen universities – the Building Stronger Universities programme – has received just under DKK 90.67 million in three phases.

2.1 Portfolio funding channels

The portfolio covered by this evaluation consists of grants allocated through seven different funding channels; two consist of several types of grants (Table 1; see also Annex L). The evaluation included all completed and ongoing projects initiated between 2008 and 2018 – a total of 378 projects, funded to a total amount of just over DKK 1.99 billion (Table 1). Despite its significance, the Danida portfolio does not include all MFA funding for development research; other funding sources at Danish universities and scientific institutions also provide such support.[4]

TABLE 1: FUNDING CHANNELS WITH NUMBER OF PROJECTS, AVERAGE GRANT AND TOTAL AMOUNT ALLOCATED, 2008-2018[5]

Funding channels (bold) and types of projects	Number of projects recorded	Funding allocation 2008-2018 (DKK)	Percent of total budget (%)	Average amount / project (DKK)
1. FFU Window 1 – North and South driven	202	1 148 063 922	57.6	5 683 485
Research collaboration projects in Danida priority countries	*33*	*320 512 837*	*16.1*	*9 712 510*
Larger strategic projects	*59*	*468 420 332*	*23.5*	*7 939 328*
South-driven projects (prior to 2017)	*16*	*123 540 883*	*6.2*	*7 721 305*
Pilot research cooperation projects (South-driven prior to 2013)	*20*	*94 813 018*	*4.8*	*4 740 651*
Smaller projects: Initiatives	*5*	*1 034 168*	*0.1*	*206 834*
Smaller projects: PhDs	*47*	*78 419 794*	*3.9*	*1 668 506*
Smaller projects: Postdocs	*22*	*61 322 890*	*3.1*	*2 787 404*

---

4   For example, earmarked research initiatives in multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and UN agencies or core funding for organisations such as the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Danish Institute of International Studies (DIIS). There are also research components in sector programmes in specific priority countries for Danish development cooperation.

5   These figures diverge slightly from the data in the terms of reference. The table is based on the projects that started before and in 2018 from the Danida Research portal.

Funding channels (bold) and types of projects	Number of projects recorded	Funding allocation 2008-2018 (DKK)	Percent of total budget (%)	Average amount / project (DKK)
2. FFU Window 2 – SSC aligned	12[6]	54 956 551	2.8	4 996 050
3. Building Stronger Universities, Phases I-III	Three phases[7]	272 000 000	13.7	n/a
4. The International Research Programme, ReCom	n/a	30 000 000	1.5	n/a
5. International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)	n/a	280 000 000	14.1	n/a
6. Other International Development Research	n/a	149 000 000	7.5	n/a
7. Minor Studies, Masters' degrees & mobility grants	n/a	57 500 000	2.9	n/a
GRAND TOTAL	**378**	**1 991 520 473**	**100.0**	

The portfolio of grants in 2008 had evolved from research capacity development initiatives such as the ENRECA programme (Enhancement of Research Capacity) launched in 1989, support provided through RUF (Rådet for Udviklingsforskning) for Danish researchers at PhD and postdoctoral fellowship level, and the financing of research centres and networks in Denmark and internationally. Competitive grants and peer review were introduced in the early 2000s. Changes were made based on a series of evaluations that recommended improved resourcing, increasing sustainability, broadening the impact on national innovation systems, strengthening knowledge management and working towards more coherent, productive and collaborative structures for the management of development research.[8] Despite being urged to develop a coherent vision of how development research could best contribute to

---

6   In total, 21 projects were granted in 2017 and 2018. However, 10 of these started in 2019 are therefore not included.

7   BSU II consisted of seven individual projects with budgets ranging from 8 to 15 million DKK. BSU III consisted of six individual projects with budgets ranging from 10 to 15 million DKK. During BSU I, four platforms supported 41 PhD students.

8   See for example the reports *Partnerships at the Leading Edge: A Danish vision for knowledge, research and development,* 2001, and *Timeline and history of the Danida support to research partnerships 1989-2019*. Bente Ilsøe and Pernille Friis, for DFC, 2019.

knowledge creation and to development, and determine how Denmark could best underpin development-oriented knowledge societies in the Global North and South, Danida could not steer development research through a formal strategy; an effort to do so failed as a result of the drastic funding cutbacks in 2015.

As this evaluation was not aimed at determining (social) 'value for money', a systematic assessment of the type and value of the research content of the portfolio was not done. The following subsections highlight in broad terms the foci that between 2008 and 2018 defined Danida's grants portfolio and positioned its contributions to knowledge and research capacities in both Denmark and the South.

INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (CGIAR) (2008–2016)
Danida had been a long-standing financier of the CGIAR until 2016, when its support was terminated as part of funding cutbacks in Danish development assistance. Between 2011 and 2016 Denmark contributed USD 34.6 million to the CGIAR Fund (0.76% of the total grants between 2011 and 2019), making it the 17th largest out of 40 donors.[9] Around two-thirds of the allocation was for core funding to the system-wide initiative between 2012 and 2016 (after the CGIAR reform), while one third was ringfenced between 2008 and 2011 for thematic research primarily on climate change, agriculture and food security[10]. The achievements of the CGIAR system are well-recognised; among others, estimates are that without CGIAR research, countries in the Global South would be producing 7-8% less food on 11-13 million more hectares at the expense of primary forests and other fragile environments.[11] It has also been well positioned to lead in areas of global concern, such as climate change and climate-smart adaptive agriculture, considered priorities in both Denmark and the Global South. Danida's funding provided Denmark with the opportunity to support research of global importance by contributing to the essential stability and predictability of the CGIAR budget for long-term programming. The financing gave Danida a strong voice through collective action; it was at the time seen as a "role model" for other donors[12] and a leading voice on the Fund Council, well beyond the scope of its relatively limited financial contribution.[13]

---

9   Data extracted from CGIAR Trust Fund Dashboard on 8 October 2019, https://www.cgiar.org/funders/trust-fund/trust-fund-contributions-dash-board/

10   Led by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

11   *Danish Organisation Strategy (interim) for the CGIAR Fund (International Agricultural Research) 2015-2016*. Published by MFA, February 2015.

12   Ibid.

13   Confirmed in an interview with examples with key CGIAR stakeholders, October 2019.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH (2008-2016)
As part of its focus on supporting international collective action, between 2008 and 2016 Danida also financed well-known institutions and networks in the social and health sciences[14] selected for their relevance to Danish development assistance and capacity strengthening capabilities, and focusing on African and European as well as broadly international initiatives.[15] Some of the support was also provided to organisations that aimed to bridge the critical gap between research and policymaking.

This approach to development research funding has many benefits. Apart from the impressive results of the organisations supported, support to health sciences in economically poor environments and international support for often locally-neglected social sciences are considered valuable and in Africa, even essential.[16] Evaluations of core support programmes have been "overwhelmingly positive"[17]; they are seen as providing essential opportunities for growth in new areas and expanding networks of support and exchange, fostered by long-term, stable financing.

Such allocations allowed Danida to have a close dialogue with the supported organisations and facilitated the sharing of a table with like-minded funders. As articulated by a key stakeholder: "*Danida punched above its weight by providing important strategic input and direction. Our cooperation simplified the administration of financing, planning, monitoring and evaluation. And everyone benefitted from dialogue and agreed-upon joint actions and low transaction costs*". The joint engagement by Nordic countries in several of these efforts, including meetings held every six months between Norad, Sida, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland and Danida (at the time represented by the Technical Advisory Services, TAS) also strengthened cooperation on development research until Danida's sudden withdrawal in 2015. Recently organisations such as

---

14   They included in Africa the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) and the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC); in Europe the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) and the European Malaria Vaccine Initiative (EMVI); and internationally the International Partnership on Microbiocides (IPM) and the International Aids Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

15   Cover Note: Council for Development Policy. *Report on support to development research 2013*. UFT File No. 104.Dan.8.a.2.

16   See for example Wachira Kigotho in *University World News Global Edition, Scientists fight back against freeloader accusations*, 30 Jan 2020. https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200127114644361. The 2014 annual report to the by the Council for Development Policy also noted that socio-economic research was less well represented in South-driven applications.

17   Carden, F. et al. 2019. *Strengthening Research Institutions. Learning from Doing*. Using Evidence Working Paper. Foundation.

CGIAR and CODESRIA have been rejuvenating their strategies and priorities, offering new avenues for both core and thematic support in line with regional and global imperatives.

> The International Aids Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) is a global not-for-profit, public-private partnership focused on developing a vaccine targeting the virus varieties in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2013, at the time of Danida support, it had developed 22 new vaccine candidates of which 13 had been assessed in clinical trials, working through centres for HIV vaccine research partnerships in 19 countries, engaging more than 100 academic, biotechnology, pharmaceutical and government partners, and reaching more than 300,000 people for voluntary testing and counselling. IAVI also helped to build research capacity in East and Southern Africa, training more than 800 scientists. Its work is available to other research groups, contributing to an 'add-on' effect that accelerates the development of new vaccines.[18]

MINOR STUDIES IN DENMARK (2011-2014)

During 2011-2014 Danida supported smaller research studies in Denmark by Danish or foreign researchers in response to requests by Danish embassies and MFA departments. These studies were often conducted by Masters' students. They aimed to help narrow the gap between development research and development assistance and strengthen the quality of Danish development cooperation by exploring and guiding issues relevant to strategic plans and development policy, and promoting learning, policy influence, strategic thinking and innovation. They were terminated due to perceptions of high transaction costs and challenges in integrating the results into country programmes; the responsibility for this type of support was transferred to embassies[19]. Due to lack of contacts and institutional memory loss in embassies, the evaluation did not study the extent to which the funded Minor Studies were found to be useful, but the topics supported covered a wide variety, executed by institutions from different parts of the world; only a few examples are provided her as illustration. They demonstrate good potential for useful contributions to understanding issues of immediate importance to development in a specific context, or to development policy and strategy generally. Organisations supported in the North were not all based in Denmark; this has since changed, with

---

18 Cover Note: Council for Development Policy. *Report on support to development research 2013*. UFT File No. 104. Dan.8.a.2.

19 The evaluation did not study this aspect in depth, and the extent to which such funding – often seen as running the risk of being 'consulting' rather than research – has subsequently been implemented by embassies is not clear.

all recipients of funding now either in Denmark or in partner and priority countries in the South.

SELECTED TOPICS IN MINOR STUDIES, WITH MANAGING INSTITUTIONS, INITIATED IN 2013 AND 2014

- Illicit financial flows (Global Financial Integrity)
- South-South Cooperation to open the capability trap (DIIS)
- Coherence in conflict: Bringing humanitarian and development aid streams together (Policy 2 Practice Team)
- Assessing national and regional capacities for implementing the responsibility to protect in Ghana and West Africa (West Africa Network for Peacebuilding)
- Inequality in countries transitioning from low-income to lower-middle income (ODI)
- Effects of green trade liberalisation on developing countries (Copenhagen University
- Conflict, resilience and transition in Somalia (Shan Research Ltd)
- Study on the Human Rights Based Approach (Institut for Menneskerettigheder)
- Evidence and strategic choices for the green growth priority area of Danida's development cooperation strategy (World Resources Institute)
- Violence against women and girls, including cultural and religious (International Human Rights Initiative)

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME – RECOM (2011-2014)

From 2011 to 2014 Danida also supported ReCom – the 'Research and Communication on Foreign Aid' initiative. ReCom was intended to research, document and communicate what works and what is achieved through efforts in development assistance – understanding the complexity of foreign aid, filling critical knowledge gaps and improving aid effectiveness. Co-financed by Sida, it mobilised the expertise of several well-recognised and experienced institutions such as UNU-WIDER and DIIS, also engaging early-career researchers from the South and establishing linkages with networks such as AERC. It provided an opportunity to give direct support to Danish development assistance efforts while also being relevant to others around the world – fostering a body of knowledge about the value and effectiveness of development assistance that could be used to raise public awareness about the value of aid in Denmark and among partners in political systems in the South, and inform development policies and strategies in both Denmark and the South. It produced significant findings, some of which reached the media. The grant holders made efforts to disseminate the results to intended users via social and mainstream media; through papers and policy briefs; and through conferences and briefings with stakeholders in various cities. Although the evaluation could not study the extent to

which the results were taken up, they noticed that an attractive ReCom website with content accessible to all remains available on-line, with several anecdotes of uptake of results in policymaker documents and discussions.

> "The efforts of foreign aid in relation to employment in Africa have been misguided. Countries where economic growth has led to only minimal improvement in employment received more aid than more successful ones. In a region where foreign aid tends to represent a substantial fraction of GDP, and in light of the inequality described previously, foreign aid has failed to direct attention to those projects which would have been more successfully reduced poverty. An alternative approach to poverty reduction in Africa should focus on improving working conditions and increasing job availability. This would include raising productivity of strategic crops such as cassava, maize, rice and wheat, improving roads, and enhancing access to finance. Meanwhile, foreign donors can help African nations to endow their workers with the necessary skills to make the transition to higher productivity manufacturing jobs by shifting the focus of aid from improving the regulatory environment to improving infrastructure, education and skills available. Finally, foreign donors can also assist African governments by supporting exports, building industrial clusters through special economic zones and building firm capabilities through development agencies to attract FDI and management training."
>
> *Source: Research brief based on WIDER Working Paper 2014/43*

COMPETITIVE FUNDING – FFU WINDOW 1 (2008-ONGOING)
The competitive funding 'FFU' modality – initially based on research partnerships, a move to 'larger strategic programmes' as well as individual Danish PhD and postdoctoral fellowships[20] – has undergone a series of changes since the early 2000s. In 2006, following a series of new legislations, the Consultative Research Committee for Development Research (FFU) was established to enable credible assessment processes based on the criteria of scientific quality, relevance and potential impact. Themes of annual calls for proposals were aligned with Danida priorities and knowledge needs. Since 2008 there was a progressive shift towards a more South-driven approach, first tested in Vietnam through the Pilot Research Cooperation Projects funding channel. At present both South- and North-driven projects are supported as part of the 'Research collaboration projects in Danida priority countries' funding channel. (Details of the evolution of Window 1 are provided in Annex M). However, FFU Window 2 and termination of a dedicated South-driven channel of funding in 2016 demonstrate Danida's return to a stronger emphasis on Danish interests.

---

20   The latter two were terminated in 2012.

The thematic areas in which resources were invested (Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4) show main priorities throughout to be health and agricultural production. Partnership projects from the South have a stronger focus on climate change than the North, which in turn has a stronger focus on natural resource management and on state building, governance and civil society. 'Economic development and value chains' also drew notable attention. In all cases the amounts allocated were similar for each type of project, with the exception of health projects in the South (likely larger for the development of infrastructure).

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF W 1 NORTH-DRIVEN ALLOCATIONS AND NUMBER OF PROJECTS PER THEME (2008-2018)
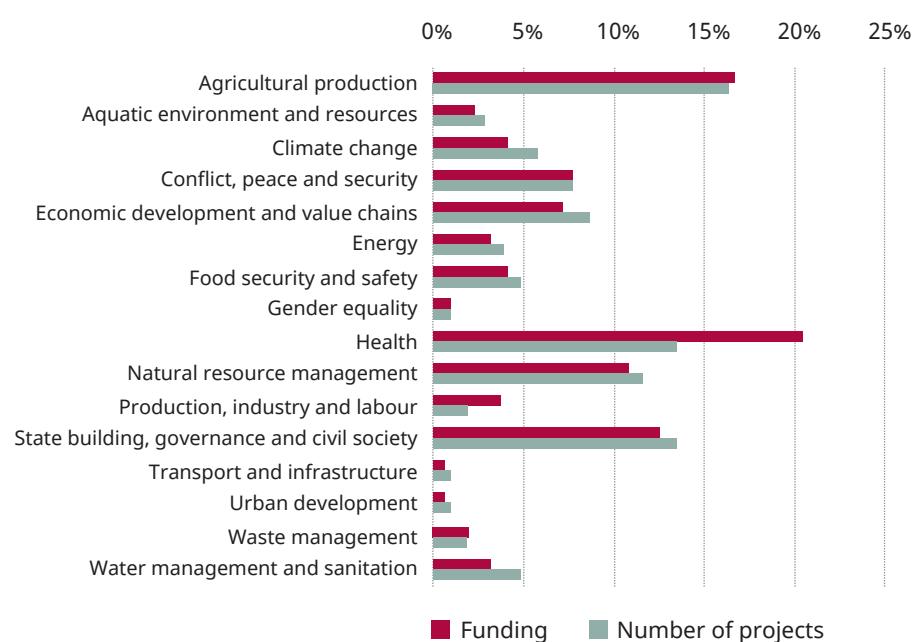
Note. As some projects cover more than one theme, the total funding amount has been divided equally amongst the different themes. The number of projects in the table will exceed the actual number of projects as they were counted under each different theme. The table and graphs include both single- and multi-country projects. With regard to the multi-country projects, the funding amount indicated is the total amount for all countries (there is no earmarking for specific countries).

FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF W 1 SOUTH-DRIVEN ALLOCATIONS AND NUMBER OF PROJECTS PER THEME (2008-2018)
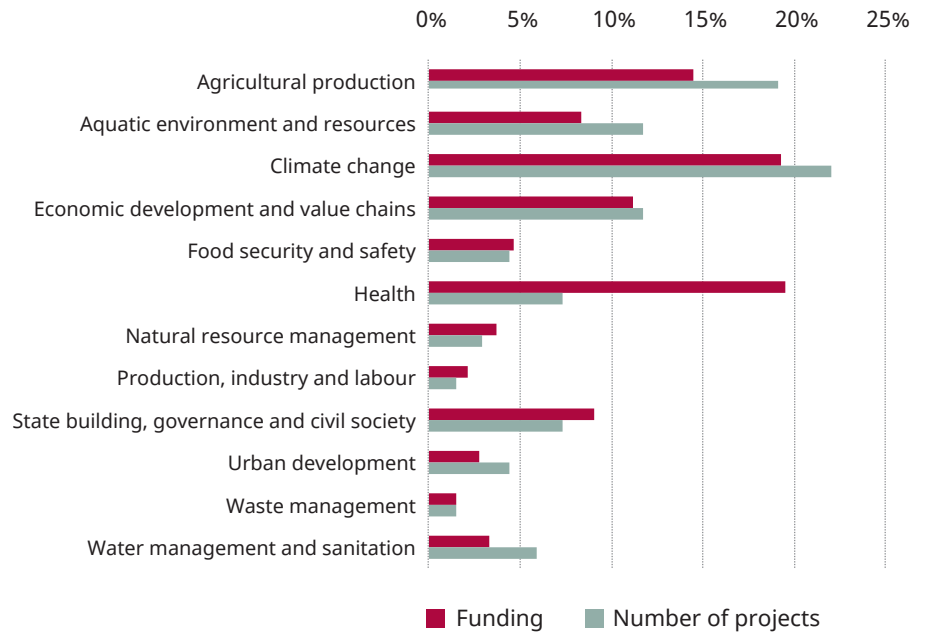
Note: As some projects cover more than one theme, the total funding amount has been divided equally amongst the different themes. The number of projects in the table will exceed the actual number of projects as they were counted under each different theme. The table and graphs include both single- and multi-country projects. Regarding the multi-country projects, the funding amount indicated is the total amount for all countries (there is no earmarking for specific countries).

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF W 1 'SMALLER PROJECTS' ALLOCATIONS AND NUMBER OF PROJECTS PER THEME (2008-2018)
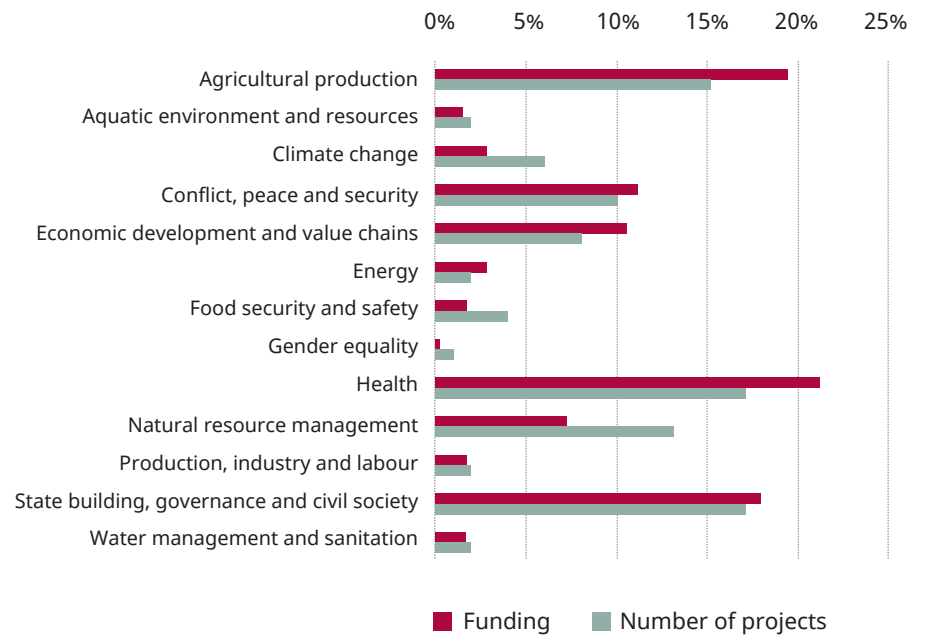
BUILDING STRONGER UNIVERSITIES (BSU I-III) (2011-ONGOING)

The Building Stronger Universities (BSU) programme is a relatively long-term (at least 10 years) investment by Danida in institution-building. Its first phase (BSU I) became operational in 2011 as a collaboration between Danish institutions and 11 institutions in five countries, namely Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya and Nepal, organised around four thematic platforms. It was driven from the North, managed by 'Universities Denmark' and focused primarily on individual capacity development through the support of scholarships. Negative evaluation findings led to an adjusted second phase (BSU II) in 2014, which included seven university partners from Uganda, Ghana, Tanzania and Nepal only. More than 50 researchers from Danish universities participated in the matchmaking process, which resulted in seven consortia across all the Danish universities.[21] This time the Southern universities were given the authority to administer the programme and to define actions that better reflect the need for institutional capacity development.[22] Subsequent to BSU II, the third phase, BSU III, was launched in October 2017, again informed by lessons learned while largely maintaining the approach followed in BSU II. Still ongoing, it now includes six university partners from Uganda, Ghana, and Tanzania only[23] (More details on the evolution of BSU are provided in Annex N).

In order to consolidate what has been done, BSU III has fewer thematic areas and more in-depth research components. Despite the focus on institutional research systems and individual capacities that suit each university's context and priorities, South-South exchange between the participating universities has been well received, and the BSU III research foci have overlaps that continue to provide potential for such cooperation and exposure to one another's way of working. Although they are not working within specified competitive funding themes, foci on health, (climate smart) agriculture and the environment (natural resource management) are common.

COMPETITIVE FUNDING – FFU WINDOW 2

The most recent funding window initiated in 2017, FFU Window 2 embodies the growing imperative to move closer to Danish development cooperation, Danish business and industry, and national strategic interests as outlined in the *Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action, The World 2030* launched in 2017. It encourages

---

21   Cover Note, Council for Development Policy. *Report on support to develop-ment research 2014.* F2 case no.: 2015-7403.

22   *Building Stronger Universities Phase III 2017-2021*. Programme Document. Evaluation Department; MoFA: August 2017.

23   Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Kumasi, Ghana); University of Ghana (Accra, Ghana); Gulu University (Gulu, Uganda); Kilimanjaro Christian Medical University College (Moshi, Tanzania); Sokoine University of Agriculture (Morogoro, Tanzania); State University of Zanzibar (Zanzibar, Tanzania).

partnerships in 'growth and transition' countries that can harness "Danish strengths" – in the strategy expressed in thematic terms with reference to water, energy, health and food, as well as social issues such as democracy and the rule of law. Linked to the Strategic Sector Cooperation (SSC) (earlier 'Partnering with Denmark') Facility, actively supported by (at present) 35 sector ('growth') councillors in Danish embassies, the Window 2 themes reflect the 39 SSC agreements concluded between authorities in Denmark and 18 partner countries[24], covering a wide variety of thematic areas. As in the case of FFU Window 1, the assessment of applications is done in two phases using expertise from embassies and external reviewers – aiming to balance scientific quality, feasibility and relevance to national and Danish priorities and policy, the level of innovation and potential for impact. The 2020 thematic areas resonate with Danish development research contributions over the past decade (Figure 5),[25] but as can be expected, the supported Window 2 projects are in general more narrowly defined (although foci have been broadened in the last rounds) and are more technology and industry related than those in Window 1, which have a stronger focus on social issues.

FIGURE 5: FFU WINDOW 2 FUNDING ALLOCATIONS PER THEME (DKK)

---

24 *South and North America*: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico; *Africa:* Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco and South Africa; *Asia:* Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Myanmar and Vietnam; *Europe*: Turkey.

25 Climate change, energy, environment and natural resources, food quality, and health systems.

**TABLE 2: EXAMPLES COMPARING TOPICS SUPPORTED IN WINDOWS 1 AND 2**

Examples of Window 2 projects, 2018 and 2019	Examples of Window 1 projects, 2018
• Satellite EO for flood and drought forecasting in China	• Green Resources Innovations for Livelihood Improvement
• Port Efficiency and Public-Private Capacity (PEPP)	• Rights and Resilience in Kenya (RARE)
• Optimizing Brazil Health Care with telemedicine	• Building Resilience of Lake Busumtwi to Climate Change
• The Regulation of International Supply Chains (RISC)	• Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana
• Pathways to water resilient South African cities	• Militarisation, sustainable growth and peace in Uganda
• Green and Flexible District Heating/Cooling in Turkey	• Diaspora Humanitarianism in Complex Crises (Dhum)
• Salmonella Control in the Colombian Pig Industry	• Building Resilience to Climate Change in Ethiopia
• Reintegration Through Active Labour Market Reforms	• Enabling best possible childbirth care in Tanzania
• Evaluation of Resource recovery Alternatives in South African water (ERASE)	• Crowdfunding for Youth Entrepreneurship in Tanzania
• Safety and health and audit practices in Bangladesh	• Governing Climate Mobility (GCM)
• Maintenance and Repair Strategy for Wind Energy Development	• Global Norms and Violence Against Women in Ethiopia
• Offshore Wind Farms Large-Scale Integration in Turkey	• Grassroots Innovations for Inclusive Economic Growth
• Coexistence of obesity and anaemia during pregnancy	• Everyday Humanitarianism in Tanzania (EveryHumanTZ)
• Addressing Maritime Insecurity (AMARIS) in Ghana	• Building climate resilience into basin water management
• Overcoming barriers to improving OHS among SMEs in Myanmar	• Access-Authority Nexus in Farmer-Herder Conflicts
• Enhancing the Effectiveness of Vocational Education	• Crowdfunding for Youth Entrepreneurship in Tanzania
	• Increasing the Productivity of Ghanaian Aquaculture

2.2 Portfolio themes

Analysis of the total amount of funding allocated across all modalities during the period under review confirm the dominance of health and agricultural production (Figure 6). Gender as thematic area is a surprising neglect; while it is seen as a cross-cutting issue, it has not had the profile as focus for projects that would have been expected, given its treatment as priority in development over the past decade. Its importance, and that of other "Danish" values such as human rights and democracy, have been reinforced in *The World 2030* as one of four strategic aims.[26] In general, the areas already supported resonate very well with these four areas, which are likely to guide development cooperation initiatives over the next decade. A focus on youth is a notable absence.

---

26   Security and development – peace, stability and protection; migration and development; inclusive, sustainable growth and development, and freedom and development – democracy, human rights and gender equality.

FIGURE 6: TOTAL ALLOCATION PER THEMATIC AREAS SUPPORTED ACROSS ALL W1 AND W2 FUNDING CHANNELS, 2008-2018[27]
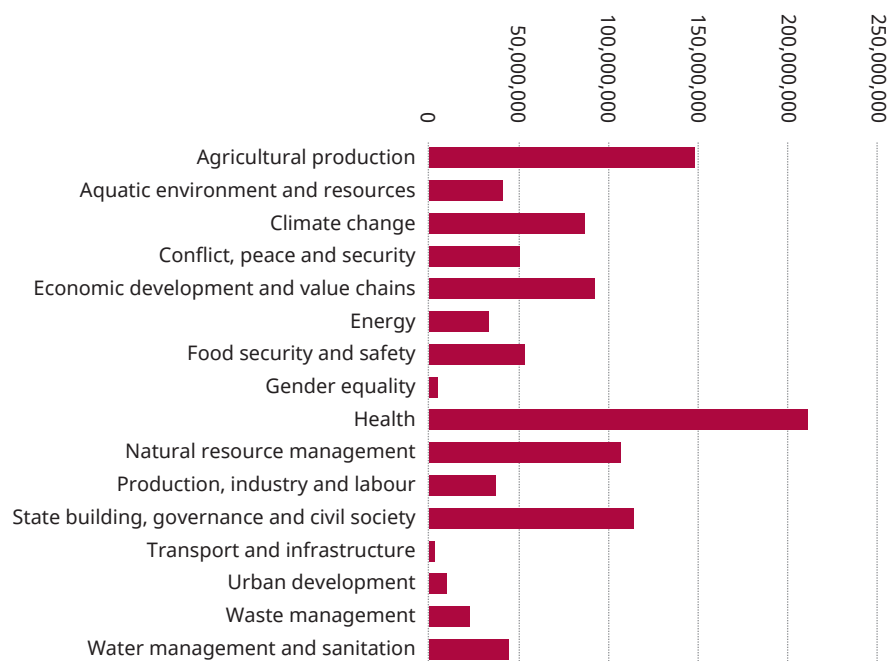
2.3   Portfolio financing

In the last two decades MFA underwent major changes brought about by several rounds of restructuring and cutbacks,[28] including an annual reduction of 2% in administrative overheads ('driftsbevilling'). With the 2016 Finance Bill, the allocation for Danish development cooperation was set at 0.7% of GDP. This led to significantly cutbacks that also affected development research support and its underpinning structures. Denmark now has, with the exception of Iceland, the smallest foreign service ('udenrigstjeneste') among the Nordic countries, a situation that has severely affected its operations.[29]

---

27   In cases where projects cover more than one theme, the total funding amount was divided equally among the themes. The table and graphs include both single- and multi-country projects. As BSU I was not recorded in the Danida Research Portal it has 'unspecified' as the theme and has not been included in this graph.

28   Very limited data and precise written records are available on these changes, especially with regard to cutbacks.

29   MFA's administrative overhead budget has been reduced with about DKK 800 million (approximately 33%) since 2000; the number of full-time positions ('årsværk') fell from 1,555 in 2000 to 1,098 in 2015; since 2000, the number of embassies and other representations has fallen by about 20%, from 120 to 95. Source: Taksøe-Udredning om Dansk udenrigs-og sikkerhedspolitik, Maj 2016; Udenrigsministeriet.

Scope and consistency. The size and composition of Danish development cooperation have changed considerably over the last decades, dropping recently in relative terms to the lowest in 30 years (0.72%; Annex L)[30] [31] Danida's allocations to development research have thus also fluctuated from around DKK 62 million in 1989 to a peak of DKK 300 million at the turn of the century, before showing in 2015[32] a severe dip resulting from cutbacks in the development cooperation budget. After 2015, only the competitive FFU partnership-based and BSU modalities continued. Since 2017 the financing trend has been upward again, reaching DKK 200 million in 2019 – yet still relatively low compared to 2008. A portion of development cooperation funding has also for some years been funnelled to migrants and refugees[33] and, with the implementation of FFU Window 2 in 2017, to helping in efforts to secure new markets through cooperation between the public, research and private sectors in Denmark and in the 'transition and growth' economies of primarily middle-income countries. From 2013 to 2018 there has also been a move to give significant support to countries such as Turkey, hosting a huge number of refugees and protecting the EU against a larger influx.

Funding is negotiated on an annual basis, which brings a degree of uncertainty to strategies and hampers long-term planning.

Geographic distribution. The bulk of allocations were for projects in Africa, followed at a distance by Asia at less than one fourth of the amount for Africa.[34] Six countries – Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, Vietnam,

---

30   The Finance bill for 2020 has approved maintaining 0.7% of GNP, with additional funding for climate change interventions of DKK 150 million.

31   Ravnborg. DIIS Comment 15 April 2019; Lars Engberg-Pedersen & Adam Fejerskov: *The transformation of Danish Foreign Aid* in Kristian Fischer & Hans Mouritzen: Danish Foreign Policy Review 2018. Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). 2018.

32   In total only DKK 8 million was allocated DKK 2 million for FFU adjudicated projects and DKK 6 million for "Other international research".

33   Managing future migration flows thus became an important part of the strategy, articulated in *Strategic Objective 2, Migration and Development*. In order to prevent irregular migration to Europe, Danida aims to ensure that assistance is provided to migrants in their home areas, the "migration areas" ("nærområder"), and that refugees are readmitted to their home countries. Financial assistance to refugees had for long been part of the budget for development cooperation; in 2015-2016 this took up a considerable amount. In 2016, for instance, the government reserved about DKK 4.4 billion (about DKK 1.6 billion more than what was actually spent). The reservation of funds for refugees in the annual Finance Bills means that these funds cannot be used for long-term development cooperation in a planned and structured way. Despite less funds used for refugees in Denmark in 2017 and 2018, the surplus was not directed back to bilateral funding. Additional resources for development cooperation might be available when the financial requirements for refugees are known by the end of 2019.

34   Since Danida-funded development research has to be linked to Danish development assistance policies and strategies, one of the requirements is therefore that competitive funding is provided to priority countries defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Uganda and Burkina Faso – took up 74% of the total allocation,[35] while projects implemented in 43 other countries comprised the rest.

Global South/Global North balance. Table 3 lists the competitive FFU and BSU funds allocated to the grant administering institutions in the Global South and in Denmark. The total amount awarded to (and hence in principle controlled by) Danish institutions is almost three times that of the South, although the funds are spent more evenly between Danish institutions and partners in the South.[36] The balance in allocations shifted significantly between 2014 and 2016 with emphasis at the time on South-driven projects. The move back to projects driven by Denmark since 2017 is also demonstrated in the allocations. In addition, the ratio of approved proposals for North-driven projects has consistently been much higher than for those in the South (Annex O).

TABLE 3: TOTAL AMOUNT PER GRANT YEAR BY LEAD INSTITUTION (IN DENMARK AND IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH) IN THE BSU AND COMPETITIVE FFU FUNDING CHANNELS, 2008-2018.

Year	Institutions in the Global South (DKK)	Institutions in Denmark (DKK)
2008	-	112 729 493
2009	20 048 043	138 151 370
2010	19 671 600	13 918 014
2011	23 252 211	65 824 840
2012	24 934 485	57 186 807
2013	23 904 852	93 259 130
2014	83 219 183	76 865 172
2015	60 879 246	87 396 116
2016	50 733 658	47 164 953
2017	62 000 000	220 907
2018	14 989 268	144 248 964
Total	**383 632 546**	**962 236 766**

35   Led by Tanzania with 118 projects comprising 25% of total funding, and Ghana with 74 projects (18% of total funding). Burkina Faso has 18 projects (5% of total funding), the highest in the "fragile" category.

36   A total of 71.4% of the funding was awarded to a lead institution in Denmark, and 28.6% to an institution in the South. After the award the amount is split – said to be around 50% each – between the institutions in the North and the South.

Note: amounts are given as allocated in the first year of actual funding; since 2016, 60% of North-driven projects has to be allocated to activities in and managed by the South.

Sources: Danida Research Portal. BSU figures cross-checked in programme, progress and completion reports.

Lead institutions. In Denmark 16 different institutions served as lead institution responsible for managing a project and administering – and thus controlling – the grant; 21 institutions did so in the South, dominated by Tanzania, Vietnam and Ghana with eight, six and four lead institutions respectively. The University of Copenhagen was the largest beneficiary overall, with 20% of the total budget allocated for 96 projects across 43 different departments or units. The second largest was Århus University, following far behind with 5.6% of the total budget for 26 projects managed by 16 different departments or units. Fourteen other institutions received between one and six grants; of these, fewer than ten went to private or government funded institutes and hospitals rather than university departments. In the South three universities dominated: in Tanzania, Sokoine University and in Ghana, the University of Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) (details in Annex L).

Sectors. In line with the strong focus on individual and institutional capacity development, and in recognition of the importance of the higher education sector for strengthening national research capacities, a large majority of institutions supported were universities, followed by some public research institutes (Annex L). Although earlier funding channels, such as the Minor Studies and International Research Funding had a more open policy in this regard, only a handful of private sector or non-government institutions were direct recipients of the financial support in FFU Window 1 and Window 2.

2.4　Projects in fragile contexts

Starting from 2010, fragile states and related issues such as governance, conflict, peace building and humanitarian assistance in different formulations became a permanent theme in calls for North-driven projects. This was linked to the launching of the 'Freedom from Poverty-Freedom to Change' strategy launched in 2010, which emphasised the support to fragile states and the role of security;[37] these continue to be important themes for Danish development cooperation.

37　MoFA/Danida: Freedom from Poverty – Freedom from Change. Strategy for Denmark's Development Cooperation. 2010.

In the absence of a formal list of fragile countries supported by Danida, and recognising that such a list would have had some changes over time, the evaluation compared the list of countries supported with Danida's research grants since 2008 with the OECD States of Fragility Report 2018[38] and the Fragile States Index published by The New Humanitarian in 2019. The 12 most fragile countries or contexts selected for analysis had all been on the various lists for a several years and in 2019 had a rating of *Alert* to *Very High Alert* on the latter index[39] (Table 4; Danida also supported another eight countries on the index with a 'High Warning' rating[40]; of these, Tanzania, Nepal and Burkina Faso have been some of its most targeted countries for support during specific periods). Much but not all of the supported research was conducted in pockets specifically designated as fragile in otherwise more stable countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya.

TABLE 4: LIST OF 12 COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST FRAGILE CONTEXTS SUPPORTED WITH RESEARCH FUNDING BY DANIDA, 2008–2018

Country	Fragile States Index Rating
Somalia	Very High Alert
Afghanistan	High Alert
Sudan	High Alert
Ethiopia	Alert
Guinea	Alert
Guinea-Bissau	Alert
Kenya	Alert
Liberia	Alert
Mali	Alert
Myanmar	Alert
Niger	Alert
Uganda	Alert

---

38   Extracted on 6 February 2020, http://www3.compareyourcountry.org/states-of-fragility/overview/0/

39   The list from 'Alert' to 'Very High Alert' includes 38 countries out of 178; Kenya and Ethiopia have been among the countries on the list that have 'most improved', while Mali has been among the 'most worsened' countries in 2019.

40   In 2019, a total of 60 countries out of 178 have been included in the spectrum between 'High Warning' and 'Very High Alert'.

The 12 contexts with the 'most fragile' status on Danida's list were awarded a total of just under DKK 377 million, (18.9%) of the total allocation for development research between 2008 and 2018 for 64 projects, approximately half of which was to single countries projects (including two BSU stages at Gulu University, Uganda). Triangular cooperation was therefore very prominent, with between two to four participating countries. Multi-country projects combined those on the most fragile list with those in more stable contexts[41], while six included Southern partners from Asia and Africa. All partnerships were led by researchers in Danish institutions, and the bulk of the funding was taken up by 26 larger (partnership) projects (Figure 8). Unsurprisingly, the allocations for the thematic areas 'Conflict, peace and security' and 'State building, governance and civil society' are much higher in relative terms, while the high allocations to 'Agricultural production' and 'Health' reflect their priority status for research funding across all Danida-supported countries (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: TOTAL RESEARCH ALLOCATIONS (DKK) PER THEMATIC AREA IN THE 12 MOST FRAGILE CONTEXTS SUPPORTED BY DANIDA, 2008-2018[42]

---
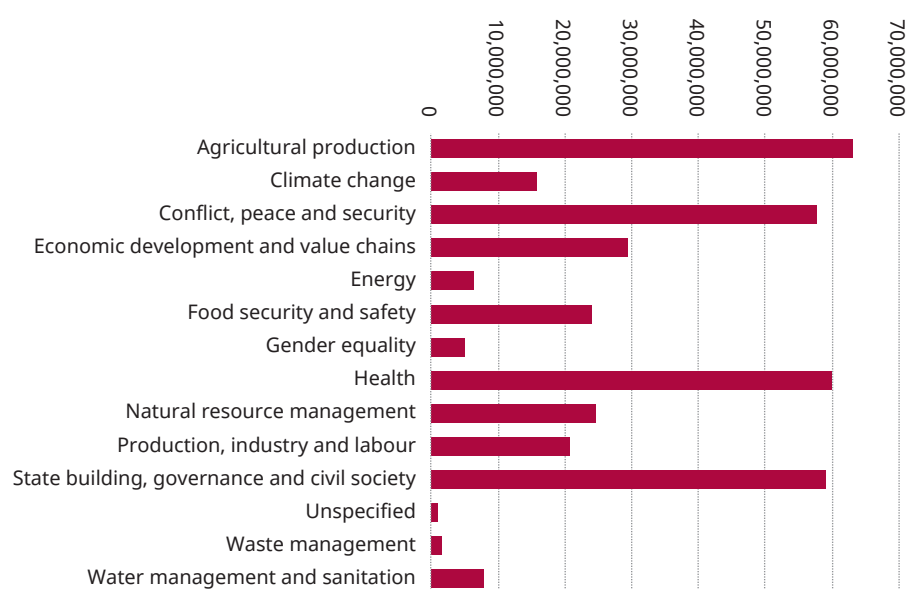
41   From a fragile context perspective, the most challenging triangular project was executed in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Somaliland, 'Governing economic hubs and flows in Somali East Africa', which sought to develop a better understanding of key economic and political processes that have shaped state formation in the Somali territories since 1991, through understanding how the daily management of market centers and commodities contributes to state-building in Somaliland, Puntland, the Somali region of Ethiopia and the Somali parts of Kenya.

42   As some projects cover more than one theme, the total funding amount has been divided equally among the different themes. The table and graphs include both single- and multi-country projects. With regard to the latter, the funding amount indicated is the total amount for all countries; there is no earmarking for specific countries.

FIGURE 8: TOTAL RESEARCH ALLOCATIONS (DKK) PER FUNDING CHANNEL IN THE 12 MOST FRAGILE CONTEXTS SUPPORTED BY DANIDA, 2008-2018[43]

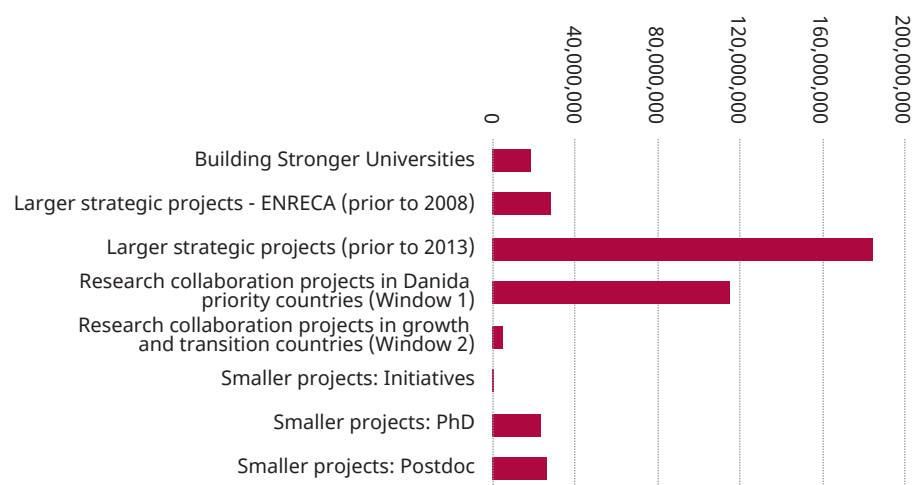## 2.5   Portfolio management

Danida was established as an independent department in MFA in 1971, but in 1991 lost its independent status and became an integral part of the Ministry,[44] which was divided into North and South departments. In 2003, the management of bilateral assistance was transferred to Danish embassies in major partner countries in order to increase effectiveness and improve the conditions for "a real partnership with the recipient country". Due to cutbacks (Section 2.3), MFA now has a much narrower sectoral and technical expertise. The department UFT, representing MFA's sectoral and technical expertise in developing countries as well as in development research, was closed and a new "hybrid" department, the Technical Quality Service (TQS)[45] established to cover both quality assurance and technical expertise. The staff of the UFT either became part of the newly established TQS with the job category of 'development cooperation specialists' as opposed to 'diplomats' – or were transferred to other departments.

Until 2006, development research projects were granted by MFA based on recommendations from the Council for Development Research.

---

43   As some projects cover more than one theme, the total funding amount has been divided equally among the different themes. The table and graphs include both single- and multi-country projects. With regard to the latter, the funding amount indicated is the total amount for all countries; there is no earmarking for specific countries.

44   Although Danida did not exist formally anymore, it was decided to continue using the term 'Danida' when referring to Danish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance abroad.

45   In Danish: Kvalitet og Faglighed I Udviklingssamarbejdet (KFU).

However, these changes in the system led to the transfer of the responsibility for development research in 2016 to Danida's evaluation department EVAL (recently integrated as part of Evaluation, Learning and Quality, ELK). Through a legislative change, the Council for Development Research was replaced by an ad hoc committee working in tandem with the Strategic Research Council (now the Innovation Fund Denmark) – namely, the Consultative Research Committee for Development Research (FFU), with the charge to advise the ministry on development research. The minister appoints FFU members based on endorsement by the Innovation Fund, which also finally approves the recommendations for grant allocations made by the FFU to MFA based on an assessment of processes and criteria. The administration of the portfolio of grants was outsourced to the Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC) in 2008, while the responsibility for policy and strategy remained in the ministry.

2.6   Important shifts

The following four types of shifts have played important roles in shaping the portfolio since 2008:

Shifts in financing. Bilateral development cooperation funding has declined significantly, resulting in a reduced focus on development research in general, while the need for annual budget negotiations continues to cause uncertainty and instability in financing.

Shifts in expertise. The sectoral technical expertise in MFA was reduced, which led to much narrower expertise for both planning for and facilitating uptake of the results of the development research.

Shifts in foci and interest. Attention has been shifting towards (i) fewer modalities, hence the phasing out of some in 2015 within reduced budgets; (ii) four strategic focus areas for development cooperation more aligned with Danish interests, including migration, as captured in *The World 2030*, and (iii) transition and emerging economies, along more narrowly defined themes aligned with strategic sector priorities and hence with the interests of the Danish private sector.

Shifts in modalities, among others (i) from smaller projects to larger research programmes; (ii) from individuals to institutions on a bilateral basis, with support to international institutions and networks phased out; (iii) from increasingly South-driven in both FFU Window 1 and from BSU I to BSU II, to a return to primarily North-driven support since 2017; (iv) from support that included both Global South and Danish PhDs and postdoctoral fellows, to only PhDs from the South who do not need to enrol in Denmark; and (v) in line with the intent of *The World 2030*, less focus on the North-South capacity divide and more on Danish strategic interests, with Window 2 reflecting the start of this shift.

3 ACHIEVING KEY OBJECTIVES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the portfolio from a different angle: What it has achieved and to whom actual benefits have accrued over the past decade. It discusses the nature of the benefits, the main achievements towards meeting the two key objectives of Danida's research support, how well the research was positioned for uptake and use within and outside the academic environment and, within the limitations of the evaluation, some examples with potential for longer-term development impact. From these assessments strengths and weaknesses are identified to inform future strategies.

3.2 Main beneficiaries of the support

Finding 1. *Danida's support has reached the intended direct beneficiaries in Denmark and in the Global South, largely concentrated in Africa and in low-risk environments. Insufficient monitoring data mean that the scope – that is, the numbers who have been reached and have benefitted – is unclear.*

The direct beneficiaries of Danida's support over the last decade have been both established and emerging scientists, with the exception of a few BSU recipients largely concentrated in large, established institutions in Denmark, in Vietnam and in five countries in Africa (Section 2.3). A defining characteristic of the grants is that they support low-risk projects, the result of either targeted support to proven organisations (for example, to CGIAR and CODESRIA) or of highly competitive application processes (Table 5). In BSU several smaller, higher risk universities were included. A significant number of 64 projects were implemented in the 12 most fragile countries or contexts.

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF FFU ADJUDICATED APPLICATIONS VERSUS GRANTS ALLOCATED, WITH ALLOCATIONS TO FEMALE LEADS (W1 ONLY), 2013-2017

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	Applic.	Grants	Applic.	Grants	Applic.	Grants	Applic.	Grants	Applic.	Grants
W1 North	40	8	39	9	30	5	0	0	84	9
W1 South	n/a	4	63	6	106	6	0	0	121	2
W2 North	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	51	11
Total	40	12	102	15	136	11	0	0	256	22
% Women (W1 only)		37%		17%		36%		n/a		45%

Source: Information paper for the Council for Development Policy (UPR). February 2019.

DFC reports indicate that more than 440 PhDs attached to FFU-approved research projects spent time in Denmark[46], and 'thousands of scientists' were engaged over the past three decades. The researchers who benefitted from the allocation of funds for their research were – despite some significant complaints – overwhelmingly positive about their experiences in Denmark and in partnership with Danish researchers. However, since free-standing PhD allocations were abolished and the number of scientists at different levels involved was not tracked, the extent of the direct beneficiary community is not clear. In the case of BSU, the beneficiaries would be particularly difficult to pinpoint, as a large number and variety of people had participated in workshops, courses, and other large-scale capacity building activities. Without more systematic monitoring the scope of the gains from Danida's support will remain unknown.

Finding 2. *Despite welcome deliberate shifts over the past decade, control over the use of resources still resides mainly in Denmark and among male research coordinators.*

As highlighted in Section 2.3, a large percentage of the allocations have been to lead institutions in Denmark. This means that the power over resources – and hence the power to control research approaches, the type of capacities developed, the interpretation of results and the distribution of finances – still resides largely in the North, dependent on the quality of each North-South or triangular partnership.

---

46   Lene Møller Madsen & Hanne Kirstine Adriansen (2019) *Opportunities, Challenges – and Bad Weather: Experiences and reflections of African researchers involved in Danida funded research capacity building 1989-2019*. Danida Fellowship Centre.

It also still resides primarily in male researchers. The fact that there have been consistently fewer female applicants, especially from the South (Figure 9; Annex O), has affected allocation trends. There have been significant fluctuations in the percentage of allocations to women as research coordinators – from 51% of successful applicants in 2009 (when PhD and postdoctoral fellowships were still separately awarded)[47], to 17% in 2014, to 45% in 2017. The ratio of allocations to women has recently been much higher than their applications (Annex O). For Window 2, in 2017 16% of the main applicants were women, and they made up 18% of the successful allocations.

FIGURE 9: SHARE OF WOMEN AS MAIN APPLICANTS IN FFU APPLICATION ROUNDS (2009-2017)*
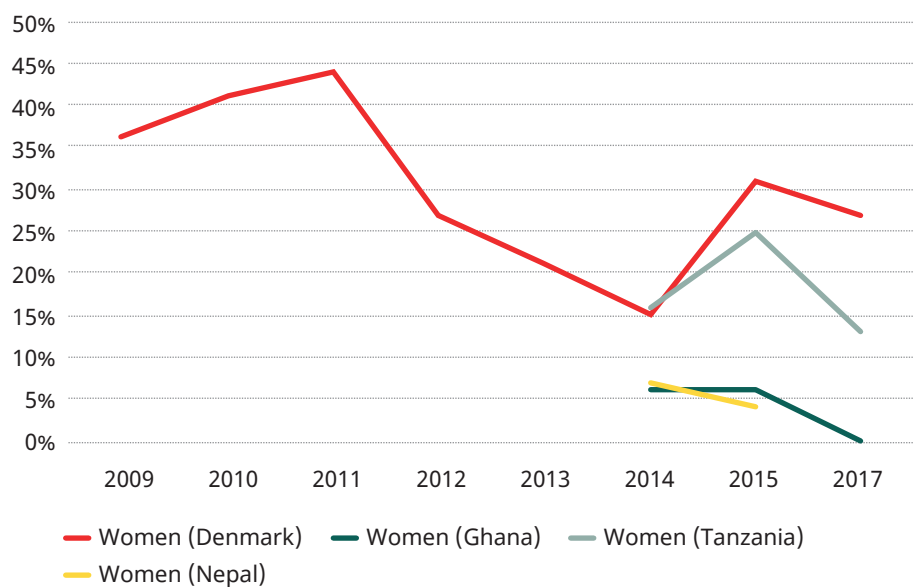
Note: the 2016 round was suspended)
Source: DFC

Finding 3. *Indirect intended beneficiaries – those intended to benefit from the application of the new knowledge – matter, but the extent of the actual benefits experienced is unclear.*

Few consultations with the indirect intended beneficiaries of the research support were conducted – the potential users of the research within and especially outside the academic research environment in the private and public sectors, and among civil society. Survey data

---

47 The decline in female applicants for Danish (North-driven) projects in 2011 can be explained by the fact that the application for individual PhD and Postdoc projects was not possible after 2011, and the percentage of female applicants among the PhD and Postdoc applicants were higher (in 2011 is was 50% compared to only 28% among the applicants for larger strategic projects).

confirmed researchers' concern with the results of their work beyond the academic context, but despite many efforts to engage with the potential users of the research findings, reports indicate varied, largely limited success (details in Section 4.2). It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the very nature of development research demands that these indirect intended beneficiaries are consistently considered as the ultimate beneficiaries of Danida's research support. Efforts to reach them therefore have to continue.

Finding 4. *Denmark also gains. Although 'capacity development' is still articulated as a largely one-way North to South affair, new experiences, expertise in new fields and the generation of knowledge of importance in global as well as in challenging Southern contexts are said to bring value to Denmark and its research community.*

Nearly all stakeholders consulted in the South and a vast majority in the North displayed an embedded perception that the beneficiaries of 'capacity development' are Southern researchers and institutions rather than those in Denmark. **This perception can be challenged** in an era where conventional approaches to research appear to fall short of offering real-world, urgently needed solutions and breakthroughs at the necessary scale. Yet, while it was generally assumed to be a matter of the South needing Northern expertise and resources, more than half of Danish survey respondents pointed to benefits for Denmark based on three recurring themes:

i.   Connections formed with researchers in Denmark (or the North) and the South that are seen as important to sustain, and that have led to mutual respect as well as appreciation for, and better understanding of the circumstances and cultures in the South.

ii.   The satisfaction of doing research that gives practical experience and enriches expertise in new, often challenging contexts, allowing for new angles, and with direct applications in practice that can help solve 'real' problems in countries and in the world.

iii. The satisfaction of combining research with supervision, mentorship and other forms of capacity development that support researchers in the South.

Key informants interviewed also expressed the main value of development research for Danish researchers as opportunities to contribute to 'big topics' in the world and thus having great impact outside Denmark, enabling Denmark to be part of global efforts to meet the SDGs, and bringing new skills that enable Danish researchers to work in Southern contexts.

These perceptions of value of this type of research support for Denmark are important, as there is anecdotal evidence that the number of researchers in Denmark working in 'development' is declining – yet ironically such insights and expertise are increasingly important for finding solutions that will benefit Denmark in a deeply interconnected world.

DANISH SURVEY RESPONDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE MAIN VALUE ACCRUING TO THEM THROUGH DANIDA'S SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

"Practical engagement at academic level with 'real problems' – knowledge for change."

"The opportunity to combine research and capacity building. And to use Danish research capabilities to address some major challenges that are difficult to address based on traditional Danish funding."

"Opportunities for research with a clear focus on contributions to the UN SDGs."

"Establishment of scientifically and personally very rewarding collaborations with colleagues in Africa."

"The core value of the project is not just the academic findings, but also the fact that it has produced a strong research partnership …. which will be continued in the future. We have learnt from each other in multiple ways, contributing to strong publications, dissemination of research findings, and capacity that can be and is already of use also outside of the project."

"Exposure to the universities in Denmark has already led us to write other funding grants, and to start to collaborate on other projects. In addition, I have made connections with other researchers at Aarhus with whom I plan to collaborate and co-supervise students."

"The funding allows us and our South-partners time to jointly encounter and improve our understanding of rural poverty including how natural resources and their governance deepens or offers a pathway out of poverty. This makes us better researchers, teachers and project supervisors."

"Danida's support has made it possible to study development relevant topics which would have had difficulties in obtaining support from the ordinary funding sources, which would often be less willing to accept the special conditions and challenges in much of the development research field."

"Cross-border collaboration, synergies among different partners, development of new products and enabling innovative markets in developing countries."

"Showing people in the global south that we care about their perspective, their knowledge and conditions for participating in the global knowledge economy."

"A strong PI and research agenda have pushed me to explore new areas of research and new approaches."

"It has trained me to become a good fieldworker who is able to work with people in very difficult circumstances."

"Fostering partnerships for future research. Building capacity of young researchers and contributing to a critical mass of well-qualified researchers and lecturers in partner countries."

"Danida's support has given to me and a number of my other Danish research colleagues the great opportunity to carry out international multi-disciplinary research work outside Denmark. I personally got a great experience in managing such a multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural project."

"The support has made it possible to advance in very relevant research areas both for the involved North- and South-based researchers: fruitful discussion of the specific research questions, application of new, targeted methods and equipment; possibility for field work in relevant places."

"I developed from being a student to become a scientist. My previous experiences with research were from my laboratory-based bachelors' and masters' thesis projects in Denmark. In this project, I had to adapt to the more independent workflows while working abroad, to higher expectations from myself and peers, and to work under less luxurious working conditions in Vietnam. Hence, I feel that I developed independence as a researcher, critical thinking, and a large experimental skill set."

3.3 Meeting Key Objective 1: Developing research capacities

AMONG INDIVIDUALS

In the absence of a strategy directing development research, the evaluation used a variety of documents to better understand the evolution in Danida's approaches to research capacity development. The results of the analyses were compared with the main lessons from efforts at individual and institutional research capacity development based on synthesis studies in Africa[48] which absorbs a large majority of Danida's funding. State of the art insights confirm that a systems approach to research capacity development is crucial. This perspective therefore also informed the evaluation's analyses of this aspect of Danida's work.

Finding 5. *Danida's competitive funding support that promotes working in partnership helped the vast majority of Southern project participants grow as researchers, team members, managers and supervisors.*

An overwhelming number (98%) of survey respondents from the South indicated that the development research support provided by Danida had made a significant positive difference to their capabilities as researchers (n/a responses excluded).[49] This was consistently elaborated in the open survey questions and by persons interviewed[50], as well as by participants in a recent study commissioned by DFC[51] with the express purpose of soliciting perspectives on capacity development from African researchers funded by Danida over the past 30 years.

The Southern researchers lauded the benefits of tailored, flexible project support that provides opportunities for a range of capacities to be strengthened as part of a solid team. They spoke about their exposure to Danish institutions and experts who shared freely, and of access to advanced infrastructure and different ways of organising and working. They praised the many Danish researchers who "went beyond purely research collaboration". PhD students who participated in FFU projects highlighted their experience with the use of new techniques and instrumentation they had only read about before, and about the chance

---

48 Carden, F. et al. 2019. *Strengthening Research Institutions. Learning from Doing*. Using Evidence Working Paper. Foundation.

49 The statement was agreed by 83.8% of all respondents, with a lower yet still significant portion of Danish researchers agreeing.

50 In this evaluation the data came primarily from those who participated in Window 1, across subcategories, while the DFC study covered a larger range of modalities over a 30-year period. Analyses per modality were not done due to the sample size when split too much.

51 Lene Møller Madsen & Hanne Kirstine Adriansen (2019) *Opportunities, Challenges – and Bad Weather: Experiences and reflections of African researchers involved in Danida funded research capacity building 1989-2019*. Danida Fellowship Centre.

to network internationally, make new friends in the North and South, and change their own attitudes towards academic work. In BSU, those reached reported improved critical thinking, personal relationships and international networking, and noted their experience of working in flat social hierarchies. They also noted growing in traditional research competences: scientific and technical skills, grant-writing, writing for publications, novel ways to teach and learn, and research ethics.

Finding 6. *Researchers reported a large number of largely intangible outcomes of the research funding.*

Given the nature of Danida's support, many outcomes that researchers themselves considered to be the most important were intangible and qualitative, such as prestige, feeling of belonging to an international community, and empowerment in the research world. The survey results showed hundreds of examples of benefits gained at different levels: methodological practice, career advancement, team leadership, collaboration, publishing, grant-writing, language skills, project manage-ment, communicating results, technical know-how, professional skills, theoretical knowledge, networking, and empirical work. The impact was also felt in research teams. For instance, just one team listed nine 'most important' benefits they perceived to be a direct outcome of their FFU project – and most of these are not the type of outcomes reported in annual or final reports: visibility and recognition for the university and the research group; additional resources; improved educational quality; transfer of expertise vertically and horizontally; improved institutional field work capacity (project vehicles); individual capacities for research; improved financial management (experience, facilities); international collaboration; and increased opportunities for winning more funding.

Finding 7. *The improved research skills of individuals had multiplier ('ripple') effects on individuals and institutions.*

The recent DFC study on African researchers' experiences of Danida's support[52] highlighted that the researchers educated through Danida-supported projects were advancing in their countries: Most former PhD students ended up in high positions, for instance in ministries or in health or academic systems. The majority (82%) of 'Early Entry Danida Researchers'[53] were employed either at universities or in the public sec-tor; they have not left the country or continent, as is often feared. Some of those working in the public sector were still conducting research; only 1% were unemployed. Others were no longer involved in research but had important positions in society due to their academic and intellectual skills. A majority continued to publish at international level. Those not

---

52   Ibid.

53   Those researchers who obtained support soon after their PhDs.

working in research found value in being trained as critical thinkers, work independently and share knowledge, applying such competencies in their new positions. Almost all were active in local development, while some were active in politics at home and abroad.

PhD fellows who benefitted from Danida's grants noted in the survey and interviews that it also enabled them to conduct their research, produce publications, and use their experience to facilitate learning for students through research-based teaching. Improvement in skills – including research methodology, developing of concept papers and proposals, developing tools, conducting and managing the field work, knowledge of right procedures to follow during data collection from approving protocols to actual data collection and academic writing – were imparted to students, as staff build on their learning through lectures and student supervision. In Vietnam, time after time examples of students or staff who could build on the benefits of their cooperation were given – whether as new or experienced supervisors, for fundraising, applying new techniques or new expertise in other projects, or further developing the collaboration with Danish colleagues to embark on new initiatives.

Finding 8. *Capacity injections at the scale of small research teams often disperse after the project, reflecting a key shortcoming of 'projectised', short-term support.*

Dispersion of research teams was reported occasionally, and although in those cases the intellectual capacity built is not lost, the synergy and sense of 'team' are. Without ongoing engagement in solid field of work the researchers may end up working on different topics where they cannot use their expertise and benefit from what they have learned. There was a feeling among some that the research projects are undertaken and then, when money runs out, abandoned – reinforcing the sense that funding opportunities do not sufficiently support strategic long-term research programmes, but continue to operate in 'individual project' mode.

Finding 9. *Capacity development has been a strength of Danida's support for decades, but there has been no explicit effort to make sure that the capacities developed now are fully in tune with the special demands of this era.*

The evaluations and reviews of Danida's support over past decades have all pointed to very successful research capacity development outcomes. The findings in this evaluation therefore come as no surprise. However, the skills and expertise gained do not highlight any differences compared to what 'capacity development' meant years ago: specific techniques, working in or leading teams, managing a project or funds, working with more sophisticated equipment, strengthening networks

and so on. In both Denmark and the South little mention was made or signs seen of a focus on essential capacities that do not necessarily come naturally during research cooperation, for example:

- The ability to integrate knowledge across disciplines, sectors and knowledge systems, as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demands.

- The ability to work with culturally responsive, gender and/or 'leave no-one behind' lenses.

- The ability to understand and deal with the notion of 'decolonising' curricula, development models and research approaches.

- The ability to examine implications for the environment and/or sustainable development in all projects, irrespective of their focus.

- The ability to cooperate and/or co-design efforts directly with policy-makers/advisors or the private sector based on an in-depth understanding of their needs and ways of working.

- The ability to engage with the implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution for disciplines, fields of work or research, advanced work with data, or job opportunities – all aspects that are fast becoming a priority for planning in the South.

Such issues require explicit attention and awareness of current versus desirable situations. As found by the DFC study, researchers in Africa who received support from Danida are not necessarily aware of or concerned about this increasingly pertinent issue – but it is pertinent that a very large number have been educated in, or influenced by higher education curricula and approaches in the North, and are therefore not always receptive to models and narratives outside their experience.

A few Danish coordinators noted during interviews that they found value in exploring new angles on research in Southern contexts and/or with Southern input. This might hold promise for the need to unearth or develop new frameworks that have their origins in the South[54], away from dominant narratives and models about how change or development happens. One example given was a team of Danish researchers' approach to agriculture with an emphasis on the private sector, something that was not suitable in the particular African context. Another Danish research coordinator noted: *"I would like to think there is equality in the relationships. But Western norms are the dominant norms. This is what*

---

54   This is an important topic of concern among many specialists in the South– also promoted for example in the NORHED Programme funded by Norad.

everyone operates on. So, capacity building is also ensuring people know how to work by norms." Although the comment referred to aspects such as data management and ethical issues, it touched on the often-hidden power relations that underlie North-South cooperation.[55]

While South-South and triangular cooperation offer good potential to interrogate these issues, as far as the evaluation could determine, this has not been a focus. Several participants in two triangular cooperation projects referred to their experience essentially as North-South cooperation on parallel tracks, while others found it refreshing to be made aware that in the South "*we can also learn from each other*".

55   Sharing Knowledge, Transforming Societies: The Norhed Programme 2013-2020. Tor Halvorsen, Kristin Skare Orgeret & Roy Krøvel (eds). Published by African Minds, 2019.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH ON THE MAIN VALUE OF DANIDA'S RESEARCH SUPPORT

"It has given me the exposure to what research is all about; the focus of research, use of state-of-the-art equipment and improved my writing skills through publications."

"Access to top-notch scientists who have helped improve the scientific methods I use and have helped to develop my way of thinking concerning problems and how science can address these problems."

"Exposure to European culture and appreciating the role of culture in promoting global citizenship."

"I learnt the importance of time management in research."

"I improved my English skill; published high quality papers and became a scientist."

"As a natural scientist, this research exposed me to other disciplines since it was multidisciplinary study, i.e. Economics, Geography, Marketing, Law and some social science."

"The main value has been growing as a researcher and earning respect among other scholars a result of producing what has been considered good research."

"Having a new connection to all the researchers involved in the collaboration (this was wonderful). Danida funds unlocked (for some time) the access to the world-class Danish Royal Library through the University of Copenhagen."

"Apart from funding my PhD thesis, Danida's support took me to Denmark where I met interacted with scholars of diverse backgrounds. They selflessly shared information they had on my thesis area, guided me with methodological insights and opened my eyes to the sheer wealth and value of qualitative approach to research."

"The supervision provided by Danish supervisors and other supervisors from the project coordinators was so thorough and meticulous to the extent that it made me realise that communicating research results must be done carefully and effectively if it is to elicit the desired change in the field of study."

"Mainly the project was on urban stormwater management. After the project, my school of thought and that of the researchers around me, including the students

I teach, …. has completely taken a new paradigm. The paradigm shift will continue to influence the community I live in."

"Ability to conduct cutting edge research. Experience in a large research consortium. Active learning of project administration and management according to international standards. Personal development and progress in the scientific field. Increased visibility and recognition of my scientific capacity by colleague scientist. Appreciation by colleagues on winning and managing the prestigious Danida grant. Acquisition of state-of-the-art laboratory and field resources and logistics for long-term research and sustaining high-quality research programmes. High potential of publishing in high impact factor journals. Attendance of scientific conferences and meetings."

"Exposure to the advanced learning systems provided in the Danish universities, improved access to literature through the library at Aalborg, expansion of networks provided by participating in different conferences, the humility displayed by Danish professionals when compared to the superior attitude displayed by a number of researchers in my home country, learning new methods of research that enhances the value of the results generated, new methods of analysing data, exposure to other cultures through the Danish Fellowship Centre and respect accorded to human life in Denmark when compared to my home country through proper use of taxes to improve the living conditions for residents, and the importance of leisure in improving productivity, ensuring that the research conducted is valuable to my home country, exposure to advancements in the energy field in Denmark."

"In the previous project, in addition to three PhDs and joint publications, the group involved in the South became extremely successful in raising additional funding. The PhDs were also employed by the department. In the current project, the team has grown their writing, analytical and methodological skills in ways that I was not expecting. They are now, for example, the reference people at their university on Nvivo based analysis, and social network analysis. The quality of the publications that are coming out of this project are phenomenal."
Project participant based in Denmark

AMONG INSTITUTIONS

Finding 10. *The strengthening of individual research capacities through competitive FFU grants has had ripple effects that benefitted institutions.*

FFU-assessed projects are not expected to contribute to institutional capacities.[56] Yet many interviewees and survey respondents made well-known connections between individual and institutional capacities[57]: The strengthening of individual capacities has led to more research-based teaching; higher-quality articles; better pedagogical approaches, grant-writing and knowledge-sharing; and a more collaborative work culture.[58] South-driven projects in particular are noted as having led to improvements in international networks (as the coordinators are at the centre), Southern supervision skills[59] and financial management. A number of projects championed and established interest and capacities in new pedagogic and technical methodologies. Among others, qualitative and ethnographic methods were in a certain instance in Uganda previously not considered as 'real science', while in Vietnam in some cases a new focus on qualitative research, and in others new quantitative methods and models opened new research horizons with the potential also to inform teaching. The institution was now also seen as having more opportunities for international collaboration and international fundraising. In some cases, the projects contributed extra resources, for example vehicles for field work, or laboratory equipment. Some persons interviewed also noted the elevation in the prestige of research groups and departments within the institution and, in some cases, nationally.[60]

---

56 According to the proposal call texts, FFU-funded projects are expected to "contribute to strengthening research capacity in developing countries". In 2012, capacity strengthening was defined as "research-based education – e.g. support to PhD students"; while subsequent calls have the same text but without the definition of research-based capacity.

57 The perceptions of contributions to institutions was confirmed by the survey results, where 92% of Southern respondents and 77% of those in Denmark believed that the development research support made a significant positive difference to the capacity of their institution to deliver good research.

58 For example, in Uganda previously the students would not share anything out of fear that the other students would "steal their ideas". The project requested the students to present their work to each other which was a completely new approach. "*They learned to work together, to publish together, etc. In general, there was cross-fertilisation and a healthy atmosphere*". The project also established an office for the PhD students to sit and work – previously they had nowhere to work at the institute. The new culture of working together appears to have continued after the project was phased out.

59 Some projects introduced a new approach to the supervision of PhD students, such as more frequent and higher level (better quality) supervision, and more co-publishing of papers. In some cases, the Danish and local supervisors had sessions together in order to provide the same direction for the PhD student.

60 None of the institutional ripple effects, and their scope, could be further studied, verified and assessed during this evaluation. The evidence therefore remains anecdotal and subject to how the concept of "institutional capacity" and its "development" is interpreted.

Stakeholders with knowledge of the Hanoi Medical University in Vietnam considered the confidence developed through working with Danida's support as a key factor in applying and then being selected as one of seven World Health Organisation nodes worldwide in that specific area of work. The department also became internationally attractive to international students, including from Tanzania who was part of the triangular cooperation project funded by Danida.

Finding 11. *The BSU programme shows the value of a phased, systemic approach supported by long-term investment, in particular in smaller universities.*

The three BSU programme phases have allowed recipient institutions, DFC and advisors to build on lessons and make improvements. BSU-III is thus widely perceived among stakeholders as a growing success. Continuity and consolidation have been possible, and the diversity of actions, with priorities determined by the university, are showing ripple effects. A full-fledged evaluation is essential for an in-depth understanding of the role, quality and value of the actions taken with Danida's support in each institution, but reports and stakeholder experiences highlight concrete signs of progress across diverse yet interconnected fronts, best illustrated in Gulu University in Uganda:

(i) A policy framework for research is coming into place: *"When we realised we did not have these policies we gave it priority under BSU".*[61] (ii) An e-campus strategy and e-learning system have been developed through South-South cooperation with Maseno University in Kenya, and a system to track graduate student progress by the Department of Computer Science. (iii) Internet connectivity was boosted from very low levels through an upfront payment until 2021. (iv) Postgraduate expertise development included the support of five of 13 new PhD holders since 2010[62] (when there was only one PhD graduate). (v) Facilities established for postgraduate students included an e-learning lab and e-resources (poor internet connectivity has been a constraint). (vi) Through cross-cutting courses[63], graduates are seen as better prepared for development challenges in line with the university motto of 'community transformation'. (vii) The capability to run accredited postgraduate programmes was strengthened by building on ENRECA's delivery of short intensive

---

61 A handbook on graduate studies and best supervision practices, a staff development policy 2019, a research and innovation policy and an ICT policy; work is in progress towards establishing a grants office, a repository policy, a plagiarism policy, and a research agenda aligned to needs in the area, Uganda Vision 2040, and the SDGs.

62 Other donors include Sida, Welcome Trust, NORHED-Norway and MasterCard Foundation through RUFORUM.

63 Such as the anthropology of education, gender and sexuality, sustainable development, and peace.

courses for PhD students, later picked up by BSU II and BSU-III while moving from Danish to joint design and delivery. Now integrated in new graduate courses as course units, faculties could adapt and include them in newly developed PhD and Masters programmes. (viii) New pedagogies and curricula adjustments made to reflect research-based teaching, in particular using Project Based Learning (PBL) principles of community engagement and outreach, training 50 staff on PBL and action research and integrating this approach into curricula. (ix) Training workshops for practitioners on gender and development as well as legal pluralism and transitional justice in post conflict situations enabled among others the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies to develop two short courses.

Finding 12. *While BSU III shows good potential to foster institutional research capacity, it is limited by its relatively small amount of funding and lack of emphasis on the creation of collaboration and synergy.*

Danida's initiatives over the years have involved dozens of different types of often small interventions, and none more so than BSU, as illustrated by the example of Gulu University**.** Having a large number of small interventions has its drawbacks, but there are also benefits: a wider spread and hence influence, a feeling of inclusion among a large group of participants across organisational silos, a building of communities where everyone feels they benefit, and the ability to experiment within modalities. The scope of Danida's funding for BSU is such that it can address only part of what its supported institutions need. Its resources are being spread thinly, and implementation therefore has to try to focus catalytic interventions that are complemented by the institutions' leadership commitment and resources as well as those of other donors. BSU documents list a very large number of different activities that all fit under the umbrella of capacity development.

At KNUST in Ghana, for instance, BSU-III involves more than 20 different activities that have to proceed in a certain sequence and create synergies that can put the university's research on an increasingly positive research trajectory that is sustainable. BSU's lack of focus coupled to the limited synergies between BSU and other Danida and donor initiatives, risk undermining its impact. Other evaluations have raised similar issues in earlier versions of BSU[64], including the lack of cross-cutting coordination and the resultant missing of potential synergistic effects for wider impact.[65] The improvements in BSU III have yet to fully address these challenges.

---

64   *Review of the Master Scholarship Programme: Final review report.* December 23, 2015, Ramboll.

65   Ghartey, A. B. (2017). *Building Stronger Universities (BSU) II Project: BSU II Project Evaluation.* August 2017, Ghartey Associates Limited: Accra, Ghana.

Finding 13. *BSU benefits from South-South collaboration, although the full value of the latter has not yet been explored.*

Nurturing of the South-to-South collaborations started in BSU I and has continued to grow in subsequent phases. The programme has supported exposure visits to sister universities to learn from each other, as well as networking meetings between the BSU programme implementers. Information exchange on staff profiles in relevant faculties aims to make it easier to find potential partners to develop proposals and external examiners for graduate student theses. The BSU-II mid-term review confirmed that such visits had value through the sharing of experiences and insights about grants management, e-learning and other PhD service facilities. The fact that the universities have subsequently positioned themselves to apply for collaborative research projects and are now working on e-learning initiatives will add a layer of value to the BSU programme – if some of the joint initiatives succeed.

Finding 14. *Where BSU-type capacity building is done with Southern ownership, the strong support of the university leadership and a systematic approach to institutionalisation, results can be synergistic and enhance the chance of sustained success.*

The support of the university's leadership is essential for long-term success. In Gulu University, the leadership engaged in BSU with the intention to simultaneously build university structures to fulfil the institutional vision. This steered the BSU activities. The university set up a number of units where staff members are responsible for different kinds of BSU initiatives. That direction of development had strong support of the management, and alternative plans were made to continue without Danida funding. The different BSU elements were brought in to support the university's vision: For example, educating lecturers to get PhDs is not a matter of prestige but of the university's goal to support research-based teaching through 'training of trainers'. Currently the university has structures for research support ranging from outreach and popularisation to writing grant applications and managing grants. Furthermore, even minor investments in laboratories, for example, have helped to avoid the situation where researchers trained in Denmark would come back to find no use for their newly acquired technical skills.

Finding 15. *Smaller institutions illustrate the benefits of catalytic (BSU) support but pose significant challenges to sustaining an upward trajectory. It is still not clear that supporting the strongest or largest universities gives the best return on investment – nor that funding anything other than 'winners' has long-term potential.*

One highlight of Danida's funding came from a small, new university where BSU support was the first major research-orientated grant it had won. The institutional impact went well beyond the impact such a

relatively small amount might have in large institutions. The research group showed a solid combination of scientific excellence, local knowledge of the nature of and emphasis on community development, and more than two decades of research experience in their community. The project's development research elements were advanced far beyond most other projects, and they had by far the most solid written ethics and community engagement policy for working with vulnerable and marginalised groups that has evolved over 20 years of experience. Researchers felt strongly that the project was *theirs* – especially as they had no connections with FFU or screening committee members and had not discussed the project with Danida or even with the embassy. The success triggered a number of spin-off initiatives and project ideation within the institution, creating intellectual buzz and excitement. "*As the university's first major research project, we believe that if you do a good job, and are able to deliver, then that will set a stage for more opportunities to come. We want to make sure that we do everything right, follow all commitments, do everything by the book. … We get a lot of support from our university's top management and they give us all the necessary support they need*." Despite the promising signs, only a full-fledged evaluation will be able to determine whether the potential held true and, in particular, whether the momentum and very significant institutionalisation required across many fronts will continue to thrive in challenging contexts and diminishing resources once donor support ends.

The evaluation thus found that a small, 'young' university such as Gulu has benefitted considerably from the BSU programme, whereas this is less visible in the larger, 'older' universities such as Sokoine University in Tanzania and the large universities in Ghana. For the well-funded University of Ghana (UG), for example, Danida's support is "*a drop in the ocean*," as one interviewee put it. For both UG and KNUST, Danida does not come even close to the largest donors either in terms of money (e.g., NIH, World Bank, USAID, DFID, UNDP) or in terms of scholarships (e.g., Chinese, Japanese and DFID). It raises the question for Danida whether development cooperation funding should at all be used for institutions that are already developed by almost all measures – especially if the same money would have greater relative impact in a less-funded university.

On the other hand, supporting 'winners' – institutions already having strengths that enhance the chance of success – is one of the lessons from similar initiatives.[66] If too many institutional systems have to come into place, or development has to take place in a high-risk external environment, the chance of sustaining success is much lower. The challenges experienced by a fragile institution in challenging external contexts make a strong argument for providing opportunities and then backing

---

66   Carden, F. et al. 2019. *Strengthening Research Institutions. Learning from Doing*. Using Evidence Working Paper. Foundation.

individuals and institutions with good potential to be successful. On the other hand, sustaining results in such contexts is very challenging. In Gulu University, staff had been lost whose skill sets were strengthened by the projects, a situation exacerbated by national dynamics where recruitment plans of universities have not been implemented for several years as the Government of Uganda has not allowed recruitment of staff.[67] Inefficient or highly bureaucratic processes are discouraging and present major challenges to progress and delivery, including postgraduate student examination processes and getting proposals approved for subsequent registration of the PhD student and the examination of thesis. It takes several months after submission before students can defend their work.

Only a full-fledged evaluation of BSU-III will provide the depth of infor-mation needed to make an assessment in this regard, but it will be important for Danida already to try to track progress beyond simple quantitative indicators and superficial narratives. Much deeper insights than this evaluation could provide are needed about the effectiveness and success of institutional capacity development efforts: the relevance, suitability and credibility of training efforts; the ecosystems that have been developed around PhD education; the extent to which new skills are immediately applied and therefore embedded in the institutions; the role of power and culture in the formal as well as informal aspects of the research system; the extent to which efforts presumed to enhance the take-up and use of research results suits the context, and so on.

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA: TOWARDS A RESEARCH-BASED UNIVERSITY

BSU programmes have served the institutional vision of the University of Ghana very well. The university had made a strategic decision to develop towards a university strongly based on research. When BSU I started, many colleges at UG struggled with too few doctoral degree holders to run the educational programs; BSU I was developed together between the Danish and Ghanaian partners, and it did contribute to increasing the number of PhD holders as well as capacity building on many other levels. BSU II was aimed at strategic priorities and aligned its central themes with areas identified by UG – again, UG considered their striving towards research-based university a priority. By the time of BSU II and BSU III, the university had expanded its vision to research-based teaching, doctoral schools, and PhD conferences were held aimed at familiarising young researchers with academic practices in their fields. While BSU has been a complex funding instrument with numerous, disconnected smaller and larger activities, it has been aligned with other efforts and with the vision

---

67   The Faculty of Education and Humanities was for instance operating at 33% capacity. In the BSU section, the slow bureaucratic process of graduate student examination is cited as one of the reasons for delays in completion of PhDs.

Finding 16. *Institutional capacity development viewed from a holistic (systems) perspective is in line with the BSU-III design, and necessary.*

In the past decade Danida has been purposeful about developing research capacity at two levels: (i) at *individual* level, initially with a strong emphasis at postgraduate (in particular PhD) level with the intent to ensure that researchers in the Global South can generate useful knowledge in service of their countries' development, and (ii) at *institutional* level in selected research-oriented universities, recognising to a certain extent that a focus on *an ecosystem for research* rather than only on individuals is important for advancing the ability of a country to cultivate and manage its knowledge for development. Both are appropriately seen as contributing to national development in the Global South – helping to build stronger institutions within the national systems of innovation, as well as delivering researchers who can do, position and communicate research and innovations in policy, strategy and practice relevant to their country's immediate as well as future needs.

A recent study in Africa once again confirmed the importance of ensuring that institutional research capacity development is done with a holistic approach.[68] The study highlights four domains that have to be developed with enough synergies to enable a strong institutional effort that will sustain in the long term (Table 6). BSU-III has followed such an approach in principle: It has a longer-term perspective that allows for contextualisation, flexibility and diversity in action; it is managed under Southern leadership and with significant control over opportunities and resources; it aims to mainstream research through a strong PhD degree orientation; and it is focused on strengthening administrative and management systems, technical expertise as well as physical infrastructure.

---

68   Carden, F. et al. 2019. *Strengthening Research Institutions. Learning from Doing*. Using Evidence Working Paper. Foundation.

TABLE 6: THE MAIN ELEMENTS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA COMPARED WITH THE CURRENT STATUS OF INSTITUTIONS ACROSS THE CONTINENT[69]

Domain	Element	Status
People	Leadership with vision Skilled technical staff	*Donors drive the agenda* *The best people get poached*
Products	High quality & timely Demand and willingness to pay	*Organisations follow the money not the vision.* *Lack of persistence in funding* *Governments are not engaged*
Processes	Strong management systems Strong government systems	*Institutions are weak* *There is exploitation by northern partners*
Property	Have the required physical resources Have the required financial resources	*Research is underfunded* *Good institutions are financially distressed* *Institutions are weak*

Finding 17. *Danida's present implementation modalities have many elements known to foster capacity development.*

There are well-known reasons for the successful development of individual research capacities that are also reflected in Danida's current implementation modalities. The approach to FFU Window 1[70] resonates particularly well with success factors for research capacity development initiatives articulated in the literature[71][72], in findings of the recent DFC study[73] and in perspectives provided through interviews and the survey:

i. Competitive grants coupled to well-designed assessment processes that assure the quality and commitment of the researchers involved.

---

69   Ibid.

70   It is too early to assess the capacity development success of FFU Window 2.

71   Cooke, J. A framework to evaluate research capacity building in health care. *BMC Fam Pract 6,* 44 (2005).

72   Sharing Knowledge, Transforming Societies: The Norhed Programme 2013-2020. Tor Halvorsen, Kristin Skare Orgeret & Roy Krøvel (eds). Published by African Minds, 2019.

73   Opportunities, challenges – and bad weather. Experiences and reflections of African researchers involved in Danida funded research capacity building 1989-2019. Lene Moller Madsen & Hanne Kirstine Adriansen. A DFC Report, 2019.

ii.   Competitive grants with a focus on relevance and tailoring for context that create opportunities for researchers to gain skills and confidence 'close to practice' and application in the field.

iii.   Requirements that demand thinking about and preparing for use and impact, and hence how to connect to potential users outside the research environment.

iv.   Flexibility to allow for contextual differences. Choices can be made with respect to the project concept, identification of partners, and how the project is put together to get to the best results.

v.   Opportunities to gain exposure to new cultures and new ways of thinking about, and approaching research, as well as new technical practices, especially through mutual visits to Denmark and the South for fieldwork.

vi.   Partnership approaches, attitudes and opportunities for face to face meetings that purposefully build and nurture a common vision for a project, including quality expectations; encouraging Southern or equal ownership of what transpires; and allowing enough time to build trust and good relationships.

vii.   Making available (sophisticated) infrastructure and additional resources that provide opportunities to do more advanced work than researchers are used to.

viii.   Embeddedness in institutions and systems that enables the benefits of capacities developed to sustain – for example, staff members as participants who are then able to raise funds or manage other projects or postgraduate students.

Finding 18. *The World 2030 has set a new tone and priorities, also for research capacity development.*

In addition to the focus on helping to ensure Southern countries' can address their own challenges, it emphasises the need to see research as part of bringing to bear the research strengths[74] and full power of Danish society – public and private sectors, philanthropy, the financial sector, civil society – to work with the South on solutions for global and national challenges. It proposes increasing attention to fragile countries, the wellbeing of which also affects Danish society (*i.a.* refugees, migration), as well as the more equal opportunities offered through partnering with 'growth and transition' economies. The Window 2 modality is the

---

74   Strengths identified include climate, water, energy, health, food, democracy and the rule of law, among others.

response in terms of development research. Despite some scientists' alarm about possible negative consequences, this approach is in keeping with trends worldwide and the inevitable consequence of shifts in power and resources and increasing geopolitical competition between countries and regions.

3.4 Meeting Key Objective 2: Enabling high quality research

INTRODUCTION TO THE RQ+ ASSESSMENT APPROACH
FFU has changed its criteria for assessment only slightly since 2008, mostly in terms of the level of evaluation detail visible to applicants, and the transparency of the evaluation criteria applied for review, both of which have increased over time. FFU now assesses the "scientific quality" of research proposals on a five-point scale[75]; in the latest call for example, proposals were rated in terms of the research experience and qualifications of the research team, and the originality and innovative nature of the project in terms of generating new knowledge and results. Until 2016, each proposal was rated on a three-point scale using twelve criteria[76]. Aside from the capacity strengthening item, the criteria and their descriptions in funding calls are typical of evaluation panels, and well designed for measuring scientific quality and the potential for advancing research in different disciplines.

As Danida's funding is for *development research*, this evaluation adopted the more tailored Research Quality Plus (RQ+) Assessment Framework[77]. Featured in the journal Nature[78], it was designed specifically for development research. Using a set of quality assessment rubrics, it considers the context in which the research takes place and the level of risk that this brings to the chance of success, as well as four dimensions of quality tailored for development research. The rubrics enable rating and aggregation of the results as well as comparison with other international

---

75   Communication by DFC, July 11, 2019.

76   *Scientific quality*: Innovative value of scientific ideas and hypotheses; scientific relevance and effect; generation of new knowledge in the field; theoretical foundation of the project; scientific method, expected data quality and project design; actual and potential scientific significance of the field and inclusion of relevant scientific disciplines; dissemination and communication of results to the relevant users; strengthening of research capacity at South partner institution. *Quality of research group and feasibility of the project*: Scientific competence of the involved researchers; combined scientific competence of the research team(s); feasibility of the research and capacity building plan; management and organisation, timetable, milestones, resources and risks.

77   Ofir, Z., Schwandt, T., Duggan C. and McLean R. (2016). *Research Quality Plus: A Holistic Approach to Evaluating Research. IDRC, 2016.*

78   Lebel, J. and McLean, R. (2018). *Comment: A better measure of research from the South.* Nature Vol. 559, 5 July 2018.

RQ+ analyses. A total of 25 projects were selected out of 111 Window 1 'completed' projects in selected categories of project types funded since 2008[79]. Further sampling and methodological details are provided in Annexes E and K.

CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON THE RESEARCH PROJECTS

Finding 19. *The projects assessed were relatively low risk in terms of the maturity of the research fields, the data environment and the research environments.*

The FFU-embassy joint assessment procedure undoubtedly helped to screen out projects where contextual risk was high, thus reducing the potential for failure related to inadequate instrumentation or a poor data or research environment. Most projects were executed in mature fields of research, with well-established theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as a history of existing empirical research. They also addressed topics for which instrumentation and measures for data collection and analysis are widely agreed upon and available. In only a few instances, scarcity or gaps in data posed a problem; in those cases, better preparation before the project started would have been enough to identify the existing gaps. Examples of those few problems include, for instance, novel computational methods turning out to be too demanding in a development research context, and the unavailability of historical data necessary for some methods. The research environments supported the projects, with good to excellent institutional and political support; however, infrastructure posed a problem for several projects. One took place in a politically unstable context with an imminent risk of humanitarian crisis or violent conflict, a few in post-conflict environments, and others in countries with a low risk of destabilisation.

QUALITY DIMENSION 1: RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Finding 20. *The Research Integrity of the selected projects – their technical quality, appropriateness and rigor of the design – was high; they were generally well-designed, well-executed, and published in venues of good quality. Survey responses confirmed that a majority of respondents considered the*

---

79   The 111 projects are the maximum number of projects from which the sample was drawn, as they all reflect a formal completion date of mid-2019 despite the fact that no-cost extensions were common. The number from which the final list was selected was therefore in actual fact smaller; the sample of 25 projects is estimated to have comprised at least 25% of those that met the key selection criteria of (i) actual completion by mid-2019 and (ii) a spread of project types under Window 1. The 25 projects were selected using maximum variation sampling that focused on information-rich projects, a variety of project types and budgets sizes, and a balance between mono and multidisciplinary projects. The following project types were included: (i) Research collaboration projects in Danida priority countries; (ii) Larger strategic projects; (iii) South-driven projects (prior to 2017); (iv) Pilot research cooperation projects (prior to 2013); (v) Smaller projects: Postdoctoral fellowships.

quality of their Danida-supported publications to be high compared to their own average.

One indicator of the success of Danida's screening and selection process was that the mean score for the research integrity dimension in the sample was very good: 5.6/8. Project proposals typically showed well thought-out research design, methodological rigor, well conducted literature reviews, and rigorous execution. Six projects in the sample scored below acceptable (1-4) on research integrity due to serious flaws in execution, or modest research outputs compared to the size and length of the projects, or they did not achieve some central objectives they had set.[80] Yet, overall, the score in this dimension was high. In addition, a majority of survey respondents (70.8%, N/A excluded) considered that the quality of the publications emerging from their Danida-funded project(s) was better than the average for their own publications.[81]

QUALITY DIMENSION 2: RESEARCH IMPORTANCE
Finding 21. *The assessed projects were original, generally able to identify important challenges and apply innovative approaches to solving them, and clearly relevant to development challenges that were key priorities for the countries involved.*

On the measure of originality, projects in the sample scored 5.6/8 on average, with a number of highlights, such as introducing unorthodox approaches to medication delivery, innovative involvement of the private sector, and new means of value creation for African products. As Danida's project selection process involves several levels of screening, and as proposals required an explicit description of development challenges they address, it is no surprise that projects in the sample scored very well on relevance, 6.1/8 on average.[82] Projects were typically aligned with key development priorities or national priorities, and that alignment was commonly well justified. The survey results showed the same, with 93.1% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, "*Danida's grant allocation was in line with the development goals and policies of the country/ies on which the grant was focused*". In those cases where relevance was low, the proposal was able to market the research problem as nationally important, and even alarming if not addressed, but very early on it became obvious that the problem was not of high

---

80 For example, one three-year project, which received roughly five million DKK and was extended to nearly five years, produced one journal article in an international journal, a few articles in local journals, and no PhD graduates out of two projected.

81 The results were similar when PhD students, for whom the publications were typically among the first of their career, were removed from the sample (72.5% above average). Please see Annex J for details.

82 If this average appears to be low, consider that 6.1/8.0 is a result of fourteen projects that scored 7-8, eight that scored 5-6, and just three that scored below 5.

importance after all, or the project could not address the problem. For example, in one project it turned out that the alarming problem was not caused by what the project suspected; in another, it turned out that the materials available were a poor match with the proposed solution.

Finding 22. *A bibliometric study of all relevant portfolio outputs confirmed that Danida-supported publications compare favourably within their fields and include many highly-cited papers.*

A bibliometric study on DFC's portfolio of Danida-funded publications found that those publications have gathered above average number of citations[83]. The mean normalized citations score (MNCS) for those publications is above 1.0 throughout 2007 to 2017, indicating above average number of citations for their field and publication year (Figure 10). The MNCS score peaked in 2008-2010 with the score 1.50: that time the publications in DFC's portfolio gathered 50% more citations than publications in the same fields over the same period of time did on the average.[84] The share of uncited publications was low – especially as Web of Science captures only a fraction of actual citations to articles. The journals in which the articles appeared were well recognised in their fields: their journal scores (MNJS) were above the world average in their respective fields. Although citations are not an isolated measure of "quality" but a result of complex disciplinary and social processes, citation scores are able to estimate tendencies at a larger scale, and those tendencies were positive in the analysed set of articles.

DFC's records included top articles in their fields on, for instance, cultural barriers to climate change adaptation, satellite imaging of land degradation, malaria research, and environmental income and rural livelihoods – among many others. From 2007 to 2012 Danida-funded publications were well overrepresented among the top 10% publications in their fields, but their share gradually gravitated towards the norm[85].

However, it is of concern that many articles that DFC reported to be a result of Danida funding acknowledged a plethora of other funders but

---

83   The bibliometric figures are from Jens Peter Andersen's DFC-commissioned bibliometric overview of Danida-funded research.

84   These numbers are influenced by the very well-known and very prolific Bandim Health Project in Guinea-Bissau – see Section 7.4.

85   PPtop10% peaked in 2008-2010 to 17.8 – indicating that Danida-funded articles were nearly two times overrepresented in the top 10% most cited publications in their respective fields, which is an impressive figure. The figures fell to 10.3, 9.9, and 9.7 over 2013–2017, slightly below the statistically expected value.

not Danida;[86] such acknowledgement has to be monitored and enforced as part of Danida's funding requirements.

FIGURE 10: MEAN NORMALISED CITATIONS SCORE FOR DFC'S PORTFOLIO OF DANIDA-SUPPORTED PUBLICATIONS (2007-2017)

QUALITY DIMENSION 3: RESEARCH LEGITIMACY

The RQ+ process evaluates the legitimacy of research in four dimensions, all geared towards establishing the extent to which the research process has taken into account the concerns and insights of relevant stakeholders, and has been deemed procedurally fair and respectful of their values, concerns and perspectives. Research legitimacy is key for development research, which often features significant power distances and asymmetries, and differences in beliefs, values, and practices between researchers and other stakeholders.

Finding 23. *Despite strong satisfaction with Danida's approach to supporting vulnerable populations, research legitimacy was by far the weakest aspect in the RQ+ framework among the sample of 25 projects.*

The below-acceptable mean of 3.6/8 on the four dimensions of legitimacy indicates that Danida has not required projects to address questions that are central to and characterise development research, such as concerns related to the most marginalised and vulnerable populations, ensuring inclusiveness and gender responsiveness, and true engage-

---

86   Of 17 2007-2017 top-cited publications identified by the bibliometric study, just six explicitly acknowledged funding from Danida (by any name, including Danish Council for Development Research and Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

ment with local knowledge. The details of the specific analyses are discussed in the findings that follow.

Finding 24. *Despite apparent agreement over the clarity of Danida's approach towards gender, minorities, and marginalised groups, in practice those were mostly overlooked in the assessed projects.*

Survey respondents felt strongly that Danida's approach and requirements were clear about how they can ensure that their work is sensitive to gender, minorities, and marginalised populations.[87] The FFU calls, however, were very vague about cross-cutting areas such as gender and minorities. Human rights were mentioned under some themes in 2008, 2010, 2011, and 2012. "Poor and marginalised groups" was mentioned under one theme in 2013 and 2014. Since 2014 the calls have explicitly noted human rights under the "relevance" section of assessment, and since 2017 the SDGs were introduced.

Finding 25. *Although Danida-funded projects very often work with vulnerable and most marginalised populations, the assessed research project documentation rarely addressed the potentially negative consequences and outcomes for, or inclusiveness of those populations.*

Only seven out of 25 projects in the RQ+ sample adequately discussed the possible harm or risk to populations by either the research processes or research outcomes. Most projects almost completely ignored identification of possible risks, and even when they did, they did not consider appropriate measures to protect participants from harm; the mean score on that measure was below acceptable: 3.2/8. Standard research ethics, like informed consent, privacy, anonymity, and right to withdraw, were often discussed, as were standard, low-effort mentions of ethics approvals by ethics boards – but strategies for protecting vulnerable informants and stakeholders were few and far between. Efforts to anticipate unintended consequences were very limited, and just two projects out of 25 discussed (indigenous) intellectual property rights (IPR) of local participants, even when many more than that aimed at co-developing products, processes or practices and innovations that potentially fall within IPR. On a brighter note, one project offered good practice by devoting a full work package to working with local populations and making sure they get the most out of the project with minimal risk.

---

87   Just 14.3% of survey respondents disagreed with the statement "*Danida's approach and requirements were clear about how we can ensure that our research is, wherever* relevant, *sensitive to the inclusion of minorities and others whose voices are often not heard*" and just 8.1% disagreed with the statement "*Danida's approach and requirements have encouraged us to be gender-responsive, for example by promoting gender equality, fostering inclusion, and/or ensuring equal opportunities for women and men to be heard during the research process.*"

As development research is often done from a position where the researcher and populations involved in the study differ greatly in power, particular care must be taken to ensure that the study should be inclusive in selecting participants and potential beneficiaries – stated explicitly in the research design and strategy, not just implied in a generic research ethics statement. The minimum criteria for inclusivity – appropriately addressing inclusiveness in research design, execution, and findings – were met in roughly half of the projects, with a mean score of 3.7/8. Interests of the most marginalised, vulnerable communities, which should be a priority for Danida-supported research, were rarely explicitly mentioned as a priority, or even as a concern.

Finding 26. *Most of the records of the assessed projects were gender-blind or showed significant lack of gender-responsive practice.*

Few if any development research projects can be considered gender neutral – even road construction changes the social dynamics of villages by changing gendered practices, such as where and whether goods can be sold at the roadside, uses and users of the roads, and where public transportation stops. Gender has been a common concern in Danida's reports over the years, with calls for gender mainstreaming[88], but gender as a concern made it into calls for proposals only in 2016, under one of the themes. A majority of the projects in the sample (16/25) showed more or less indifference to gender issues, aside from an occasional mention of striving for gender balance in the research teams, yielding a mean score of 3.0/8 on gender-responsiveness. Even where gender issues were a focus, this did not necessarily mean that extra awareness was shown in the project planning – by, for instance, prioritising a gender balance in recruiting or considering other aspects, such as the mitigation of discrimination and sensitivity to power relations. As always, there were also positive examples that showed gender-responsiveness and attempts to sensitise the project to the special needs and situations of different genders, sensitivity to gendered impacts of research, and collection of data disaggregated by gender. One positive highlight considered gender in a coherent and cross-cutting way, acknowledging that many basic concepts, like entrepreneurship and youth, are highly gendered, and took that into account throughout the study design and implementation.

Finding 27. *Grounding the research studies in relevant knowledge systems was an emerging concept and concern.*

Roughly half (12/25) of the projects scored below acceptable on engagement with local knowledge (mean score 4.6/8). The most common levels

---

88   See, e.g., *Cover Note – Council for Development Policy: Report on support to development research 2014. F2 case no.: 2015-7403*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

of local knowledge consulted were the national level and institutional partners, and the most common body was partner universities. However, few projects engaged with the knowledge of other local communities involved, including indigenous, poor or minority groups. Consulting and respecting traditional knowledge, wisdom, and practices of non-academic stakeholders was much less common than involvement of local researchers as experts of the local research environment. Their input was often characterised as part of the capacity development, but they did not appear to be significantly included in project design. A few South-driven projects took concrete steps to report back to the communities of informants or to share benefits from the research process, but only two explicitly ensured their ownership of (indigenous) intellectual property.

QUALITY DIMENSION 4: POSITIONING FOR USE
Development research is conducted with use in mind, and needs to be positioned for use: research findings, processes, and products should be targeted to and engage user groups from all sectors of society, they need to be ready to be contextualised for and by potential users, and they need to be useful and usable for potential user groups and match their practices of information access and use. The RQ+ approach seeks evidence of credible, context-sensitive strategies that projects have adopted to target potential users.

Finding 28. *Danida's approach and requirements support positioning the research results for use, and in general projects in the sample adequately identified and engaged stakeholders and potential user groups.*

A large majority (90%) of survey respondents agreed (47 out of 101) or strongly agreed (44 out of 101) with the statement "*Danida's approach and requirements encouraged us to ensure that our research was well positioned for use outside the academic environment.*"

Embassies, and their growth counsellors in Window 2, did some limited work to connect researchers with researchers, government stakeholders, industrial partners, NGOs, and other potential partners. The level of that activity, however, greatly depended on the particular people in the embassies and their interests. There typically were a number of strategies for dissemination of results and knowledge, and an understanding of how to communicate results to very different stakeholders. The majority of projects (19/25) scored acceptable, good, or very good (5-8) on knowledge accessibility and sharing (5.3/8 mean score).

Finding 29. *Dissemination of project activities throughout the project was often scattered, project web pages often disappeared right after the project ended, and usually more information dissemination was planned than done.*

Nearly all projects planned to, and did, start a web site as required from grant holders but, contrary to the promises, many were rarely updated; the evaluation found some also of poor quality. For example, one project reported that their website was frequently updated to advertise the different events throughout the project period – but the project websites were deleted right after the project ended, and an archived copy of that website showed a minimal-information page that had not been updated between two archive copies two years apart from each other. Not only was that project's reporting to Danida misleading, but it also showed poor dissemination practices and poor sustainability of the project: The project information disappeared right after it ended.

The project plans commonly involved workshops, meetings with local stakeholders, hands-on demonstrations, separate dissemination plans for different stakeholder groups, technical and trade press leaflets, and policy briefs. However, project completion reports and other documentation often showed fewer or less complete dissemination activities than originally planned. Stakeholder mapping and (early) strategic engagement was missing, and aside from a few great examples of usability thinking, accessibility and user-friendly formats were not a common concern in practice.

Finding 30. *Most projects were timely in the sense that they responded to a current issue perceived to be important by local stakeholders, but the potential for turning research results into actions was largely missed.*

Some of the highest scores on timeliness and actionability were in South-driven, South-designed projects. Moreover, Danida's screening process required researchers to analyse and reflect on the use environment of their research, and also required policy briefs to be written. That approach ensured that most projects scored high on actionability of research (5.5/8 mean score). Cooperation between Danish researchers and their counterparts also furthered development of feasible public-private partnership ideas and plans for 'productising' or commercialising research and design outputs. But in the end, actual tangible, documented outcomes were much rarer than good plans.

Development research is expected to have an impact – be it immediate or long-term – on some development issue, but turning academic research into practical, impactful actions is notoriously difficult. That seemed more effective when public and private sector stakeholders were included as a partner from the outset of the project. There were next to no reports of research that made suitable connections to product development or commercialisation to eventually take results to market. In the absence of risk-tolerant investors and business incubators, a clear pathway towards commercialisation of results after project termination was reported in just one of the 25 projects.

FIGURE 11: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RQ+ RESULTS FOR A SAMPLE OF 25 PROJECTS
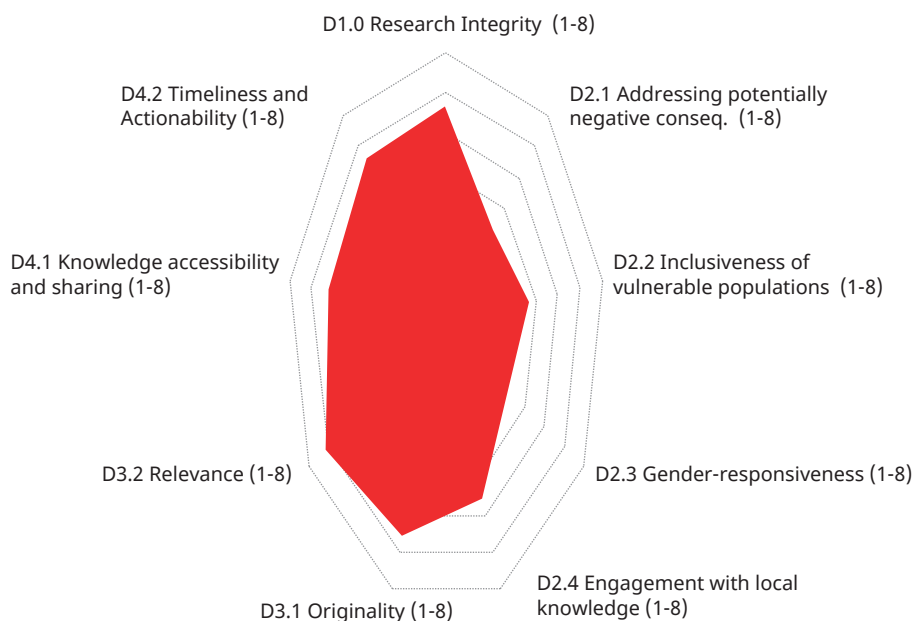
Finding 31. *The RQ+ results reflect Danida's proposal evaluation process; weaknesses in the research legitimacy dimension therefore indicate insufficient attention to this aspect in assessment and subsequent reporting processes.*

As Danida's grant selection procedure starts from screening committees and embassies who emphasise local relevance, and then continues to FFU who emphasise scientific quality of the research proposal and potential of the research teams, Danida's process strongly steers projects in specific directions. Danida asks for one kind of quality and gets it. Although the sample is limited to 25 projects (estimated 20-25% of those completed in time within the selected projects types in Window 1), the difference between the RQ+ elements is large enough not to be ignored (Figure 11)[89].

---

89   In summary, the mean scores for integrity, importance, and positioning for use are very good – 5.60, 5.84, and 5.42, respectively – but for legitimacy an insufficient 3.61.

ENGAGING VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES: AN EXAMPLE FROM LAKE BOSUMTWI IN GHANA

The limnology of Lake Bosumtwi, the only natural lake in Ghana, has been changing, causing a decline in its fish population. A group of researchers at the University of Energy and Natural Resources have followed the change years, working with the many communities around the lake – fishermen, tourism industry, local inhabitants, and community leaders. After several projects examining the lake from multiple perspectives, the group applied for and won Danida funding to study its ecosystem and socioeconomic role in the lives of local communities, and to develop capacities for sustainable practices, improved lake health and reduced vulnerability of local residents. The group's success in conducting the research is based on their decades of deep and wide commitment with the local communities, scientific excellence, local knowledge of nature and emphasis on community development. The group has developed their strategies and protocols for engaging vulnerable and marginalised groups and win community acceptance. For instance, they start from traditional leaders and authorities to learn how to communicate with the different communities. They use long and personal relationships to combat research fatigue among the community and give back to them where possible. They have also engaged 14 government, national, regional and local authorities for collaboration.

Source: Project reports and interviews

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

Finding 32. *The RQ+ results in this evaluation fare fairly well in comparison with RQ+ analyses elsewhere. However, the alarmingly low 'research legitimacy' dimension results suggest that instead of funding 'research for development', Danida might be funding 'research in developing countries'.*

Table 7 presents a summary of the RQ+ analysis results. A recent meta-analysis[90] pulled together 170 unique RQ+ analyses of research projects between 2010 and 2015 from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East to form a bird's-eye view of research quality in development research. In terms of research integrity – the 'classic' quality indicator of research – the projects in the current RQ+ analysis scored fairly close to those in McLean and Sen's study w.r.t. originality, relevance, knowledge accessibility and sharing, and timeliness and actionability (Figure 12).[91] However, in the research legitimacy dimension the mean scores for addressing potentially negative consequences,

---

90   McLean, R. & Sen, K. (2018) *Making a Difference in the Real World? A Meta-Analysis of Research for Development.* IDRC: Canada.

91   Integrity (5.6 in this study vs 5.8 in McLean and Sen's), originality (5.6 vs. 6.0), relevance (6.1 vs. 6.7), knowledge accessibility and sharing (5.3 vs. 5.9) and timeliness and actionability (5.5 vs. 5.7). In contrast, the score for potentially negative consequences was 3.2 in this study vs. 5.4; inclusiveness of vulnerable populations was 3.7 vs. 4.8, gender-responsiveness 3.0 vs. 5.6, and engagement with local knowledge 4.6 vs. 6.3.
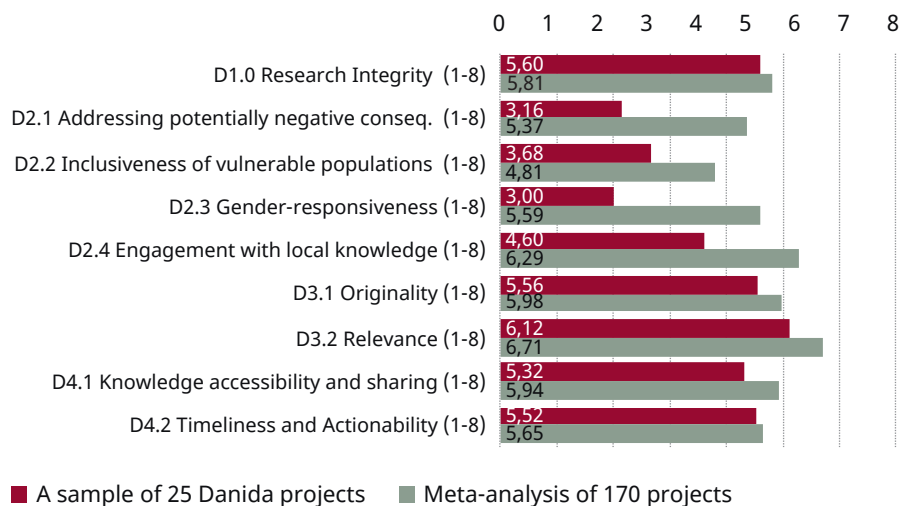
the inclusiveness of vulnerable populations and engagement with local knowledge were markedly lower than the international average, while gender-responsiveness scores were exceptionally low in comparison.

TABLE 7: RQ+ ANALYSIS OF 25 DANIDA-FUNDED DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PROJECTS: A SUMMARY

	Component	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	Mean
Key influences	C2.1 Maturity of the research field (1-3)	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1.40
	C2.2 The data environment (1-3)	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1.56
	C2.3 The research environment (1-3)	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1.40
	C2.4 Political environment (1-3)	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1.56
	C2.5 Research Capacity Strengthening (1-3)	2	1	3	1	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2.16
Integrity	D1.0 Research Integrity (1-8)	2	5	3	2	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	4	7	5	6	6	7	7	7	6	3	7	3	7	7	5.6
Research Legitimacy	D2.1 Addressing potentially negative conseq. (1-8)	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	5	2	2	1	3	3	4	1	6	5	3	8	5	5	4	5	3.16
	D2.2 Inclusiveness of vulnerable populations (1-8)	1	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	5	5	6	2	2	2	4	2	6	3	5	7	6	6	5	6	3.68
	D2.3 Gender-responsiveness (1-8)	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	2	6	1	6	5	6	5	3	6	5	4	8	3.00
	D2.4 Engagement with local knowledge (1-8)	2	1	3	6	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	6	6	7	5	6	4	5	4	5	5	6	7	7	7	4.60
Research importance	D3.1 Originality (1-8)	3	4	6	5	4	5	6	7	4	5	5	7	4	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	7	6	7	6	7	5.56
	D3.2 Relevance (1-8)	2	3	6	5	6	7	6	7	7	8	7	7	5	8	5	6	7	6	7	7	7	2	7	7	8	6.12
Positioning for Use	D4.1 Knowledge accessibility and sharing (1-8)	2	2	2	2	5	6	7	6	7	3	5	6	6	5	7	7	7	3	7	6	6	7	7	7	5	5.32
	D4.2 Timeliness and Actionability (1-8)	2	2	2	3	7	6	5	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	5	5	6	5	5	7	7	6	7	7	7	5.52

FIGURE 12: COMPARISON BETWEEN RQ+ ANALYSIS IN THIS EVALUATION (SAMPLE OF 25 PROJECTS) AND AN RQ+ META-ANALYSIS OF 170 PROJECTS BY MCLEAN & SEN (2018)

- D1.0 Research Integrity (1-8): 5,60 / 5,81
- D2.1 Addressing potentially negative conseq. (1-8): 3,16 / 5,37
- D2.2 Inclusiveness of vulnerable populations (1-8): 3,68 / 4,81
- D2.3 Gender-responsiveness (1-8): 3,00 / 5,59
- D2.4 Engagement with local knowledge (1-8): 4,60 / 6,29
- D3.1 Originality (1-8): 5,56 / 5,98
- D3.2 Relevance (1-8): 6,12 / 6,71
- D4.1 Knowledge accessibility and sharing (1-8): 5,32 / 5,94
- D4.2 Timeliness and Actionability (1-8): 5,52 / 5,65

■ A sample of 25 Danida projects   ■ Meta-analysis of 170 projects

Specialists engaged in development strategies and initiatives are increasingly clear and assertive about the need for commitment to local knowledge, gender-responsiveness, safeguarding the dignity of individuals from vulnerable and most marginalised groups, giving back to the communities who devote their time to research, reporting back to communities involved, and so forth. Although there is no doubt that each of the 25 projects in this sample addressed a development issue,

and that researchers do their work with respect and dedication, the social and cultural commitment recorded in the project documentation does not reflect state of the art considerations related to research that has to inform development.[92]

ICT4D – HOW A FIELD TOOK ITS DEVELOPMENT MANDATE SERIOUSLY

There are examples of successful transformation in the field of development research. For example, information and communication technology for development (ICT4D) was for a long time considered a technology-dominated field where development was just a challenging context for technology development. Projects were often demonstrations of technological prowess in a developing country context, with poor sustainability, poor inclusivity, and next to no attention to potentially negative consequences of technology. In the 2000s a new generation of ICT4D scholars started to increasingly challenge the technology-driven approach and prioritise the development dimension, with increasing calls for joint standards for ICT4D ethics. Today ICT4D has developed a list of 20 ethical maxims that ICT4D projects are expected to adhere to, including reciprocity and giving back to communities where research is done, accountability to participants, addressing potential risks and negative consequences to participants, and non-discrimination and sensibility to vulnerable populations. Although the change in mentality is still under way, that shift is remarkably changing how current and next generations of ICT4D researchers view their field as focused on development, not technology.

---

92   One consideration is that this RQ+ assessment did not do interviews, for example, to gather additional information about what efforts to ensure legitimacy might have been taken in practice but not documented. The necessary strategies, practices, and principles for ensuring research legitimacy may have been in place but just not included in the research plan, midterm reports, LFA or final report.

4 TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

4.1 The make-up of Danida's research support portfolio

Finding 33. *Danida's thematic portfolios display several features – and three types of projects – that help define its potential for uptake towards impact, and support arguments for a portfolio approach to managing the grants.*

It has (i) a diversity of problem- or opportunity-oriented, context-specific projects, providing opportunities for practical fieldwork – including in unstable, fragile contexts that pose significant practical and institutional challenges and affect the time allocated for the research; (ii) Individual projects with enough in common to be connected as parts of solid bodies of knowledge for development, e.g.at intersections of food systems, nutrition, health, climate change and green growth; (iii) Projects engaging multiple disciplines, but often without sufficient attention to the important role of social sciences in health or natural science-oriented projects; just having 'multidisciplinary' projects as criterion is not enough; and (iv) gender (equality) and other cross-cutting normative areas are under-represented – only one project was formally categorised in that theme, although several others have some emphasis on gender issues.

Roughly three types of projects are evident: (i) a majority of topics that are often found in development work; they focus on fairly narrowly defined problems or opportunities (a disease, local food source, community challenge); (ii) a minority that have a 'big picture', systems-oriented approach (understanding local to global value chains, REDD+ in local contexts, economic development in a region; transforming smallholder livestock farms to commercial enterprises); and (iii) a minority trying to explore cutting edge ways to bring fast advancements or a competitive edge to countries or regions (circular industries, tax regimes, ecological infrastructure, green growth).

The following short summaries highlight aspects of the content of the most prominent thematic areas supported over the past decade (Chapter 2), based on an analysis of a selection of the more than 220 larger partnership-led projects supported under these themes in Windows 1 and 2. All were found to be multi-partner projects and largely multi-disciplinary, although often without social science partners that to an external observer would appear to be essential. All made efforts to communicate their results to stakeholder groups – some with good

success captured as examples at the end of this chapter. Examples are provided at the end of the chapter.

Health. The 27 projects falling under this theme focus on addressing challenges related to a wide spectrum of diseases common in income-poor countries, including malaria, HIV, tuberculosis, uncommon tropical diseases and parasites, as well as wider issues such as primary health care, reproductive health, nutrition, the use of latrines and medicine regimes for children. Examples of results include a simple step developed through a PhD project that made a difference in the incidence of bilharzia among children, the preparation of vaccines to be trialled, new potentially nutrient-rich and abundant food sources, and establishing ways to improve the preparedness for epidemics based on experiences with Ebola – which also highlight the challenges of working in fragile contexts such as Burkina Faso where Danish researchers' need to work in rural areas have been leading to security and other concerns.

Agricultural production. The 36 projects clearly show the wide spectrum of interesting work done in this field with Danida support over the years. Across countries there has been a strong focus on different dimensions of aquaculture and on novel, mostly indigenous food sources, often coupled to green growth and climate change risks for farmers; it is pertinent that climate change implications and resilience are particularly prominent in this theme. The important issue of strengthening value chains also provide good examples of the need to understand and work with a systems perspective on life. The 'climate smart cocoa systems' project is an example, interestingly conducted only between international CGIAR centres and Danish institutions. Still ongoing, it aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of climate change on the socio-biophysical bases of cocoa systems, a very important crop in Ghana. Through seven work 'packages' and a multidisciplinary approach it aims to study the socio-biophysical limitations and options for cocoa cultivation under climate change and assess institutional and socio-economic factors that favour or limit adoption by farmers of innovative management options.

Climate change. In this area the 26 projects highlight the intersections between agriculture (and aquaculture), fresh water, food, health, resilience and livelihoods, all of which also have significant overlaps with the other thematic areas. Vietnam was an important recipient of this support through a visionary agreement with a relevant government ministry; the research initiated in this area before its importance of was recognised worldwide now serves Vietnam very well, as it is one of the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The projects cover a very wide range of interests, from the use of advanced technology to a focus on community level protection and resilience. Care here has to be taken to ensure that projects that apply under this thematic area actually fit; some appear contrived, with curt statements that

climate change had no effect on the issue studied before listing a series of other findings that could have been better suited under a different thematic area.

State building, governance and civil society. There is much diversity among the 25 projects captured under this theme, which is especially prominent in some of the most fragile countries supported by Danida. They tend to focus on the reasons for, and results of tensions and conflicts. Migration and mobility patterns, rural-urban linkages, marginalised women, the influence of media on identity and work, the influence of economic and political processes, communities and forests, smallholders' land rights, corruption, detention and penal rights, formal and informal revenue bargains affecting public policies – all fit into efforts to advance state building and governance and the role of civil society in it. Much of the content leaves the impression that they are not necessarily ground-breaking new topics, but rather novel in the specific context in which the research is being operationalised. All cover foci that can help provide more sophisticated and necessary insights into critical issues in low-income and fragile countries. The almost-essential systems orientation of these projects is well demonstrated in the joint team of 'legal experts, political scientists, sociologists and economists' that aim to provide policy-relevant understanding of the political economy of tax and revenue bargaining in low income countries, studying the motivations of people dealing with institutions or commodity systems.

Gender equality. This theme officially has one major project only, although some designated under other themes can qualify, such as a completed triangular project in Vietnam and Tanzania or intimate partner violence and reproductive health.

Economic development. Almost all the 21 projects overlap with other themes as so many projects engage with economic development – from agricultural growth, poverty and farmers' values to global value chains, agro-industries and new markets; from new partnerships for development to political and economic processes in unstable regions; from value adding crops to street food hygiene; from green strategies and products to cultivating sustainable practices in the hotel and tourism industry. A good number display an understanding of the importance of a systems approach to advancing economic opportunities, with several impressive examples supported under Window 2.

ONLY ONE PROJECT FORMALLY CLASSIFIED UNDER THE GENDER THEME

The IMAGENU project partners with an international NGO and with Gulu University as part of its BSU initiatives. Imagining gender futures in Uganda, it places marriage and its decline in focus, showing how this fundamental gender relation implicates livelihoods, health, education and people's future imaginations. It aims to generate new knowledge and stimulate debate about how changing patterns of gender partnerships relate to livelihood, education and reproductive and mental health issues – in the hope that it can contribute to better social gender policies and create debate in the wider public.

From: Project proposal document and public summary.

ESTABLISHING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN A LOW-INCOME COUNTRY

The Gecko project aims to provide scientific insights and an algorithm for designing and projecting high-circular eco-industrial parks in Kenya. The project investigates if and under what conditions developing countries such as Kenya may gain environmental and competitive advantages from early entry into circular ways of organising production and exchange of resources in symbiosis networks, thereby potentially establishing near closed-loop production systems and reducing investments in expensive End of Pipe environmental infrastructures. Critically investigating the potential and scope of industrial symbiosis – where one firm's residuals become a proximate firm's resource – is at the core of this research project. The project outcomes will contribute to the development of a strategy for eco-industrial parks in Kenya as part of their wider green growth strategy and will be a direct input to an ongoing Danish SSC project.

From: Project proposal document and public summary.

4.2 Uptake outside the academic sector

Finding 34. *Danida's insistence that grant holders also focus on the uptake of their findings led to many impressive efforts to facilitate the take-up of results, in particular by local communities and administrators. 'Immediately felt' relevance, local accountability and (early) collaboration as well as sufficient funds for sharing actions were important elements in success.*

The FFU calls for proposals and reporting formats have demanded relevance to national needs, and since 2010 have had a strong focus on doing and communicating research beyond the interests of the academic environment. The RQ+ analysis (Section 3.4) showed reasonably good scores for positioning for use, highlighting the significant efforts to get take-up of research results among potential users. Interviews and reports suggest that the more closely the projects worked with district administrators, local politicians, and communities – from the project design stage on – the more they could report on local influence. This is well in line with what is known about effective policy influencing strategies in the Global South.

Although project completion reports and especially survey results paint a bright picture of the uptake of findings,[93] the broad range of descriptions in qualitative responses appear overly optimistic. Many were inconclusive, referring to communicating results to stakeholders rather than their actual uptake, or too tentative upon completion of the project. Yet there were also substantive examples of the uptake of findings through individual expertise – developing materials, guidelines, and policy plans, invitations to parastatal and government policymaking boards, and even careers in government.

A fair number of projects were able to attract media or social media attention. Around a third of survey respondents from the South as well as in Denmark confirmed that their work had been taken up by media outlets or to a notable extent in social media. Data showed a wide range of channels, from newspapers to documentaries, from radio and TV programmes, to Facebook and Twitter, with a few cases where research-ers had ample screen time and airtime, especially on radio.[94] The reach and impact of these efforts are unknown, but they are almost certain to enhance the chance of uptake.

Finding 35. *Many communication efforts displayed well-known challenges in reaching influential policy- and decision-makers showed, including poor timing and materials inappropriate for the target audiences. It was easier to attract institutional and local attention.*

Since efforts to disseminate results end when projects end, it is noted that project websites were not sustained after closure of a project. In some cases, the web material of projects was not inspiring or well curated. In scanning policy briefs, it is clear that they are often written in unappealing ways, using technical language and arguments more suited to the academic world than to the world of policymaking.

Sharing activities require funding, and enthusiasm to share does not guarantee success – especially amidst major differences between the worlds of policymakers and researchers. The interface between policy and research is notoriously difficult to navigate in the absence of established linkages between a research group and policymakers, and policy influence comes in forms that are not always immediately visible in policy change. In the political and policy domains, releasing policy

"....we all make small collective moves – our research has certainly contributed to and helped boost international and national calls for integrating non-state, local justice into justice sector reform in Myanmar, and to include these into debates about the peace nego-tiations, but from that step to actual policy changes is not one that comes so quickly. It takes time, and one individual project like ours cannot take credit for this on its own. It is many collaborative efforts. We found here that it was crucial to engage in constant dialogue and sharing with NGOs, international and national, as well as UN agencies to push for this agenda, based on our research findings. But this does not lead to quick changes, at least not in a country like Myanmar."

Survey respondent from the South.

---

93   49.5% of respondents reported use of their research results in the political or policy domain. It also showed 40.3% of respondents being aware of uptake of results in the societal domain (such as NGOs, practitioners, and local com-munities), and 25.7% were aware of uptake in the environmental domain. A large majority of respondents were involved in the FFU Window 1 modality.

94   As example, in Tanzania an international conference held to disseminate a project's research results was covered by major newspapers as well as all major national TV stations, and a book produced by the project was launched by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

briefs, results reports, "good stories", websites and press releases, and then waiting for someone to call and follow-up have had limited results. It is therefore not a surprise that most case study interviewees did not consider their research to have had an effect at national policy level; despite the mandatory policy briefs and efforts to make results available in stakeholder meetings, uptake at institutional or local level was easier to achieve.

Some projects had encouraging examples of dissemination of results by arranging conferences and workshops, but in general, without early engagements or active relationships, researchers found it difficult to attract influential individuals to events, especially at national level, unless the work was solidly located in their immediate interests. Yet demand-driven 'immediately needed' research is seldom possible with the long timeframes of competitively sponsored research; consultancies by the World Bank and other similar organisations are seen as producing timelier and (immediately) useful 'research' papers.

PROMOTING THE ADOPTION OF RESULTS ON A SENSITIVE TOPIC (INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE) IN VIETNAM

We set up our research for use. We developed an approach we called 'Strategy for Evidence for Action' as a channel to policymakers. We built alliances with civil society organisations to help engage policymakers. We had a kick-off meeting to share our project and also one on policy to share project results and make policy recommendations. People in the project expected to give recommendations to policymakers about family relationships. High level officials came to both meetings and also other stakeholders such as the women's union who could give a cultural perspective on the problem and on the recommendations. We also held a meeting of staff at the university. We had briefing papers for different stakeholders in English and in Vietnamese. But we need more policy advocacy. ... It takes a long time to get policymakers' attention.

Source: Interview in Vietnam.

PROMOTING THE ADOPTION OF RESULTS AT POLICY LEVEL IN GHANA

One of the Danida-funded projects of the University of Cape Coast (UCC) adopted from early on an active strategy for dissemination of results and activities. The Ghanaian partners applied for extra funding from different donors for organising a conference on fisheries and the coastal environment. The conference was designed to attract and bring many different kinds of people together – researchers, fishermen, policymakers, and international experts. The design was intended to ensure that policymakers heard about the initiatives and results, that fishermen could exchange and gain knowledge, and researchers got to share their latest results. Even though the results of the engagement have not been traced, the conference attracted considerable attention: when the evaluation was being conducted, a link to the event appeared on the Facebook page of the Vice-President of Ghana.

Source: Interview in Ghana.

Finding 36. *Government needs often do not match researchers' ambitions or timelines, but examples to the contrary highlight the importance of long-term thinking and identification of important emerging priorities for research from national to global level – something with which Danida has had some success.*

Despite the 'relevance' of projects to national interests within given (usually broad) thematic areas, interest by policymakers is far from assured even among officials interested in using evidence. One example was provided by Ghanaian government representatives: research is more important for studying policy impacts than it is for informing policy planning. Ghana's National Development Planning Commission was clear that where research became useful for them was in understanding why and how some policies succeed and others fail. They were especially interested in research around causal effects, pre- and post-evaluation, tracing of impacts and explaining what works, how, and why.

How to make governments' needs match researchers' ambitions and Danida's modalities therefore has yet to be resolved. One example is found in the research on climate change sponsored by Danida in Vietnam more than 10 years ago, before it was a fashionable topic. It laid the foundation for what is today much-appreciated expertise in an important national priority area. The importance of such an approach was emphasised by a senior official: "*We need forward-looking information, an emerging issue that can be researched for say two years before being needed by government. That will be timely for us.*" Danida's identification of themes as well as researchers and project proposal reviewers have to try to predict real needs and opportunities likely to survive the passing of time.

Finding 37. *Connecting with industry interests and initiatives shows promise but suffers from 'pilotitis' and other challenges in getting to viable products with true potential in under-developed business contexts and systems.*

Danida-funded projects have some promising examples of integration between industry and research projects, with Window 2 increasing the potential. There are many examples of emerging findings or products that might have commercial or societal benefits, but there are few examples with potential for scaling, in part due to insufficient attention to the systems within which such efforts have to be launched in under-developed markets and commercial infrastructure. This situation strengthens the rationale for a strong Window 2 initiative. Preliminary screening across Window 1 and even some Window 2 projects indicates few connections that might enable uptake beyond initial prototypes or pilots. Although just under 28% of survey respondents reported uptake of results in the industrial or technological domains, the examples were most often at a very preliminary stage. As one key informant noted, "*the*

Danida-funded projects … end just when they would be ready to upscale and be implemented".

Examples abound: in one case where a project had a product co-developed with industrial partners, with a clear market plan, needs analysis and successful pilots, the outcomes never materialised at scale due to the very limited seasonal availability of the materials and the poor shelf life of the product – problems that might have been foreseen at an early stage. Another project studied a technology that provided ample research results but turned out to be poorly suited for its intended local use. Yet another developed a product that had promise and could be purchased, yet information on sales was not available. And finally, in another project the problem stated in the research proposal was solved, but the food product had an inferior taste and was unlikely to be taken up commercially.

Finding 38. *Danida has tried various approaches to creating partnerships and synergies between research, industry and other Danish development cooperation initiatives in order to facilitate research uptake, use and impact, but with limited results.*

Lessons learned to date in the case study countries support what is widely known through other experiences:[95],[96] in order to create relationships and synergies with the work of companies, they must be involved early on in the process; implementation must be closely monitored to make sure that plans are followed; and embassies actively engaged in arranging meetings is crucial to make the work known. In the absence of an opportunity to do basic research, researchers must get other incentives, such as time off from other university duties, salary top-ups, or opportunities for career building that are academically recognised and measured. These could include PhD graduates under their main supervision, responsibility for leading research funding, or opportunities for strengthening their research groups. Ghanaian and Vietnamese projects that were particularly successful in this regard were born out of long-term collaborations and proactive efforts to establish the necessary relationships.

The challenges lie in creating synergies that can enhance research uptake, use and impact apply to all ongoing modalities. Researchers participating in Window 1 projects complained about lack of money for roll-out and impact; researchers expected Danida (and not themselves) to act based on policy briefs and 'positive stories', there has been

---

95   Global Environmental Assessments. Information and Influence. Ronald B. Mitchell, William C. Clark, David W. Cash and Nancy M. Dickson (eds.), MIT Press, 2006.

96   Carden, F. *Knowledge to Policy: Making the most of development research.* SAGE Publications, 2009.

lingering scepticism about Window 2, and the problem of attribution is seen as undermining efforts to establish links between building stronger universities and the achievement of specific Danish high-level objectives.

Finding 39. *In scaling back its modalities, Danida has lost opportunities for the large-scale, targeted influence that has allowed it in earlier years to punch above its weight at regional and international level.*

Strong arguments can be made for limiting the number of modalities, especially given the relatively small commitment by Danida to development research. Yet much is lost in the process. Both the core and thematic ringfenced funding to organisations and networks such as CGIAR, CODESRIA, UNRISD, and to regional and international initiatives such as IPM or AMANET enables collective support and participation in platforms that can achieve more than any individual funder. Evaluations of core support programmes have been overwhelmingly positive;[97] they are seen as providing essential opportunities for growth in new areas and expanding networks of support and exchange, fostered by long-term, stable financing. Such allocations enabled Danida to share a table with like-minded funders. Persons interviewed in CGIAR (where its contribution was relatively small) and CODESRIA noted that Danida had at the time punched above its weight by providing important strategic input and direction. Cooperation simplified the administration of financing, planning, monitoring and evaluation, and all benefitted from dialogue and agreed-upon joint actions and low transaction costs. Joint engagement by Norad, Sida and Danida in these modalities also strengthened the cooperation between the Nordic countries until Danida's sudden withdrawal in 2015. Recently both CGIAR and CODESRIA have rejuvenated their strategies and priorities, offering new avenues for both core and thematic support in line with regional and global imperatives.

4.3   A selection of outcomes

Finding 40. *Despite challenges mentioned earlier, there are many impressive examples of uptake of research results in the policy domain as well as in community action[98].*

The evaluation did not include a systematic impact evaluation and could not screen through or verify claims of impact in large numbers of projects. However, survey data, the document study and interview triangulation highlighted impressive examples where the efforts to help ensure the uptake and use of the research findings appear to have made

---

97   Carden, F. et al. 2019. Strengthening Research Institutions. Learning from Doing. Using Evidence Working Paper. Foundation.

98   Reasons for such successes are discussed in the next chapter.

a real difference. Examples with various emphases are given here as illustration. A dedicated outcomes or impact evaluation with intensive outcomes harvesting or similar methodologies will provide rich insights into the details of these and other examples.

HEALTH: TRIANGULAR COOPERATION AROUND AN UNUSUAL FOOD SOURCE (CAMBODIA, KENYA)

The WinFood project successfully brought together a multi-disciplinary research group in Cambodia, Kenya and Denmark, and identified how locally available foods can be used for improved feeding of children during the critical phase of complementary feeding. Specifically, the potential of using insects and other arthropods as an alternative protein source has been highlighted. By applying highly advanced research methodology the project has contributed significant capacity building in partner countries and have provided new understanding of prevention of undernutrition. The conclusion from Cambodia is that nutritious local foods can contribute significantly to improve dietary quality, but also that a level of fortification with micronutrients appears to be needed to meet nutrient requirements, especially iron. The conclusion in Kenya supported this. The study provided evidence that local products can exchange imported food aid products, and that a rice and fish-based product is equal for supporting growth to a milk based imported product. Major stakeholders including WFP consider that the results can support a shift to a future supply of locally produced products. In Kenya, the results have shown that especially insects hold potential as alternative animal-source food, envisaging a shift from being recognised as a traditional food item collected from wild sources, to a domesticated food source.

Source: Project Completion report and public summary.

HEALTH: TREATMENT OF CHILDHOOD UNDERNUTRITION (ETHIOPIA, KENYA, UGANDA)

We have been the first to show that treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, irrespective of supplement, lead to quite high accretion of lean mass – muscle and organ tissue. We have also been able to show that the current practice of excluding short children from treatment – due to concern that these children may accumulate excessive fat – is not justified. These latter finding, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition in 2016 but disseminated through our partners through various channels, has already resulted in policy changes in Niger, and other countries are likely to follow. In addition, the Treatfood trial have documented that LNS products are more effective than CSB, especially if based on soy isolate rather than dehulled soy, in increasing lean mass accretion as well as recovery rate, and that it is highly acceptable and results in less leftover. The additional benefits of adding expensive milk protein could not be clearly demonstrated and needs further study. Thus, policy makers have hard data to inform their policies, and decide what products to use. As part of the trial and the research at research capacity sites Ethiopia, Kenya or Uganda, 13 researchers, seven from Africa and six from Denmark, have done PhD-work. We conducted four PhD-courses, including two on treatment of severe acute malnutrition. Other international experts were invited as guest lecturers, and paediatricians and nutritionist from a large number of countries, mainly from Africa, participated. We contributed to dissemination of research findings to paediatricians and nutritionists globally through our role as academic partner in the CMAM Forum, with ACF, UNICEF and WHO.

Source: Project completion report.

PRODUCTIVE RESEARCH ON SOCIETAL DYNAMICS IN A FRAGILE CONTEXT (MYANMAR)

In-depth fieldwork on everyday justice and local authority was carried out in 17 localities across Karen State (six sites), Mon State (six sites), Yangon (two sites) and in Danu, Pa-O and Naga Self-administered Zones (three sites). This included urban and rural areas as well as areas fully or partly governed by the official Myanmar State, and some by one of the ethnic armed organisations. Detailed interview and field notes permitted cross-cutting analysis, which by June 2019 had resulted in 25 academic papers, mainly by the Myanmar researchers, and seven policy-related reports/briefs.

Research findings were widely shared and discussed at international conferences and with key stakeholders in Myanmar, including practitioners and policymakers. Important briefings were translated to Burmese to facilitate policy impact. Because of its in-depth empirical findings from hitherto understudied areas, the project is said to have earned a strong position in debates about justice in Myanmar.

Source: Project Completion report and public summary.

HEALTH: THE IMPACT OF A PHD RESEARCH PROJECT (UGANDA)

One of the PhD projects under the ChildMed project focused on bilharzia, which has a high prevalence in Uganda among children. The government provides a drug through schools targeting children five years and above. However, children resist taking them as they are very big and bitter, with a pungent smell. With the objective to improve the uptake of the medicine among children, the research included a randomised control trial in 12 primary schools in Jinja district: one group received education messages prior to the mass treatment, while the other also received a pre-treatment snack. The results showed that the uptake of the drug was higher in the group of children who received the snacks (94% as compared to 79%), and the side effects were lower[99]. The findings were published in newspapers and presented to stakeholders at the district and national level, including to the Ministry of Health at a big dissemination workshop. Today, all primary schools that provide mass drug administration for control of bilharzia in Jinja give the tablets together with porridge, and all districts with a high prevalence of bilharzia have taken up the practice. The Commissioner of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) helped to promote the practice (and was part of the management structure of the ChildMed project). The prevalence of the disease has since gone down: at the start of the projects it was 35%, while a recent study showed a prevalence of 22%.

Source: Project Completion report and interviews.

---

99   Muhumuza et.al. BMC Infectious Diseases (2015) 15: 423. Reduced uptake of mass treatment for schistosomiasis control in absence of food: beyond a randomized trial".

STATE BUILDING, GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL SOCIETY: THE IMPORTANCE OF 'GLOCAL' CONNECTIONS – IMPACTING GLOBAL POLICY AS WELL AS LOCAL MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES (INDONESIA, VIETNAM)

The project investigated how the global arrangement under the UNFCCC, Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), influences regulations and communities' access to forest resources, the way compensation for foregone benefits is awarded, and to what degree local monitoring of carbon stocks and livelihood impacts of REDD+ can be used as a tool to empower local communities and help secure their rights. Results showed that the REDD+ readiness phase has been slow and that the actual practices differ from expectations due to ongoing conflicts over forest and contestations over the meaning of justice. REDD+ efforts and funds have been concentrated at the central level, with limited reach to the provincial and district level. Ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and marginalised local communities are left out of REDD+ design and implementation. Dwindling donor commitment and the collapse of prices in carbon markets jeopardise the future of REDD+. However, community-based monitoring of carbon and livelihoods promote local involvement in decision-making and safeguarding of local forest rights and access.

Four book chapters, 30 peer-reviewed scientific papers were published in international journals and nine in national journals, and 21 co-authored presentations were made at international conferences and meetings. A policy brief was presented at COP 17 and an international meeting in Hanoi. Several TV programs and YouTube videos have been produced based on knowledge provided by the project. All this has allowed the research results to be available and distributed at a wide range of fora. Senior research staff have become members of national REDD+ agencies and technical REDD+ working groups on social safeguards, while one senior staff is adviser to the President of Indonesia.

Source: Project Completion report and public summary.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: SUPPORTING A SMALL BUT PROMISING INDUSTRY (ETHIOPIA)

The project at Haramya University, focusing on the domestic and economic use of camel dairy, removed obstacles for processing camel milk and developed a range of 'high quality' camel milk dairy products. The procedures and processes were described and made available for all to access. Ten young researchers were educated through the project – two at PhD and eight at Masters level. Haramaya University is said to now have the capacity to support the emerging Ethiopian camel dairy industry, with the notion that the wider implementation of camel milk dairy technology will benefit the nutritional status of children in particular, and improve a traditional drought resilient pastoral husbandry, supporting efforts aimed at food security and drought resilience. The project has 'created the foundation for a wide implementation' in Ethiopia and all other camel rearing regions in Africa and Asia. At the time when the project was completed, the project team at Haramaya University was actively engaged in implementing the technology at two new camel dairy plants in Ethiopia.

Source: Project Completion report and public summary.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A FOUNDATION FOR POLICY INFLUENCE THROUGH LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT (VIETNAM)

Danida contribute to cooperation between DERG and CIEM in Vietnam established two decades ago, with as first collaborative initiative the 1999 Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) for the Vietnamese economy. The SAM database remains one of the most comprehensive for any emerging economy, said to be essential for any modern economy-wide market-oriented analysis. Further collaboration resulted in the Vietnamese Access to Resources Household Survey (VARHS) carried out every few years and progressively covering 12 provinces across Vietnam to provide a 'richly detailed picture of the life and work of rural families in Vietnam'. A further survey addressed small and medium enterprises in 10 provinces to understand constraints, economic performance and growth. This was captured in cross-sector data reports, research reports, syntheses and in-depth studies, academic papers and policy briefs. Other studies followed. Vietnam is also today one of the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. The collaboration established a collection of global and national climate data for use in a series of detailed studies linking climate outcomes to biophysical and eventually economic outcomes. Vietnam continues to have one of the most detailed economic analyses of climate change in the world.

"The survey results are used by many agencies. Policies for the development and promotion of SMEs are a government priority, and the datasets provide opportunities for deepening understanding. Influenced by the SDGs, a module on inequality and vocational training will now be included. Danida was unique in its focus on the long term, systematic building up of survey data and insights over time."

Source: Interviews and Report on research and capacity building activities in Vietnam.

Development Economics Research Group, 2000-2015

CONFLICT, PEACE AND SECURITY: LESSONS LEARNED FROM A BSU RESEARCH PROJECT IN A FRAGILE CONTEXT (UGANDA)

Research funded under the BSU programme at Gulu University in Northern Uganda focused on issues of post-IDP camp security, post-conflict demography and health, social cohesion and forgiveness, and land conflicts. New insights on human security dynamics after internal displacement include, among others, the following:

• After leaving the camps, IDPs experience a post-resettlement dip in health status because they have less access to treatment. The longer-term effects of internal displacement on health and mental health require follow-up.

• Former IDPs are food insecure; trends include acute malnutrition among children below five years.

• Unmarried women, widows and landless young men are vulnerable and more likely to remain behind.

• Urbanisation of former camps is insensitive to the cultural need to rebury the dead in home villages.

• Small-scale land conflicts between individuals, families, clans, businesspeople, district and national authorities are a threat to human security.

• Where access to land and land rights are insecure, willingness to invest resources is affected.

• The importance of local level forgiveness for re-weaving the social fabric of everyday life was emphasised over 'trial justice' and traditional justice.

Source: BSU report, summary and interview.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE UPTAKE OF RESEARCH FINDINGS BASED ON EVALUATION SURVEY RESPONSES

"The GREEiNSECT project was in the frontier for bringing insect farming on the agenda in Kenya and regionally in East Africa. It directly impacted that Kenya developed a standard for the use of insects in animal feed. It also paved the way for one partner institution to be selected by the World Bank to establish a regional centre of excellence for insects as sustainable food and feed, implementing a curriculum for insect farming in food systems. The coordinator was - directly because of the Danida supported research activities – invited by EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) to contribute to write a scientific opinion on insect production and consumption, to support the revision of the EU novel food legislation to allow insects to be approved as food. The EU standards are important for global trade of insects and will impact on the development of the sector elsewhere."

"Improved national policies and guidelines in malaria treatment and in reproductive health. We are currently working with the National laboratory testing a point-of-care HIV screening test."

"The ADMER project provided excellent data which formed the basis of antimicrobial resistance control activities in Ghana."

"Specific to our project, monitoring impact of mass drug administration for control of lymphatic filariasis informed the distribution operations."

"The outcome of the project was used as the basis of policy formulation and revision. Also, the local communities, particularly the community forest user groups, have been replicating the best practices of the project intervention in several parts of the country."

"The research results are being taken up through district level dissemination meetings/forums and national level workshops [in Ghana]. ... Those taking up the results are local communities engaged in charcoal production. They are using the results to engage local government and national government agencies involved in the charcoal commodity chain to improve the use of charcoal revenue for local benefits."

"Our research on placental malaria has contributed very significantly to the development of the vaccines to prevent it, which are currently undergoing clinical trials in several African countries."

"Our work in mining and oil and gas governance has been used by national and sub-national CSOs to boost their advocacy campaigns. International bodies such as OXFAM and NRGI have also reached out for advice. Industry players (companies) who prefer anonymity also feel they have benefited from insights offered by our research."

"The local NGO …. (which works to ensure women's rights) designed an intervention to help women experiencing Intimate partner Violence using our project findings."

"Antibiotic sales in Ghana have been described, and quality of antibiotic drugs evaluated – showing major problems with active drug content in drugs sold from smaller pharmacies and peddlers. Improvement of laboratory methods such as antibiotic susceptibility testing was accomplished. Much of the data and other scientific knowledge generated by the project have been used to implement antibiotic policy issues in Ghana."

Source: Project completion report.

4.4   Negative consequences

Finding 41. *Very few stakeholders consulted could identify negative consequences of Danida's support, but examples highlight important challenges related to stress over home and work commitments, insufficient time to complete PhD studies, mismatches in contracts, tension between cooperating partners, and even threats aimed at researchers.*

Only 10 survey respondents and a few persons interviewed recorded any negative consequences of Danida's funding, but those identified highlight areas of potential risk:

• A number of research coordinators in the South felt extreme stress over project or additional financial administration amidst

tight teaching schedules and other obligations; institutions do not appear sympathetic to their plight.

- Some staff members described great difficulties with synchronising their university contracts and Danida's contracts, apparently resulting from problematic communication or arrangements in university administrations; in some cases there were gaps between the two, and if during the Danida funding period university contracts ended, other persons were hired in the positions, and they came back to find out they did not have a job anymore.

- Conflicts arose that were challenging to resolve, for example where Ghanaian partners wanted to give exclusive rights to results to a private company which the Northern partners and Danida resisted, or where there were early on differences between Southern and Northern partners about the direction that Gulu University should develop, supported by BSU (in its first phase).

- Sometimes projects were closed, yet PhD students had not yet completed their studies. In cases of economic stress this meant, among others, that they could not complete their fieldwork. Frequent changes in research themes were also seen as demotivating partnerships when projects cannot continue.

- For young mothers, being away from children for prolonged periods in Denmark presented some logistical difficulties.

- The long-term commitment of donors in general, and Danida specifically, was questioned in certain cases of (perceived) sudden withdrawals from a particular project, institution or country.

- There were instances of researchers in the South receiving threats from government officials due to the focus of their research.

5 INFLUENCING FACTORS: BOUNDARIES AND IMPERATIVES

5.1 Introduction and framing

This chapter examines a number of key influences that have shaped the portfolio, its implementation and performance over the past decade, and the implications for Danida's development research support. While not comprehensive, they highlight important aspects for consideration in future strategies. The framework in Figure 13 highlights the many influences observed by the evaluation on Danida's approach, priorities and performance in supporting development research. Not all are discussed here; only those relevant for the terms of reference and considered important for future action.

FIGURE 13: KEY INFLUENCES ON DANIDA'S APPROACH, PRIORITIES AND PERFORMANCE IN ITS SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH, IDENTIFIED DURING THE EVALUATION

INFLUENCES ON DANIDA'S SUPPORT TO RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT IMPACT
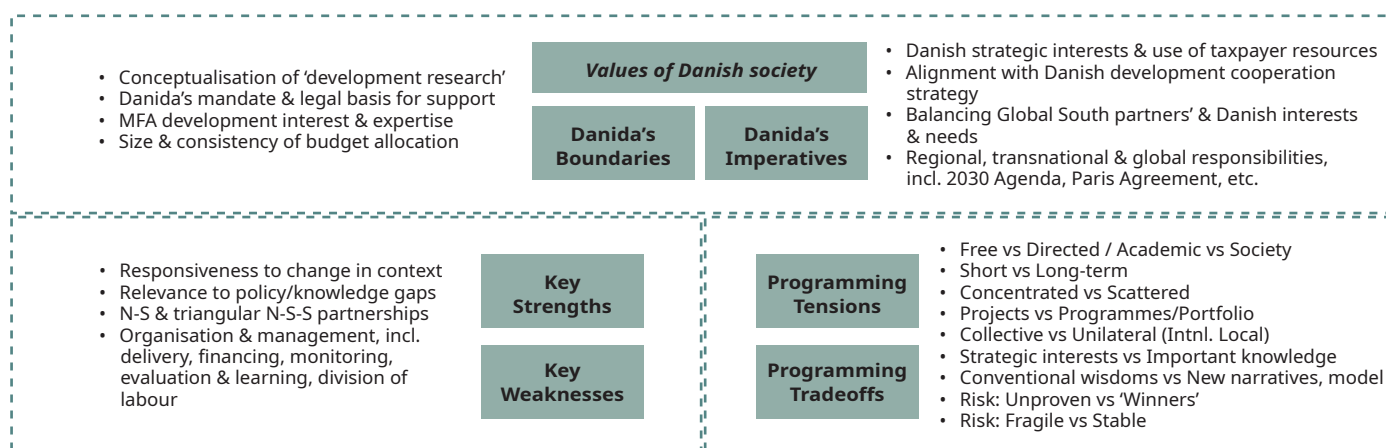
i. **Imperatives, boundaries and 'being Danish'**. These aspects highlight what cannot be ignored or circumvented in Danida's planning and implementation of development research support. They establish limits to what has been and can be done. The values (and strengths) in Danish society further shape the boundaries within which it can manoeuvre. Together, these aspects are a strong indicator of Danida's (potential) niche in development research.

ii.   **Tensions and trade-offs**. The evaluation identified at least seven prominent tensions that have influenced Danida's modalities and aspects of their implementation. Such tensions require decisions about trade-offs and the level of risk that the organisation is prepared to take.

iii.   **Strengths and weaknesses**. At least four areas showed particular strengths and/or weaknesses that have to be accounted for or balanced in order to enhance the chance of success. They also indicate areas to strengthen or to build on.

5.2   Alignment with development cooperation

Finding 42. *Good efforts at alignment between development cooperation and development research demanded by Danida's mandate and legal framework have been hampered by the absence of a development research strategy or clear niche, and by changes in MFA capacities and priorities.*

Danida's research development mandate was articulated in the 2012 Act on Danish Development Cooperation: "*Research grants may be given for strengthening research capacity and creating new knowledge in developing countries*" and in similar wording in the annual Finance Bill. Several development cooperation strategies directed Danida's planning over the years, greatly influenced by political developments (Figure 14).

FIGURE 14: TIMELINE FOR THE (CO-)EVOLUTION OF DANIDA'S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH SUPPORT, 2000-2018
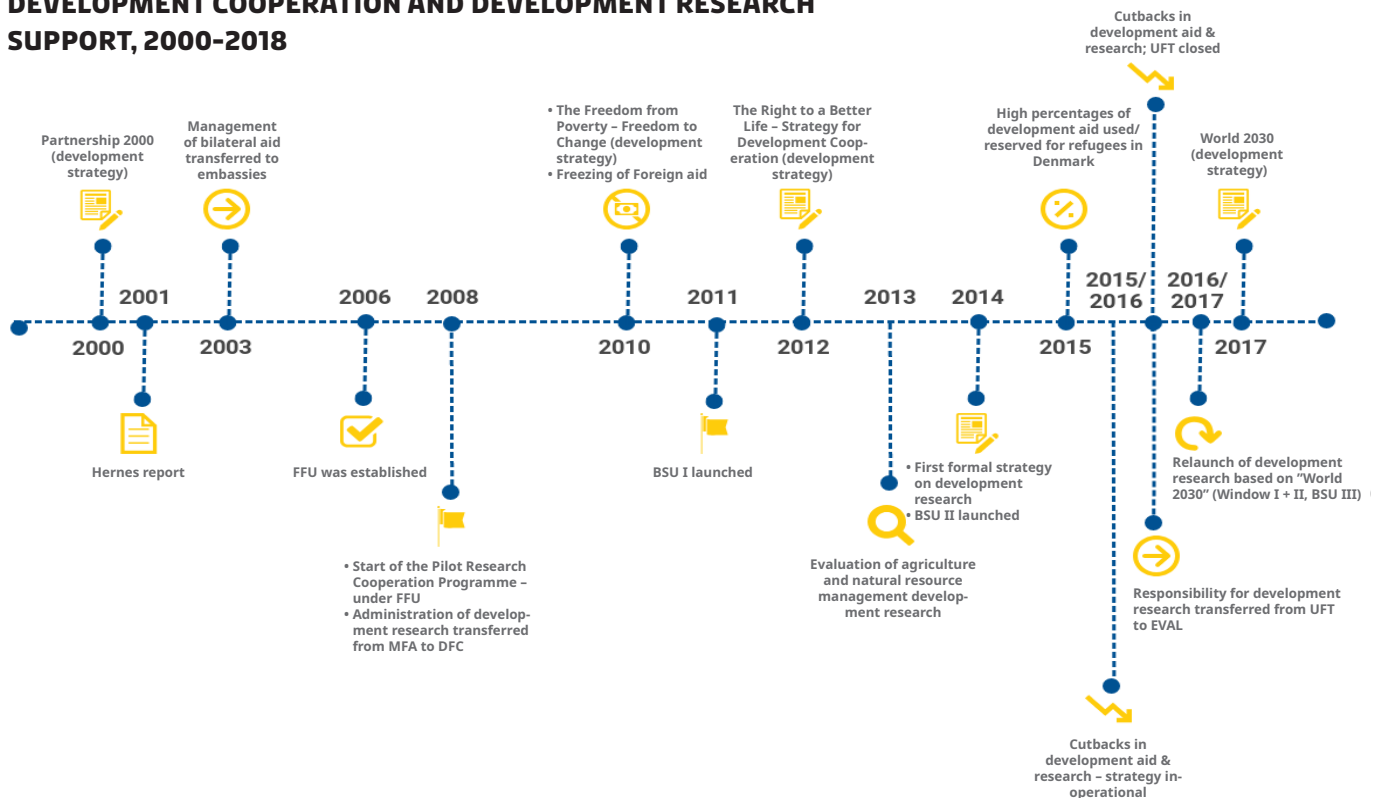
Yet the first strategy established by Danida specifically for development research[100] was in operation for only a brief period before being terminated due to severe financial cutbacks in 2015. Before that time, in the absence of a strategy the Council for Development Policy committed to aligning research development with development cooperation as recommended in earlier reviews, and this is well reflected in the evolution of approaches and priorities between 2008 and 2015.[101] [102] However, a strategy that gave direction yet allowed for flexibility would have made for a more stable approach as well as more systematic alignment, strengthened coherence and synergy between the two interconnected fields of work and with other donor initiatives, and sharper attention to priority issues in line with articulated Danish values, such as a human rights-based approach and gender equality.

Furthermore, over decades the management of development research in MFA was handled by development and sector specialists in administering units such as UFT and BSA. According to a number of key persons with first-hand insights, reductions in MFA staff numbers and in development specialists have had a significant negative influence on the interest and capacities in MFA to support development research, making the task of the remaining champions much more difficult and time-intensive.

Finding 43. *Its near-total absence in The World 2030, coupled to the low budget allocation (Chapter 2), shows that research development has a low profile in international development. Yet it has to respond to shifts in development cooperation, and without a clear niche or strategy might move in directions that discourage the relatively small Danish development research community.*

The World 2030 was informed by the May 2016 Review of the Danish Foreign and Security Policy and by key trends in Denmark and globally. It was approved in the Danish Parliament by a wide range of parties, from the liberal to the conservative, and political priorities of the two "blocks" in the Danish parliament have also moved closer, with both focusing on Danish interests, including protecting Denmark against refugee and migrant inflows. This makes *The World 2030* likely to sustain over the next decade as a stable basis for development cooperation – and hence for development research.

---

100   *Strengthening research capacity: Strategic framework for Danish support for development research 2014-2018.*

101   Such as the Council for Development Policy, various parts of the Ministry including EVAL, DFC and FFU.

102   For example, the shift to South-driven and larger projects, the intensifying of capacity development at institutional level, and the alignment of some research themes with development cooperation foci, most recently highlighted by the shift to a stronger emphasis on Danish strategic sector interests.

Key changes that are likely to influence a development research strategy include the shift from a strong focus on the effects and alleviation of poverty as well as long-term partnerships with low-income countries, to a focus on Danish interests such as commercial development, migration concerns and security risks. Humanitarian and development cooperation are being integrated and will therefore require more emphasis on countries in (violent) conflict at the same time as a shift to middle income countries[103]. It advances the prevention of migration and the promotion of Danish commercial interests, links more closely to security policies, redefines the modality of collaboration with civil society[104], links explicitly to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and proposes four new thematic areas undergirded by 'Danish values', a 'whole of society' approach and a special focus on the youth.

These priorities will have to influence development research support too. Despite a few statements about the intended use of 'knowledge' and 'research results', it has a low profile in *The World 2030* – just one paragraph, and primarily in the context of 'Partnering with Denmark' in transition and growth countries with societal challenges that match the Danish strengths. This situation poses a challenge to development research planning and advocacy. Full alignment with these foci and priorities are likely to conflict with many researchers' demands for a freer approach to supporting development research – one that builds solidly long-established relationships with partners in the South, and thematic areas that consider Danish *research* strengths coupled to expertise in development. Interviews with key informants highlighted a fear that aligning too closely with development cooperation will dilute Danish researchers' and Danida's commitment to how best to serve the interests of the South, and negatively affect the interest and commitment of an already small group of development research experts in Denmark. This places a responsibility on both Danida and the research community to help ensure that a sound balance is maintained between Danish and partner country interests – and that more, rather than fewer, researchers are attracted to work on development issues.

---

103 Both Danish development and humanitarian assistance thus now focus on three categories of countries: (i) poor fragile states, (ii) poor, stable countries, and (iii) 'transition and growth' economies, typically middle-income countries.

104 Long-term framework agreements with larger NGOs were discontinued; all NGOs had to compete for funds for short-term projects, and only projects in line with the targeted SDGs were eligible for support.

5.3 Interest and expertise in MFA

Finding 44. *The potential for uptake and use of the research findings in MFA and partner countries for the benefit of development is diminished by the lack of capacity, imperatives and incentives in MFA in Denmark and in Danish embassies to help advocate for, and support development research.*

Development interventions should be backed by some knowledge about what works and what does not, for whom, when, under what circumstances, and so on. Pertinent, timely research can fulfil this role. Yet there are few signs that research projects have contributed directly to Danish development cooperation programming. For reasons discussed below, Danish embassies are seldom active actors in creating synergies between research and development cooperation strategies. As a result, there is very little, if any, take-up of research results by embassies in country programming or related initiatives. Since embassies are not required to fulfil a specific role in development research except helping with the assessment of proposals, the divide has been growing until implementation of FFU Window 2. Here, with more alignment with Denmark's strategic interests and hence with the interests of the (at present still only 35) sector specialists in certain embassies, the situation could change – but even then, their expertise might not quite tie up with the areas being researched.

The phasing out of the Minor Studies and initiatives such as ReCom[105] – the funding channels that were in principle most directly supportive of country programming – highlights the challenges faced in making research directly useful to development cooperation initiatives. Technical (development and sector) capacities in MFA in Denmark and in the embassies, the time and priorities of embassy staff, foci and timing of research (*i.e.*, long periods before results emerge), difficulties in working in unstable contexts or immature institutions, and loss of institutional memory all work against prioritising research. It is not a situation unique to Danida or MFA; the evaluation – albeit in a limited scan of other donors – could not find a good example in smaller agencies and foreign services of a close relationship between research and development cooperation.

There are of course exceptions in some embassies. In Vietnam, a sector counsellor made limited efforts to support the building of partnerships between Danish companies, line ministries and research institutions. There were also examples in other countries where the enthusiasm and expertise of key embassy personnel gave significant support to particular projects or areas of research. But these all depend on individuals'

---

105 Reasons said to have been the high transaction costs, timing of useful inputs and changes in priorities given limited funding.

energy and interests, not on institutionalised dialogue or other impera-
tives or incentives in the system.

On the counter side, examples were given in the case study countries
where arrangements to attract embassy staff were poorly attended,
which led to great disappointment. Occasional briefings have proved to
have little effect, and there is no formal dialogue or efforts to consider
how the research can better inform the country programme through a
regular and well-structured dialogue. In two of the case study countries
the interviewed embassy staff noted that they would appreciate some
guidance – not a database – on what is being done and what value could
be derived from the research processes and findings, while in the third
country there was considerable interest in opportunities to make better
connections between country programmes and research.

Finding 45. *The screening of FFU-proposals treats relevance to development
cooperation as of somewhat lesser importance compared to quality, and
the broad thematic areas provide for diverse, often narrowly defined topics.
There is thus limited correlation between the problems studied and the
specific interests of Danish development cooperation, both at strategic and
country programme level. Formal processes also prevent quick action, further
diminishing the chance of research with immediate relevance to development
cooperation programming.*

Discussions during the evaluation highlighted that FFU Window 1
research is seldom relevant to development cooperation strategies
(overall) and programming in embassies, and research results are not
used to inform either of the two. For example, in Uganda, out of the four
reviewed FFU North-driven projects only one – the TrustLand project on
land conflicts – was directly relevant to the priorities of the Danish
embassy; this led to some engagement with project staff. Similarly, BSU
support to Gulu University had direct relevance to Danida's support for
peace and reconciliation in the region. For the other projects in Uganda
the research foci were too specific to appeal to embassy staff. And with
regard to health projects, the embassy was interested in AIDS, included
in the country programme, rather than research on other diseases.

In another situation, interesting topics in health were pursued in Burkina
Faso, yet there was nowhere the research could 'land'. Health was not
a priority in Denmark's country programme and the embassy did not
have the finances to initiate a dialogue in a sector with which they were
not familiar; on the other hand, water and agriculture were government
priorities, and while direct engagement with the government would
have enhanced the impact potential of research in these areas, research-
ers were not interested in pursuing such strategies. Current processes
also do not allow priority work to be proactively promoted, say where
embassies or sector specialists wish to encourage a local university to

*.... A paradigm shift is required
in the development cooperation:
Development assistance will
continue to be vital but .... will
be increasingly catalytic. This is
a final break with the view that
development is a task that first
and foremost requires official
development assistance.*

The World 2030

pursue a particular area of work of immediate importance. The long FFU application process stands in the way of quick action.

Given these challenges, an alternative approach is to focus on building proactively and over a significant period a field of work that has a very good likelihood to be of importance for at least a decade, as was done with the local-to-global challenge of climate change expertise in Vietnam.

Finding 46. *The proposal assessment process displays some tensions around the balance between technical quality, and the relevance and importance of projects.*

The one mechanism that fosters some alignment between development cooperation and research, the inclusion of the Danish embassies in the FFU assessment process has presented some challenges. Lightening the burden of work on embassies by shifting their participation in the proposal assessment process to the Phase 1 pre-qualification stage rather than the Phase 2 full technical proposal assessment[106] [107] was sensible and appreciated. Nevertheless, several FFU members confirmed that they put greater value on the technical 'quality' assessment criterion – above relevance to national priorities or to development cooperation (or other issues), and that embassy inputs can "lack value". Occasional clashes have been reported between sector specialists who considered a proposal to be very interesting and pertinent, and FFU who felt that the *research* rationale or potential was not sufficient, and hence was not prepared to support what appeared to be a consulting assignment. Yet some embassy representatives interviewed noted that they put significant effort into such assessments, mobilising persons both within and outside the embassy to assist with the many proposals that are annually submitted – despite the fact that they are often stretched for the time and expertise needed. And in an exceptional case in 2018, all embassy inputs had to be ignored due to the refusal of certain embassies to participate in the assessment due to resource constraints.

A key challenge in the highly competitive application process is therefore to determine which of the two main objectives of Danida's research support has pre-eminence – research capacity strengthening or the production of useful applied knowledge that can solve (urgent) develop-

---

106   Prior to 2013, the embassies were invited to provide comments on the relevance of the Phase 2 applications (full proposals based on the pre-qualification process in Phase 1) in the annual meetings in April.

107   Considering the relevance of the project to partner countries' national development priorities and research policies; the potential to contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development; the potential effects on relevant public and private stakeholders; and the immediate applicability to Danish development programmes/projects.

ment problems – or to be certain to select proposals with the best balance between quality and relevance, something that needs expert, very-well informed input from country representatives, at present the responsibility of embassies and national screening committees in two countries only.

5.4 Politics and the size and predictability of budgets

Finding 47. *The political context in Denmark has hindered the implementation of a strategic approach based on reasonably predictable priorities and budgets. This has diminished opportunities to establish a clear niche for Danish research, long-term strategic plans and initiatives, and to advocate effectively for development research as priority for funding and use in development cooperation strategies.*

Over the past decade the significant changes in the Danish political environment have meant that successive governments have been steered by political groupings with somewhat different ideologies about the role and direction of foreign policy and ODA (Annex M). This has had a marked effect on MFA and Danida's financing and programming: Out of 15 countries Danida is at present the 11th largest funder of development research (Figure 15) and 14th in support to the higher education sector out of 15 countries (Figure 16). The small size and especially unpredictability of the annually allocated budget place a severe limitation on how many and what type of initiatives can be supported per year. It hinders long-term thinking as well as effective advocacy in Denmark for increased support to development research.

FIGURE 15: TOTAL ODA TO RESEARCH 2008-17 (USD MILLION, CURRENT PRICES)
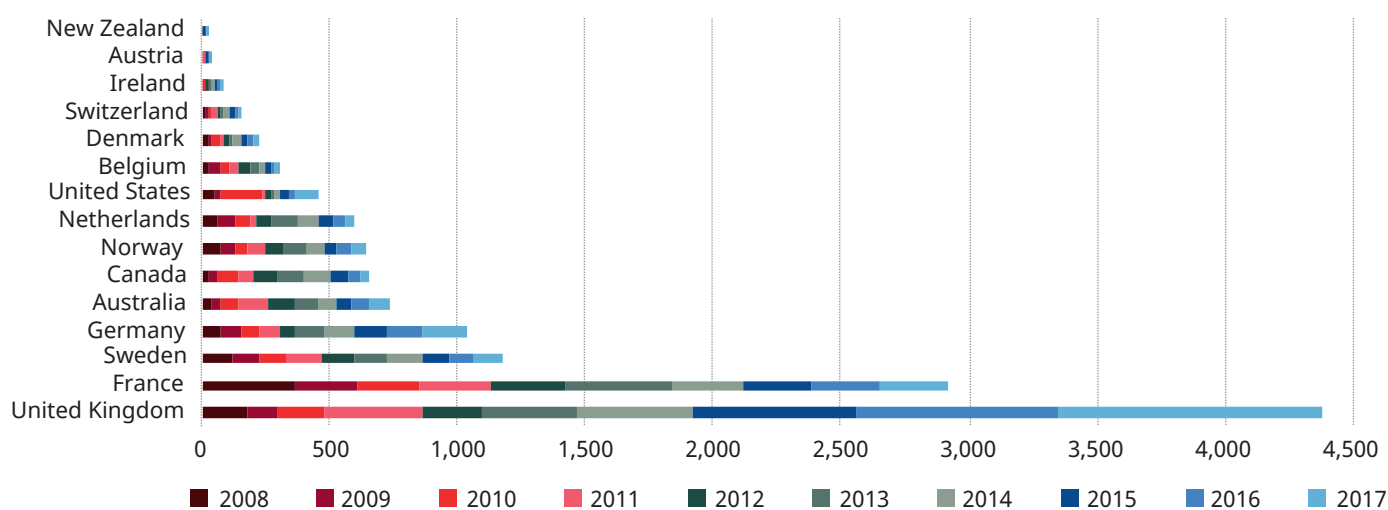
Source: OECD/DAC International Development Statistics (IDS) online database.

FIGURE 16: TOTAL ODA TO HIGHER EDUCATION 2008-17 (USD MILLION, CURRENT PRICES)
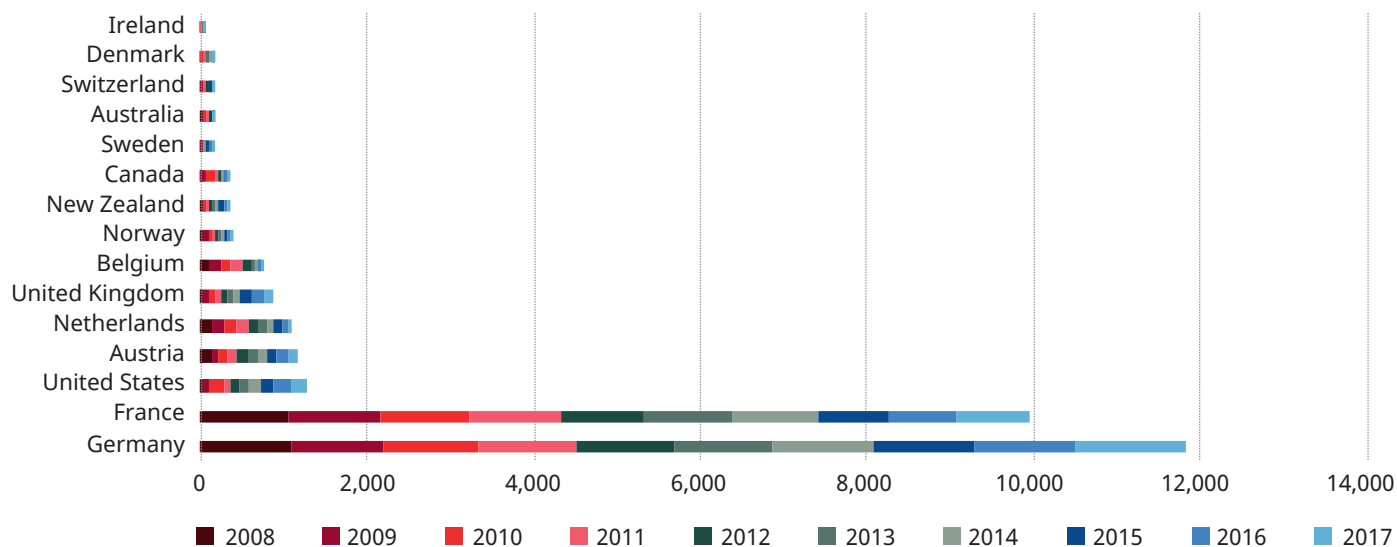
Source: OECD/DAC International Development Statistics (IDS) online database.

On the one hand flexibility – not being bound by a rigid strategy – is useful for context-sensitive, dynamic programming. On the other hand, it makes it difficult to have a long-term vision for development research or establish a clear niche that provides Danish development research with a comparative advantage over time. It has already led to short-term, ad hoc rather than strategic planning; sudden cuts in modalities in 2015-2016 as the development cooperation budget plunged (Section 2.3); relatively rapid changes in thematic priorities; and development research as low priority in development cooperation budget allocations (for example 0.8% for Denmark, that of Sweden 2.2%).[108]

On the one hand *The World 2030* opens possibilities for the higher visibility of development research, but the brief reference to the use of knowledge makes it unlikely that under present circumstances and in the absence of effective evidence-based advocacy development research will gain visibility and higher budgets despite the clear demand from the research communities in Denmark and in the South.

---

108   Source: OECD/DAC International Development Statistics (IDS) online database. Note: As development research and development cooperation funds are differently allocated and calculated, direct comparison between agencies require nuanced interpretation.

5.5   The concept of 'development research'

Finding 48. *The lack of an explicit conceptualisation or definition of development research has allowed Danida flexibility in its support but has also limited engagement with new approaches and the demands of fast-evolving global and Southern priorities, challenges and opportunities. A too-broad conceptualisation of development research also complicates proposal selection processes.*

Danida's support treats 'development research' as all research that is conducted in its partner/priority countries in the South between Danish and Southern partners, and that aims to strengthen research capacities while solving a certain development problem in line with national and international priorities. This conceptualisation allows a margin of freedom that is desirable in an international community of researchers; it allows significant freedom to choose partners and areas of work across a relatively broad spectrum of areas of interest. In essence, it argues that all research that builds capacities in the South to 'solve problems' is relevant and useful.

It does *not* encourage or incentivise new ways of thinking or conducting research in line with the demands of an era defined by the effects of the Anthropocene and increasing 'problems without borders', illustrated by climate change disasters, migration and refugees, and sudden impacts on global value chains due to war or pandemics; the Fourth Industrial Revolution; massive and accelerating inequalities both between and within countries; increasing assertiveness in the South about 'decolonising' higher education and dealing with power in systems; and global power shifts as well as increasing geopolitical tensions reflected in increasing instability in global systems as well as countries. At the same time the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development called upon the world to engage with the interconnectedness of the SDGs and the need for large-scale transformations in order to secure the future of the planet with all its ecosystems while 'leaving no-one behind'. And in many international forums the South have been vocal in demands for countries to act on curbing excesses by the rich that end up affecting the South the most.

All these issues have very significant implications for development efforts from local to global level. There is an urgency to finding appropriate frameworks, approaches, and alliances that can address these challenges and opportunities. It demands new roles and capacities for universities and researchers, and raises the question to what extent researchers have a *responsibility* to contribute in ways more suited to resolving the challenges posed by this era rather than those of the

We are at the beginning of a revolution that is fundamentally changing the way we live, work and relate to one another. In its scale, scope and complexity, [it] is unlike anything humankind has experienced before.

Klaus Schwab, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, 2016.

last.[109] Among others it will demand from researchers in both the South and the North always to be sensitive to, or work across disciplinary and sector boundaries with the interconnectedness of issues and actions;[110] recognise the value of often hidden or neglected voices, knowledge systems and narratives that are outside dominant models of development[111]; consider the implications for ecosystems and the environment irrespective of the focus of the research; share and transfer forefront technologies and approaches while mutually respecting and protecting intellectual property[112]; and engage with values and norms such as those that have been highlighted in the 'Research Legitimacy' dimension of the RQ+ analysis in this evaluation (Section 3.4).

While FFU calls for proposals and assessment criteria have touched on some of these issues, such as encouraging larger multi-disciplinary teams and gender-sensitive approaches, the extent to which they have been embodied in the implementation of the research projects has not been tracked or systematically assessed during or at the conclusion of projects. This indicates that Danida might not be alert or explicit enough in its engagement with how best to shape research that is highly relevant for development. From this perspective, the focus balances towards 'research' more than 'development' and runs some risk of promoting 'research in developing countries' rather than 'research for development'.

Furthermore, some frustrations were also voiced in Denmark about the extremely broad scope of what is today considered to fit under the umbrella of 'development research', and FFU representatives admitted that the concept has become somewhat diluted over the years. The scope of development research can mean anything from research in development studies as a field of social science, to any research that aims at providing answers to development problems. The more different fields a call permits, the harder it is for FFU to justify – within the same call and the same council – a ranking of rather short research proposals from fields like medicine, anthropology and energy.

---

109   https://www.nature.com/articles/nclimate1150

110   That is, viewing development and the research that is done through a (complex) systems lens.

111   It is not enough only to depend on 'local researchers' to provide context-sensitive perspectives. Often educated in the North or in universities in the South that base their curricula on the North, they can also be insensitive to norms and models that do not reflect the curricula and frameworks on which their education had been.

112   A recent report by the African Development Bank emphasised that African universities are too focused on traditional teaching and publication rather than on innovation and transfer of technology https://4irpotential.africa/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AFDB_4IRreport_Main.pdf

5.6   Balancing Global South and Danish interests

Finding 49. *Danida has made impressive efforts to balance Global South and Danish priorities, capacities and needs in its support to research in service of low-income countries. It has helped both Danish development researchers and the grants portfolio administrators to build valuable experience, among others in managing power dynamics in North-South cooperation, which will be useful as FFU Window 2 takes root.*

Strategic decisions made over the last 10 years indicate at least two shifts that are likely to persist over the next few years despite: (i) giving the Global South in low-income countries more ownership and opportunity to manage and direct grants and projects; and (ii) drawing closer to strategic interests in Denmark through support around industry and market interests in middle income countries, which could blur any difference between 'development' research and other categories. It will be crucial for Danida and the development research community to safeguard the value that this has brought, and could continue to bring, to research that is executed in the South – irrespective of the source of funds or funding modality.

Initiatives such as South-driven projects, institutional development initiatives and grants management; insistence on 60% of North-driven funds being allocated and spent in the South; the retrospective study of African recipients of Danida's support; National Screening Committees in Nepal, Ghana and Tanzania as well as FFU members from the South; and efforts to engage proposal reviewers in the South – all are examples of how development research portfolios can be managed for such balance. This is imperative, not only because of undertakings in development cooperation strategies to consider the interests of the South, but also given that power tends to reside in the North as source of both funding and research expertise. Furthermore, reports, the survey and interviews conducted as part of the evaluation show that the Danish development research community, although small in number, has largely displayed sensitivity and relevant expertise in their cooperation with Southern partners, with many skills in management, supervision and the conduct of research in Southern contexts that researchers working primarily in the North may not command.

It is important that these strengths are not lost, but instead inspire the larger research community in Denmark if 'development research' is increasingly conducted in middle income countries that might attract new cohorts of researchers.

5.7 The SDGs and other international responsibilities

Finding 50. *While the MDGs were not a special focus, Danida appears to have been prescient in the selection of thematic areas before 2015, which early on laid the groundwork for research in relation to the SDGs. The SDGs have since become an explicit framework for Danida's support, but FFU calls appear only superficially aligned with the SDGs, and it is not clear that there is true commitment to their essence.*

This reflects my aspiration to use the SDGs as a key parameter in the design and execution of Danish foreign policy. The SDGs provide us with a blueprint for a progressive world. ... Denmark must be at the forefront of the effort to implement the SDGs. We must set examples. Build alliances across traditional dividing lines. And we must push for action at all levels: nationally, the EU and globally.

Danish Foreign Minister
Copenhagen, 9 Sept 2019.

There was a disconnect between the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the themes for FFU competitive grants before 2015 (Annex O), with the possible exception of a broad focus on sustainable development and health. However, in the last part of the decade the SDGs have been an explicit priority and framework both for development cooperation and for FFU calls for development research proposals[113]. In fact, examination of the themes before 2015 highlights how they have already laid some groundwork for the SDGs – not because the latter seem all-encompassing, but because of the strong promotion of research climate change and sustainable development throughout the decade of support, in line with the Nordic countries' early commitment to these areas of work.

Unsurprisingly, since 2015 almost every proposal finds it possible to place its problem within the SDG agenda.[114] Yet key concepts in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are not given any prominence – the urgent need for large-scale transformation; the 'indivisibility' of the SDGs that demands integrated, cross-goal and cross-disciplinary approaches to finding solutions that span ecosystems and human-nature interactions; and concerted attention to cross-cutting areas such as gender, youth and 'no-one left behind'[115] – themes that also recall the need for better performance in the 'Research Legitimacy' dimension of the RQ+ analysis. In fact, attention to the cross-cutting themes that

---

113   Development cooperation emphasises the importance of SDG16 (Peace, Justice and Institutions) and SDG17 (Partnerships), and three Global Goals considered additional priorities: SDG5 (Gender Equality), SDG7 (Sustainable Energy) and SDG13 (Climate). In line with a systems view of the world, the interconnected nature of the SDGs is acknowledged with SDG16 and 17 as 'connecting threads' among various priorities for each of three country categories (and including an 'informal SDG18' focusing on youth), as well as a 'whole of society' approach that builds on Danish knowledge, principles, values, competencies and strengths, and encourages engagement by actors across Danish society, particularly the private sector.

114   For example, the 2019 Windows 1 call for proposals includes sustainable economic development gender equality, humanitarian assistance, climate change resilience and state building and governance; all fit easily under one or more of the 17 Global Goals.

115   Noted in The World 2030 as the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including refugees and internally displaced people, and fragile states.

seems obvious from a Nordic perspective – especially gender equality and marginalised voices – are strikingly absent. FFU does not assess projects explicitly on any of these aspects; just including a reference to gender is not sufficient to ensure a gendered approach to the research. Minutes of FFU meetings hardly mention the SDGs, and FFU members as well as some researchers confirmed that linkages with the SDGs often appear to be a matter of presentation in proposals. FFU Window 2 calls of 2017-2019 state that the SDGs constitute an overall thematic framework, yet some of the very narrow country-specific research themes make their relevance to SDGs look artificial and contrived.[116] And while the SDGs have had a higher profile in the partner countries; national plans and discussions tend to be linked to the 2030 Agenda[117], and national screening committees are an example where linkages with the Global Goals are frequently points of discussion. But here too such discussions are said to focus on narrow and superficial thematic fit rather than the other characteristics encouraged in the 2030 Agenda.

Finding 51. *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its SDGs has not been sufficiently interrogated for its implications for North-South or triangular relationships and capacities.*

The 2030 Agenda emphasises that 'problems without borders' require new partnerships and ways of working across the world. This argument is also taken up in *The World 2030*. Yet Danida's research programming has not explored the implications for bilateral and multilateral relationships which are still based on a strong notion that capacities are to be developed in the South rather than the North. No effort has been made to foster an approach that recognises the need for capacity development in Denmark too, given the demand for new ways of thinking and working to resolve urgent problems where the impact of changes in global systems or specific ecosystems often have their most severe impact in the South.[118]

---

116   For example, around maritime issues the call proposes a few topics, such as e-navigation solutions and economic impact of piracy – which, while potentially useful for Ghana and beneficial for Danish trade and investments – seem rather marginal to the SDGs.

117   For example, Vietnam integrated the SDGs into its Socio-economic Development Plan (2016-2020) and developed a National Action Plan to enhance alignment with the SDGs, followed by the establishment and approval of the Vietnam SDG targets in 2016. In Uganda the development approaches of the National Development Plans have been refocused towards the achievements of the SDGs.

118   For example, through climate change or biodiversity destruction caused primarily by carbon emissions and other forms of pollution in the North, through bottlenecks in global food systems, or through asymmetries in the so-called 'rules-based order' established after the Second World War.

6 INFLUENCING FACTORS: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, TENSIONS AND TRADE-OFFS

6.1 Introduction

With reference to Figure 13, this chapter also focuses on several key aspects of Danida's support that have determined the performance of its portfolio to date – here focusing on strengths and areas in need of improvement, as well as choices and trade-offs that have to be made when designing and implementing funding modalities. While the tensions highlighted in this chapter are not a comprehensive list, they are some of those most important to address in future plans.

6.2 Responsiveness

Finding 52. *Danida's responsiveness – through processes managed by EVAL/ELK, FFU and DFC – has helped to shape the research financing and modalities in line with international and local developments.*

Finding 53. *At the same time, care is needed to ensure that ongoing evolution does not either create too much uncertainty, or ignore aspects in need of change, such as research that is allowed to continue past its prime without sufficient renewal and growth.*

Findings 54. *Too-frequent changes in themes for calls for proposals during some years have caused uncertainty and some 'gaming' of the system, but where themes have built on one another, they have allowed for longer-term engagement that tends to support productive partnerships.*

Danida's responsiveness has been displayed in several shifts, among others the following: (i) The ongoing efforts to rethink and improve modalities of support. (ii) The incorporation of the SDGs in FFU funding calls despite limitations, for example where narrowly defined projects poorly reflect the integrative, 'indivisible' nature of the SDGs. (iii) Changes in political priorities with shifting emphases on aspects such as human rights, gender and strategic sector interests – although their

integration into projects is often lacking.[119] (iii) Shifts in financing, with whole modalities terminated during the 2015-2016 funding cuts. (iv) Increasing alignment with new foci in development evaluation, for example through the implementation of Window 2.

The World 2030 strategy[120] does not prescribe any specific approach to development research programming, and Danida has the flexibility and opportunity to combine development cooperation and the interests of researchers in novel ways. However, shifting themes and requirements almost every year has fostered uncertainty about the future. Scientists have responded to new modalities and requirements but are building up resistance to too-frequent changes or to initiatives that might redirect development research too dramatically. Responsiveness to changing contexts can be overdone.

There is no consensus about whether it is positive or negative that thematic areas for FFU calls for change fairly frequently. Frequent changes in Danish development cooperation priorities[121] – and hence in FFU themes – mean that projects are frequently terminated before their full potential can be achieved; long-term engagement is important for capacity development as well as for the uptake of research results at national level. Frequent changes cause uncertainty and anxiety among researchers. The changes require researchers who did not get funded to re-frame their work in ever new ways that fit each new call. It also constrains the advancing of broader long-term development themes.[122] Some researchers noted that that one can game the system by tweaking the research angle to fit each new call.

The list of priority themes in Annex O shows that most themes last for 2-3 years[123], yet some were only supported for one year[124]. Others, such as 'Climate, energy and sustainable use of natural resources' – with

---

119 *Call 2014, 16.05.13.docx*; *Call 2015 Phase 1 Applications.pdf*; *Call 2016 Phase 1 Final.pdf* – two latter ones refer to a strategy document where HRBA plays a role, but human-rights based approach is not mentioned in any way in the call documents themselves.

120 *The World 2030: Denmark's Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Jan 2017.

121 During the period under evaluation (2008-2018), four strategies for Danish Development Cooperation were in force: Partnership 2000 (2000), Freedom from Poverty – Freedom to Change (2010), The Right to a Better Life – Strategy for Development Cooperation (2012); and The World 2030.

122 In Uganda, for instance health research (including both medical/clinical and medical anthropology approaches) has grown over the years to a large extent based on Danida funding. As 'health' ceased to be a priority FFU theme, the Danish health research could no longer be continued (new health research projects would not be funded under the FFU).

123 For instance, "ICT for development" (2014-2016) and "Medicine and health with special relevance for poor countries" (2008-2009).

124 E.g. "food security" (2009), "youth, education and employment" (2009).

---

slightly different formulations - provided opportunities for long-term support (2008-2012, and again in 2017-2018). The 'Right to Natural Resources" theme (2013) was inspired by the 'Right to a Better Life strategy' (2012).[125]

The evaluation was also given examples of groups that have been supported for a long time, risking the support of research past its prime at the cost of new initiatives. Such perceptions have led to accusations of 'old boys clubs' controlling too much of the development research funding (even if from different sources of Danida support). There is not enough evidence for the evaluation to make an informed assessment of the matter, but such perceptions raise the important issue of whether a period of support between 1.5 and five years is enough to build up the body of work and capacities needed to make a real, sustainable difference. A portfolio of projects has to respond to close monitoring of key indicators of performance, cognisant of obstacles to delivery. But the evidence that projects require no-cost extensions of more than a year indicates support of good research for at least six years, and that further support should depend on clear evidence of innovative, highly relevant expansion of the work. This is further discussed in Section 6.3.

6.3 Relevance

Finding 55. *The process guiding the FFU calls for proposals has success-fully encouraged alignment with national needs and priorities in partner countries in Windows 1 and 2. This develops awareness among researchers of the importance of ensuring relevance but does not ensure the uptake of results; filling the specific knowledge gaps the researchers identified – most often without the early engagement of influential users – might not be timely or seen as useful enough when the results are being disseminated.*

All calls for proposals in Window 1 and 2 indicate in their objectives the need to align proposals with national needs and priorities. Survey results indicate that nearly all respondents in the partner countries were of the view that grant allocations – and by implication, the annually determined thematic areas – were in line with the development goals and policies of their country.[126] The alignment has been facilitated by (i) the proposal assessment criteria applied by FFU, including the encouragement of partnerships with national authorities and/or the private sector to help ensure relevance to policy and practice, and (ii) the inclusion of the Danish embassies in the process of identifying annual thematic areas as well

---

125   The Danish government: The right to a better life: Strategy for Denmark's Development Cooperation. June 2012.

126   77% of 130 respondents in the South 'strongly agreed' with the statement that Danida's grant allocation was in line with the development goals and policies of the country/ies on which the grants were focused.

as assessing the relevance of the project to partner countries' national development and research policies and priorities.

The FFU thematic areas reflect broad priorities in Danish development cooperation strategies, which will normally also be aligned with some of the partner countries' priorities – which in turn are usually aligned with the SDGs. While such series of alignments might facilitate the interest of policymakers, policy advisors or other influential national actors in the area of work, the results are often not timely or useful enough to serve as policy input when the results are shared – unless a policy window opens and is grabbed in time to influence. And in an immature institutional environment, there might not be interest in the findings even if they are useful at that time.[127] This reflects the challenge of getting research to be applied in service of development – especially where thematic areas change frequently and a solid body of knowledge cannot be developed, or a problem of immediate importance is not the point of the research.

Finding 56. *FFU's demand for a clearly articulated knowledge gap in a research proposal is well in line with convention in research, but also opens the door to initiatives that find solutions or build a field of work for which there is little need.*

FFU meetings prioritise clearly written and analysed knowledge gaps in the proposal review. Their number one criterion is novelty, followed by relevance to the FFU established theme and then, in line with their mandate, at researcher-set knowledge gaps at project level. They have purposefully left the choice of which knowledge gaps to address to the researchers, giving them freedom to find a balance between their own interests and expertise, and international, national and/or local needs, although consultation with policymakers, the private sector and other potential stakeholders is encouraged. Researchers are able to set their focus of research based on gaps in knowledge they identify and consider important and are able to justify through arguments around the merit of research in that particular area, given their understanding of needs and problems.

Finding 57. *It is not clear to what extent the themes for Window 2 are relevant to partner countries' interests and able to provide for enough Danish expertise to ensure high quality research.*

As part of the launch of Window 2, Sector Counsellors in 14 Danish embassies were invited to propose specific themes within strategic priority areas of particular interest for both Denmark and the partner

---

127   Carden, F. (2009). *Knowledge to Policy: Making the most of development re-search*. Sage Publications Pvt Ltd.

countries. Yet there has as yet been no assessment of whether this is the case. Concerns have also been raised about whether appropriate Danish expertise was available to ensure high quality research in these areas. The most recent themes appear to address this situation – said to have been set up specifically to ensure mutual interest and benefit: encouraging some of the best Danish expertise to participate in development research, and ensuring a focus on urgent global challenges where the South is particularly vulnerable, so that Danish interests are not served at the cost of Southern interests. In line with the priorities of the new government in Denmark, Danida has now focused on the same issues in both Windows 1 and 2 – aligned with "what Danes are good at" and offering opportunities for innovation.[128]

Finding 58. *Danida's funding portfolio does not benefit from any transparently set or systematically analysed knowledge gaps for development research – not even in setting the thematic areas for competitive proposals.*

Assessing knowledge gaps in relation to Danish development (research) strategies and priorities is impeded by the lack of a strategy and systematic knowledge gap assessment processes; the first and, so far only, strategic framework for development research[129] was implemented for a short while only due to cutbacks in public finance for development assistance in 2015-2016. Yet partner countries have a large number of different development strategies at several levels and for several sectors, each with its own knowledge gaps, that can be systematically drawn upon. Even the process to identify FFU themes does not make use of systematic knowledge gap analysis to identify the themes of each call. With regard to Window 1 themes, the responsible MFA department consults with the FFU members prior to the launch of the application round (usually in September) in order to agree on the themes for the calls. The members of the committee have an opportunity to consider proposals for themes and suggest suitable texts. The Window 2 themes are drawn up in close collaboration with those responsible for strategic sector collaboration (notably the sector counsellors at the Danish embassies involved in this modality since its launch).

6.4   Partnerships

Finding 59. *Most North-South collaborations in Window 1 and BSU have worked very well. Good relationships between Danish and Southern research-*

---

128   At present identified as climate change and energy, the environment, natural resources and food; Orientering vedr. udviklingsforsknings ansøgningsrunder 2019-2020 – temaer of prioritering af støtte til forskning i lande tilknyttet det strategiske sektorsamabejde (SSC). EVAL, oktober 2019.

129   MFA, Danida (2014). "*Strengthening Research Capacity Strategic Framework for Danish Support for Development Research 2014-2018.*

ers have been an important reason for success – with 'good' defined by a series of largely common qualities somewhat differently prioritised by each side.

Both survey and case study interview data indicated few serious glitches in collaborations, even in tough situations. Only six of 141 survey respondents from among the Southern partners and only one of 66 respondents based in Denmark felt that a certain collaboration was not good. But there were challenges: 16% respondents from the South and 38% in Denmark could point to some problematic experiences. These were usually professionally resolved.

In response to an open survey question[130], both sides valued qualities in the relationship such as equality; fairness in terms of accountability, responsibility and benefits; as well as trust, openness and a good working atmosphere. Researchers in the South emphasised respect for 'the other', sufficient opportunities to share and gain, joint commitment to perform well, clarity about expectations and responsibilities, and commitment to those the project intends to benefit.

Danish researchers paid more attention to patience, tolerance, flexibility to adapt, and appreciation for other cultures. Where partnerships worked well, these qualities were on display. The empathetic attitudes and management skill of Danish researchers and research coordinators were widely praised; many PhD students felt that their Danish supervisors went well beyond what would have been expected to help students with their work and to make them feel welcome. Where personalities matched, close and personal friendships were forged – within and across university ranks – many of which continue after a project comes to an end. Relationships were deliberately nurtured on both sides, and joint workshops and conferences helped sustain relationships. In some cases, DFC is seen to have played an important part in facilitating and sustaining cooperation and communication.

Finding 60. *Glitches in relationships mostly relate to money, but also to the challenges in working across geographic, cultural and institutional boundaries.*

Overall, constructive, supportive attitudes were the norm among both the Southern and Northern partners. But there are instances where Danish researchers showed disillusionment with the level of commitment, capabilities and attitudes among partners in the South. Poor English language skills and different academic standards were frequently listed as reasons for intensive work needed to make partnerships work. On the

---

130   *"In your experience, what are the qualities that define "good collaboration" between development researchers in the Global North and the Global South?"*

other hand, some Southern partners experienced misunderstanding, or lack of respect or awareness of cultural differences. They also often struggled with their own institution's culture, regulations and inefficiencies.

The most common complaint in the survey and interviews was lack of budget transparency; examples were noted in both the Danish and Southern institutions. It was not always clear whose responsibility it was to pay for which expenses, who gets what and how much, how much was left, and even whom to ask about it. Lack of transparency about project finances made planning harder and undermined feeling of equality and mutual trust. There were inconsistencies in what payments were made, and accounting between institutions also presented problems. There was some unhappiness about the level of payment, both in terms of salaries and student stipends. The evaluation was not in a position to examine the merit of these statements.

RESEARCHERS FROM THE SOUTH ON CHALLENGES DURING COLLABORATION

"Back …. at my University, I barely had that relationship with my supervisors and in some instances some of them were not helpful. The lack of instrumentation limited my scope of work to a large extent. Equally, monthly stipends were woefully inadequate and were disbursed under conditions which sounded like threats."

"…. financial challenges for students especially when they are in their home university. The money was not paid in time …. The stipend also did not reflect the current economic situation in the home country. The financial administrative are very complex and characterised by bureaucracy at the home university."

"There were times it felt the global south carried a bigger burden of responsibility in ensuring successful delivery of the project."

"The 2014 Ebola epidemic in some West African countries resulted in my Danish partners being 'slow' to give me access to their facilities in Denmark. This resulted in a delay in my work …. I had to take a loan to complete my PhD."

"The Danish researchers had problems with their diets in the rural areas. They also wanted to stay in separate rooms while we are used to staying together."

"The partners in the north could not participate in the field trips in the south. Due to this lapse, the conceptual understanding of most of the northern partners presented a challenge."

"All the researchers from Denmark …. focused only on poverty and livelihoods in the fieldwork. But this was not the main focus of the project. They also used our data for papers and conferences without telling or referencing us."

RESEARCHERS FROM DENMARK ON CHALLENGES DURING COLLABORATION

"... the key factor is not what Danida does (or does not do). What in my view is much more important is what I will term the political economy of Southern Universities. They have so many students that the lecturers have very little (read no) time for research. Also, and perhaps related, the advancement in the system is not linked to scientific quality (publication in international, peer-reviewed journals). On the Danish side, we as researchers are not acknowledged and rewarded for the efforts we put into research capacity and popular extension (impact of the research in the Global South)."

"The worst experiences have had to do with bad management and researchers who did not always respect other disciplines or approaches than their own."

"Our Southern researchers were often overloaded with non-project duties imposed on them by the university system."

"The big challenge is the local hierarchy, there is a great distance from those who do the experiments to the managers who manage the grants."

"The coordinator has no control over 60% of the budget. It is impossible to plan, put in timely monitoring and audit. ... In our case the partner's budget suddenly ran out which meant less fieldwork ... I have no idea how a large part of money was spent. I just have to trust the South coordinator." "

"Our challenges thus far have arisen when we don't communicate well and then find ourselves with different ideas about what we're aiming for and how we're going to do it."

"It was a disaster because the partners were very stubborn. It seems as if their culture is to say 'yes' but not to do something. They don't want to be pushed around. The PhD candidates were not the best, and senior staff were not interested in the project. The Danish researchers were in the field while the local researchers were in their offices .... Their data from the field were of low quality. All of this caused a lot of conflict."

"I didn't have any really bad experiences, but the dilemmas of a privileged, western researcher collaborating with underprivileged research assistants in a non-western setting are complex and many. I was very happy to have a privileged economic foundation with me from Danida so that I could pay my research assistants a solid salary, but I still felt a certain level of exploitation throughout the duration of the work."

Finding 61. *The power of productive and long-term partnerships is most visibly displayed in many co-authored academic publications.*

Figure 17 and Figure 18 highlight the extent of co-authorship as well as the extent of participation in publishing by countries in the South and North. A large majority of papers (a total of 1,202 from 133 individual projects taken up in the Web of Science and used for the bibliometric analysis) were authored by between two and 10 authors, demonstrating what has been confirmed in interviews and survey data: publications are generally crafted between the researchers from the North and South, and the development of capacities for publishing was one of the main benefits experienced among PhD and less experienced researchers.

There were examples given where Southern researchers were locked out of publication, but these appeared to be exceptions, and reasons were not further explored. The evaluation also did not include study of information on first authorship; anecdotal information in a few of the projects studied indicated that local researchers most often took the lead in local publications, and Danish researchers in international publications, but this was not verified. The famous long-standing Bandim Health Project has been responsible for the large number of co-authors from Guinea-Bissau. This project, although an extreme

example, is one of several that highlight the value of long-standing partnerships and ongoing support for productive, important research in a well-crafted niche area where it can really make a difference – and where other funding sources help build a field inspired by initial grants from an organisation such as MFA/Danida.

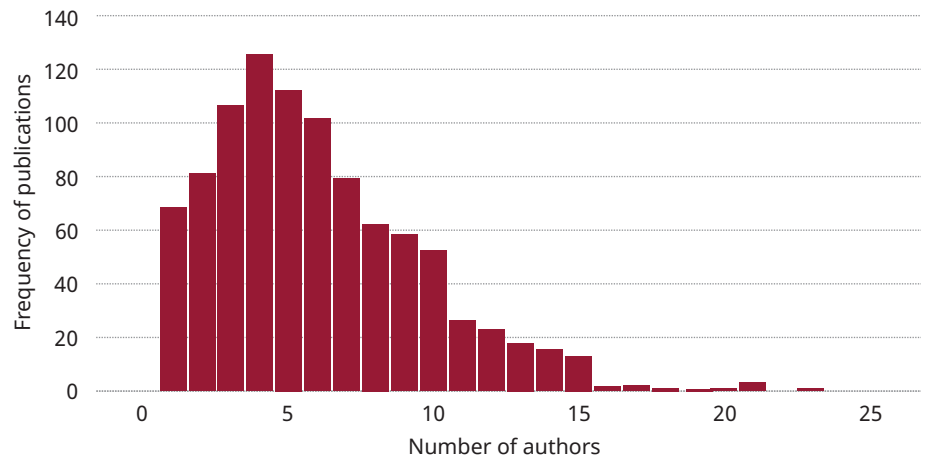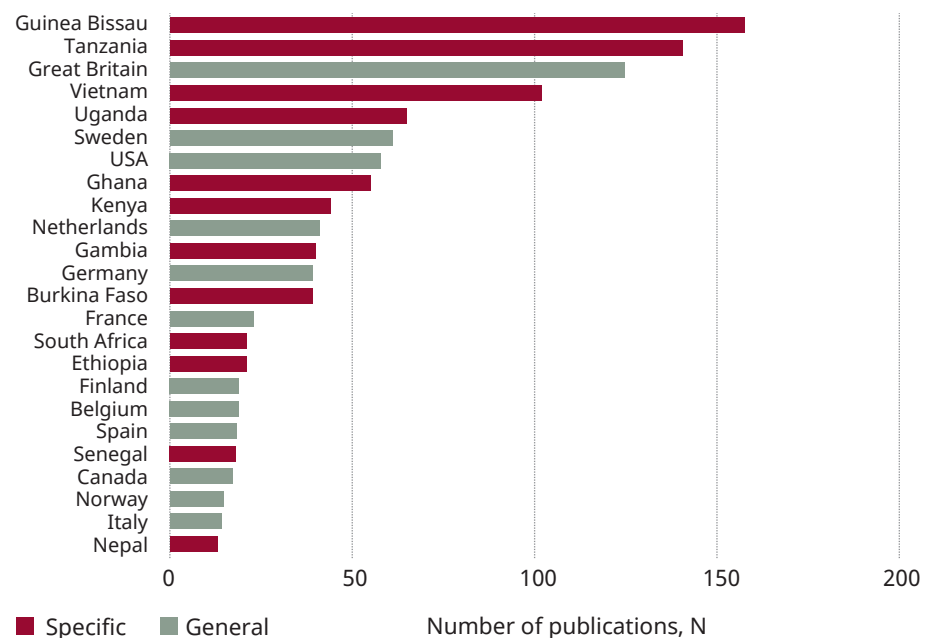**FIGURE 17: NUMBER OF AUTHORS PER PUBLICATION INCLUDED IN THE BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY[131]**

FIGURE 18: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF CO-AUTHORS IN PUBLICATIONS INCLUDED IN THE BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY (EXCLUDING DENMARK)[132]

---

131   Details in Section 4.4.
132   Details in Section 4.4.

THE MANY CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE LONG-STANDING BANDIM HEALTH PROJECT PARTNERSHIP IN GUINEA-BISSAU

While Danida has been only one of its many Danish and international funders, the Bandim Health Project (BHP) has its origins in Danish development research conducted in Guinea-Bissau since 1978, first initiated through the establishment of a continuous health and demographic surveillance system. This has enabled BHP over 40 years to follow all children who have received a vaccine, a drug, or having passed a specific infectious disease. It has enabled numerous studies and several ground-breaking observations, leading to high profile results such as the fact that the most widely used health interventions aimed at children in low income countries, vaccinations and vitamin A supplements, may have much more dramatic effects than previously thought – enhancing protection against disease in some cases and enhancing mortality in other cases. The effects are strongest for girls, and there are also sex differences in the response to vitamin A supplements; often beneficial for boys, it shows a strong negative effect for girls.

The discovery of these non-specific effects of vaccines led the WHO to change its measles vaccine programme in the early 1990s. The project helped to develop local, individual and institutional capacity through both training and partnerships: It trained the first person in the country, and the first woman, to receive a PhD degree in health, published a total of 900 scientific papers, enabled 63 researchers to get a PhD degree and 13 Guineans to get a Master's degree from an overseas university, while 45 Scandinavian PhD students have been associated with the project. More than 150 local assistants, nurses, doctors and supervisors work for the project, making it one of Guinea-Bissau's biggest employers.

Extracted from various publicly available news and website sources, 2018.

Finding 62. *Unequal power relations show through small cracks on an otherwise equal-looking surface.*

For both types of projects, the financial decisions and reimbursement of costs are based on an approval of Danish partners; Danish rules and regulations are to be used, including in accounting. This poses a problem in Vietnam, where the demanding financial and other procedures that differ significantly from government requirements complicate reporting processes.[133] Some complain that the emphasis tends to be on research questions that are in vogue at a given moment in the North. Danish researchers tend to control where to publish, when to visit, how funds are to be used, and whose models to follow. Proposal approval success rates confirm Northern strengths: the success rate for the North-driven projects has been consistently much higher than for applications from the South.

All these factors were apparent in cases noted by survey respondents and interviewed stakeholders. As example, decisions to end a collaboration and cancel PhD student positions were made at the Danish end, leaving the affected partners with a feeling they were not consulted about the decision. Several partners in Ghana and in Vietnam noted that they had little control over the timing of visits of Danish partners. Some

---

133   Stringent procedures were put in place after a case of corruption was made against researchers engaged in the first phase of PRSP.

interviewees from the North expressed quite clearly – and in one or two instances, quite dismissively of the partners – strong feelings about different levels of competence between the North and the South. And in those cases where the Northern partners wanted to maintain an iron grip over the projects, including communications and what partners are allowed to tell about the projects, a feeling of "equal partnerships" was lost.

Finding 63. *Triangular cooperation shows good benefits, but success depends on the extent of common interest and the skill with which sometimes complicated interactions are managed.*

The few cases of triangular (N-S-S) Window 1 cooperation studied, including in case study countries Vietnam and Uganda (with participation from Indonesia, Mozambique and Tanzania, among others) highlighted the good potential in this type of partnership – as well as how readily they can fail to achieve their potential. All referred to the importance of 'getting it right', especially when working between three or more very different societal cultures. Reasons for success include a clearly identified issue of interest in all the participating countries; from the beginning, planning together, with frequent and clear communication; and creating opportunities to implement and share results in a way that maximised common interests and bring to light important differences. Important benefits noted by the researchers included: (i) researchers in the South learnt that they could benefit from one another, not only from the North, and (ii) issues are more frequently similar for comparative work and learning purposes across countries in the South, than found in relation to Denmark. The BSU programme is also reported as having enhanced cooperation and learning between several universities in the South, with positive perceptions and concrete examples of the value of such interactions reported in documents and interviews.

Groups collaborating without sufficient common threads to hold them together led to artificial relationships and reduced the chance of new insights; and ownership of the collaboration was absent. In one case perceived asymmetries in expertise between countries in the South caused tensions. In several cases a triangular project was turned into several North-South collaborations running in parallel, with no cross-fertilisation of ideas, information or lessons.

ILLUSTRATION OF PARTNERSHIP DYNAMICS: UGANDA AND DENMARK

Project 1.
"The professors, we worked with, are my mentors; they have been so instrumental in giving me the confidence in the work. I still send my articles to Denmark to get comments...we developed a liking for each other – we became family... I feel we have a lot in common. I learned hard work from them; Danes don't waste their time; my culture has a lot of time wasting." – *Ugandan PhD fellow*

"We had a fantastic collaboration in the project. All decisions were made unanimously; we never had any problems. Danes are very effective, but I told them to do it their way. You cannot expect that they should copy the Danes. It is important to be humble. I throw out one of the Danish partners as he had an arrogant attitude, he wanted to tell the Ugandans what to do. It is easier to come with a respectful attitude; this is important." – *Danish coordinator*

Project 2.
"Earlier the initiative always had to come from the Danes; now we have a PI who takes the initiative. We have a balanced relationship based on equality (even though the Danes have better conditions). Now there is a positive development – the relationship is really good- it has not always been this way. Both partners should take responsibility and own the project; this has developed over the years. The collaboration is more balanced; this is also a result of the budget being shared - the Southern partners therefore also have the opportunity of taking an initiative." – *Danish coordinator*

"The project proposal was developed through a consultative and participatory process. There is a lot of consultation between the partners; most of the big ideas come from the North and it is not entirely true that there is no knowledge imperialism, but what I can say is that the Northern partners are better initiators of ideas than us. They put the ideas on the table, and we discuss ... for me the collaboration has been smooth, decisions are always made in a participatory manner and there is consensus". – *Ugandan partner.*

The importance of long-term partnership
"It is important for the Ugandan partners that the Danish partners keep going on even when it is difficult. They become like family. It creates a different form for trust that they keep coming back." – *Ugandan partner*

About gender
"Danish culture and Ugandan culture are different, in particular in terms of the approach to hierarchy and gender. It is difficult for a female leader, who believes in equality. It is difficult to make things happen in a hierarchical culture where all leaders are men. You have to take some conflicts, for instance regarding the per diem (the higher the position, the higher the per diem)." – *female Danish coordinator*

About the power of dominant knowledge systems
"The main challenge in both projects has been the simple fact that university degrees across the globe come with huge differences in quality. For projects that presuppose a shared theoretical and analytical framework, this is particularly challenging. Projects, where theory and analysis is placed in the global north would not face such problems, but they would be exploitative and merely reproduce existing power/knowledge structures." – *Danish coordinator*

6.5   Coherence, synergy and harmonisation

Finding 64. *Despite good potential to do so, Danida has largely failed to create synergies or connections at project level – both between its own initiatives and with those of other donors or stakeholders. There are very few if any effective formal mechanisms or incentives to do so, and Danish embassies do not have the means to prioritise this.*

Research coordination is difficult due to its relatively low profile and perceived long-term timeframe compared to the relative immediacy of development cooperation interventions that have to make a measurable difference on the ground in a defined period. None of the heavily budget-cut Danida entities, including in embassies, have the resources

to assume responsibility for harmonising between such programmes. Yet many donors support research and/or research capacity development programmes in Danida priority countries, and programmes or projects in similar themes or with similar aims, methodology workshops, short courses – all are in abundance.[134] In Ghana alone, the evaluation found dozens of similar programs by other donors, including NORHED similar to BSU funded by Norad[135] and from which important lessons can be learnt. Only within the University of Ghana, 20 financiers of development research were identified.

There have been few cases of cooperation between Danida funded projects and those of other donors, but these are initiated by individual interest rather than by design. As noted earlier, in Uganda, there were a few cases of ad hoc collaboration. The Trustland project worked with GIZ on an event as they had a project in Northern Uganda on land conflicts. The ChildMed project collaborated with USAID on drug supply, and the latter took over this area of work after the project ended. In Vietnam there is at least one example of a Danida-supported research projects taken over by the World Bank. But Danish embassies have seldom been active actors in enabling synergies between research and development cooperation. The Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action principles are discussed in donor coordination meetings, sometime with government involvement, but this seldom goes beyond information sharing. As noted by one key stakeholder: "*It [is] not really donor collaboration; [it's] more donor co-existence*".

Finding 65. *Links between Danida's own funding modalities exist, but they are weak in the absence of a development research strategy or a portfolio approach to managing project grants.*

Lack of synergy and coordination between Danida's own instruments as has been pointed out by previous evaluations,[136] which noted the absence of mechanisms that would incentivise such efforts. This situation has not improved. The evaluation found only a few examples of ad

---

134   Sida, DFID, and INASP, for instance, run their very popular AuthorAid program as well as embedding and institutionalisation initiatives in the same countries where Danida provides support to universities. Haylor, Graham & Lloyd, Rob (2018). *Evaluation of Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems: Synthesis Report*. August 2018, ITAD.

135   Halvorsen, T, Skare Orgeret, K. & Krøvel R. (eds). *Sharing Knowledge, Transforming Societies*: *The Norhed Programme 2013-2020*. Published by African Minds, 2019.

136   Ghartey, Adom (2017). *Building Stronger Universities (BSU) II Project: BSU II Project Evaluation*. August 2017, Ghartey Associates Limited: Accra, Ghana. *Mid-term Review of Building Stronger Universities Phase II*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 29, 2016.

hoc efforts to cultivate linkages between FFU and BSU initiatives.[137] But persons interviewed in Uganda and in Ghana acknowledged that they do not seek synergies. The logical framework given for BSU indicates some coherence within the programme, but the lack of a development research strategy and accompanying focus on results across portfolios of Danida research support hamper any effort at stronger coherence. Window 2 also appears to be rather detached from other Danida supported research initiatives.

Finding 66. *Danida's withdrawal from collective support to international programmes in 2015 diminished opportunities for harmonisation with other donor-funded research and development initiatives, among Nordic countries, the EU and further afield.*

There used to be a fair amount of close donor cooperation between the Nordic countries until 2015 – "*Denmark, Norway and Sweden used to be very like-minded*", according to a key stakeholder – and they used their complementarities and common interests, for example, by jointly funding initiatives such as UNU-WIDER. There is at present no formal cooperation or even informal harmonisation with other Nordic countries, with the EU or beyond. Danida through for example DFC participates in the International Donor Harmonisation Group but is not actively involved in prominent efforts, such as the African Science Granting Councils Initiative in Africa, the Belmont Forum or discussions about the role of research in addressing the six main transformations the world needs in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030.[138]

Finding 67. *Some government and universities' own coordination and harmonisation efforts show the best potential for creating synergies between donor initiatives.*

In Ghana, one core function of the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology & Innovation is to ensure coordination in research programmes. Interviews indicated that they have found donor funding to research particularly difficult to coordinate, as it would involve collecting data from single researchers. The government is planning to set up a National Research Fund which involves a serious effort to harmonise all research-related initiatives under one organisation, but it is not yet clear when and how that will happen. Lately the universities – who would indeed benefit the most from coordination of capacity development efforts – have stepped up to the task. CSIR is reasonably good at

---

137   For example, in Ghana, FFU-supported PhD students take BSU-run courses and workshops and share equipment and infrastructure.

138   TWI2050 – The World in 2050 (2018). Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Report prepared by The World in 2050 initiative. International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). Laxenburg, Austria. ISBN 978-3-7045-0154-7.

harmonisation within their own institution but is not concerned with what others are doing. Other universities in Ghana have also set up their own units for coordinating research funding and avoiding duplication of efforts.

POTENTIAL FOR A PORTFOLIO APPROACH: AN EXAMPLE FROM THE SAHEL/EAST AFRICA

Working with 'projects' rather than 'portfolios' diminishes the potential value of research support. Four out of five projects supported by Danida in Mali as part of support to the larger Sahel/East Africa region[139] focused on using local plants or trees to explore or enhance their potential as source of food and/or income. The fifth project intended to study the inter-locking of three crises – food, energy/climate change and financial crises – and their effects on value chains and access to food in Africa in countries that were large exporters and producers as well as small importers such as Mali. All five projects were initiated between 2008 and 2010 and varied in duration from three to seven years. One showed negative results, but others yielded results ready for further exploration; one showed some signs that stakeholders might have taken up the results. The projects were never connected – and with other donor or stakeholder efforts – to share and explore the technicalities and complexities involved in working with natural resources in the Sahel, or to connect single crop foci with larger perspectives on value chains and the economic dynamics that affect the growth of the Sahel region.

6.6   Tensions and trade-offs

Finding 68. *At least eight types of tension in its funding modalities present Danida with choices to be made in the future design of its support to development research. While there is significant merit in the current cautious, 'middle-road' approach that guides rather than directs or restricts – while limiting risk – the trade-offs might require reconsideration in future.*

The modalities supported over the past few years have had to consider the following tensions in their design and/or implementation:

'Free' research in very broad thematic areas versus problem-solving research in more narrowly defined areas of immediate concern. This tension is at present displayed in the foci and evolution of Windows 1 and 2. The more broadly defined the theme, the more freedom for researchers to choose 'pet' areas of work that are easier to publish or better for their careers, without stretching into new areas or ways of

---

139   Only one of the projects focused exclusively on Mali. The others included other Sahel countries and/or East African countries.

working that might be more challenging yet also able to make a more significant difference on the ground.[140]

A project versus more programmatic portfolio approach. While the larger grants enable several projects to address a problem in multiple dimensions or from different angles, Danida does not have a programmatic portfolio approach that can support a more strategic management of grants. The only 'glue' – the broadly defined thematic areas announced each year – has not been enough to encourage synergy or more systemic approaches to creating solid bodies of influential knowledge.

Short-term versus long-term support. While some themes for competitive grants have changed within a year, others have remained the same or built on one another; periods of support have ranged from one year in Window 2 to up to seven years (including no-cost extensions in Window 1) (Section 7.1). In some cases, research groups could build on past allocations by evolving the focus and mobilising funding from various sources. Since both short- and long-term support have benefits, there is merit in leaving space for agility while also connecting and building up solid bodies of knowledge in highly pertinent areas.

Concentrating versus scattering resources. Danida's modalities tend to concentrate resources on (i) only a few BSU universities – although within these, support is scattered, (ii) larger size, multi-disciplinary groups, (iii) Africa, and (iv) a few large and experienced institutions (which is not part of the design of modalities, but the result of highly competitive processes) (Chapter 2). While this might be a good use of limited resources, it may also work against smaller groups or less powerful researchers with more agility and novel ideas.

Low-risk support to proven 'winners' and stable contexts versus higher risk investments. The concentration in allocations means a narrower reach but also a better chance of success. Most allocations are made using assessment criteria and/or highly competitive processes that enable relatively low-risk allocations, even in fragile contexts. This limits opportunities to make a major difference in high-risk environments in ways that can sustain positive results over time.

'Going it alone' versus 'collective action'. As noted in Sections 3.2 and 4.2, in recent years Danida has terminated several modalities that

---

140 Applied research is seen as important for addressing questions that are relevant to each country's specific needs and context, but some believe this limits their ability to publish the results due to issues of scope and generalisability. Several researchers interviewed shared the concern that applied research that is poorly generalisable but locally important are far from the kind of research in vogue in the top journals managed in the Global North.

focused on collective support with Nordic or OECD countries to highly regarded institutions and networks (e.g. CGIAR, CODESRIA, UNU-WIDER) or the development of bodies of knowledge in support of development cooperation (through modalities such as ReCom, Minor Studies). This has lost Danida some 'soft power' and the opportunity to contribute to large-scale international efforts.

Strategic (largely Global North) interests versus important (largely Global South) knowledge gaps. The still-fledgling Window 2 support is seen as carrying some risk that it can take attention away from knowledge gaps justified by previous research (Section 6.3). There is a fear among some prominent development researchers that Window 2 can undermine their own role and value, and shift attention away from important gaps in knowledge to the 'pre-Paris Declaration' era where development cooperation was less empathetic towards Global South priorities, making use of power asymmetries to provide support conditional upon buying products or services from Danish companies. Maintaining a good balance between interests will require deliberate safeguards in content and processes.

Conventional wisdoms versus new narratives, frameworks and models for development. The debates about 'decolonisation'.[141] [142] as well as about 'research excellence'[143], the mindsets that have brought on the era of the Anthropocene, and very significant development successes (primarily in Asia) that have not followed conventional wisdoms about what makes for 'development' have highlighted the need to consider new frameworks, models and narratives related to development. This has to influence how development, as well as research for development, is conceptualised and done (Section 5.5). Modalities and criteria for support that do not support such new developments might constrain Danish contributions to leading edge thinking about development research.

Finding 69. *The three funding modalities that are operational at present have significant strengths in line with what has worked well for Danish development research support in the past, but also several areas in need of attention and improvement that can help strengthen the research support system as well as the benefits and sustainability of positive outcomes.*

---

141   See wa Thiong'o, Ngugi (1986). *Decolonising the mind*. Published by James Currey Ltd/Heinemann. 114 pp.

142   Ndlovo-Gatsheni, S. and Zondi, S. (2016). *Decolonising the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa*. Published by Carolina Academic Press. 204 pp.

143   Kraemer-Mbula, E., Tijssen R., Wallace M.L. and McLean R. (2020). *Transforming Research Excellence: New Ideas from the Global South*. Published by African Minds, South Africa.

Main strengths as well as challenges in the design, management and implementation of Windows 1, 2 and BSU are provided in Table 8, Table 9, Table 10, with the caveat that full-fledged evaluations of each modality, or strategic evaluations that cut across the modalities, will be able to bring deeper, more nuanced insights than could be obtained through this more expansive evaluation.

TABLE 8: STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR ATTENTION IN THE FFU WINDOW 1 MODALITY

FFU Competitive Grants Window 1
Strengths
Level and type of investment • At present largest investment in Danida's development research modalities
Design • Fair alignment expected with Danish development cooperation • Freedom to experiment and evolve – illustrated with South-driven pilot initiative • Equally values Southern capacities and new, useful, credible knowledge • Seeking to balance Danish and Southern interests, including through South-driven grants • Seeking (in some calls) multidisciplinary North-North cooperation • Enables North-South and Triangular Cooperation partnerships • Variety of research themes to accommodate more researchers • Robust enabling of individual research capacity development in the South • Relatively long support period, up to five years • Encouraging larger multi-group and multi-sector cooperation • Good experience and exposure for PhDs through visits to Denmark
Assessment approach • Competitive process enabling selection based on evolving criteria • Assessment of (South-driven) research is supported by National Screening Committees – mini FFUs' – and the embassies • Main assessment is done only by FFU, but with mostly international review input
Implementation • High demand/Low approval ratio enables high quality, low-risk projects • Significant female leadership • Increasing percentage of funding to the South even in North-driven projects
Areas for attention
Level and type of investment • Still limited by international standards
Design • Not yet well aligned with SDG imperatives • Larger projects still relatively limited in potential scope for large-scale impact • Perceptions of too-frequent changes in themes • Increasingly difficult to obtain funding for PhDs from Global North

Assessment approach	• Emphasis on technical quality at apparent cost of relevance • Embassies' contributions not always valued – or valuable • Limited integration of (social science) disciplines in projects • Cross-cutting/legitimacy dimensions neglected and not encouraged in reporting
Implementation	• Managed more like a loose collection of projects than strategic research portfolio • More North- than South-driven, with North-driven projects' success rate much higher • Despite focus on the South, perceptions that power continues to reside in the North • Majority of funding administered in the North, affecting power relations • Challenges with financial administration in the South • No mechanism to ensure contributions to Danish development cooperation • Challenged by university bureaucracies and hierarchies in the South • Limited multi-sector cooperation • Majority of projects coping with delays of 6-24 months • Very few women applicants from the South • Incentives – in the South, tension between topping up salaries and reducing duties • Some relatively poor project reports

TABLE 9: STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR ATTENTION IN THE WINDOW 2 FUNDING CHANNEL

FFU Competitive Grants Window 2	
Strengths	
Level and type of investment	• To be determined by success of pilot phase
Design	• Close alignment with strategic sector cooperation, focusing on the value of directly supporting a key aspect of The World 2030/Partnering with Denmark • Opened up opportunities for research in a larger set of institutions and countries – engaging with higher income yet still developing countries, building expertise in Denmark in different types of context • Opening up opportunities for strategic sector cooperation and interests from Southern countries that can draw on Danish strengths and expertise • Brings the private sector potentially on both sides closer to the interests of development
Assessment approach	• Building on existing administrative procedures • Demand in first rounds indicate space for this type of research • Able to balance desire for research, consulting and technology transfer
Implementation	• Managed as a pilot on which lessons can be based, with an early review in 2019 • Well received by both Danish embassies and researchers, indicating interest, relevance and opportunities • Linking research more closely to industry interests and vice versa.

Areas for attention	
Level and type of investment	• Insufficient funding for the level of interest and need for ongoing support to pilot projects in next phase • Might draw funding away from other useful modalities
Design	• Blurring the lines between development and strategic research, potentially failing to protect the concept and value of development research • Risk that power and interests will shift too much to Denmark, with commercial foci eventually super-seding Window 1 in scope and importance • Without systematic assessment, merit of themes not clear; narrowly focused themes initially limited participation and possibly also relevance for Southern countries (now appears to be addressed) • Short timeframe for projects misaligned with research • Changing themes and limited resources limited opportunity for reapplication • Focus on natural, health and technical sciences might diminish integration of social sciences as a matter of course • Capacity development perceived as focused solely on Southern partners • Direct value for SSC projects unclear
Assessment approach	• Follows Window 1 procedure, but without sufficient diversity in FFU expertise to account for commer-cial and strategic focus • Potential to fail to protect Southern interests
Implementation	• Set-up of Window 2 rushed, potentially weakening efforts to test it well • Sector Counsellors participating to varying degrees in the project design, with reports of some poten-tial for bias in themes based on close contact with Danish researchers • Some said to have insufficient alignment with strategic sector foci (not checked) • Overlap with Innovation Fund foci and countries initially – now brought into synergy by excluding IF from W2 countries.

TABLE 10: STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR ATTENTION IN BSU

Building Stronger Universities (BSU) - Phase III	
Strengths	
Level and type of investment	Concentration of funding in a few universities, large and small, allowing comparison in strategy as well as freedom to choose priority areas to develop
Design	BSU III flexible enough to allow for South-owned tailoring according to need
	Aligned with development cooperation as well as national goals
	Has a holistic, systems-oriented approach, essential for institution-building, although not yet fully developed
	Southern ownership encouraged and has evolved
	Loosely designed model, giving space for contextualisation per university
	Encouraging mainstreaming or inclusion of important themes such as gender, resources and rights
Implementation	BSU II and III have been increasingly South-owned and driven
	Encourages South-South exposure, exchange and learning
Areas for attention	
Level and type of investment	Limited for its charge, despite some good signs of impact, especially in smaller universities
Design	Ambitious without partnerships for what is to be achieved
	Sustainability once funding ends not assured, esp. in challenging external contexts
Implementation	Challenges with financial management in the South
	No donor coordination or creation of synergy
	Some governance structures said to be cumbersome, leading to inefficiencies
	No formal engagement with embassies; depends on individuals' interest
	Actions might be too scattered and ad hoc; need to be well sequenced for sustainability.

7 INFLUENCING FACTORS: MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

7.1 Introduction

The evaluation was not expected to include an organisational (systems) assessment. Instead, the emphasis was on identifying some of the main management and administrative challenges that affected efficiency and the delivery of results.

7.2 Management of the portfolio of grants

Finding 70. *The administration by DFC of the grants allocated in the different modalities has been efficient and empathetic – an important reason for the largely smooth operations as well as positive image of Danida among the direct beneficiaries of the financial support.*

Three programme managers and two administrative officers in DFC administer the grants and all associated assessment, tracking and data or information management processes on behalf of Danida. Researchers consulted in all three country case studies were very pleased with the administrative services provided by DFC, their speed of response, capacity for organising events, matchmaking with Danish research units, the monitoring and evaluation approach, and facilitation of shorter and longer visits to Denmark. DFC was also perceived as being open to no-cost extensions of projects when there are unexpected delays, and open for budget reallocations even between budget lines. Survey and interview data confirmed that there were some administrative and financial challenges, in particular with delayed payments and uncertainties about aspects of financial policies and regulations, but the bottlenecks appear to be mostly in the recipient universities, especially but not exclusively those of the partners in the South.

Finding 71. *The shrinking human resources in MFA in general, and a high burden of evaluation work in EVAL in particular, have had a negative effect on the strategic management of the portfolio of grants, and hence on the standing of development research in MFA.*

Over decades, the management of development research in MFA was handled by development and sector specialists in administering units such as UFT and BSA. Fluctuations and reductions over the past decade in MFA budgets (Chapter 2) and staff numbers – in particular the loss of development and research-savvy specialists – are widely perceived among key informants as having diminished the profile and position of development research in MFA. The burden of work on EVAL is perceived to have been particularly challenging[144], given its responsibility for the evaluation function in MFA; it has to provide MFA/Danida with politically sensitive strategic direction as well as practical evidence through both evaluation and research. This means keeping a strong finger on the pulse of relevant policies, initiatives and trends, and responding with agility to political, strategic and practical challenges and opportunities. The four staff members, including one recently appointed advisor, have struggled to maintain a balance that does justice to development research.

As a result, the basic management and administrative responsibilities in conjunction with DFC are well executed, but there is too little attention to the *strategic* management of data and information that can support planning, decision-making and advocacy around development research. In other words, the portfolio of research grants overseen by Danida through EVAL, including the thematic 'sub'-portfolios, has been managed as a set of unconnected projects rather than as one or more portfolios that benefit from tracking and in-depth, nuanced understanding.

The absence of a development research strategy has exacerbated the situation. Strategic management requires interpreting, synthesising and sharing carefully identified features and trends in content and performance that can inform actions around research for development. It can help shape not only the performance of the portfolio, but also its profile and the use of the research in MFA, in Denmark and among influential actors in partner countries.

7.3   Project delivery

Finding 72. *Delays in the delivery of projects have been common as a result of contextual and systemic constraints and inefficiencies, mostly outside*

---

144   In the absence of a full-fledged study of organisational systems involved in the management and administration of development research, the evaluation had to work with triangulated perceptions of such challenges in the system. Comparison of staffing and resources between these and similar units in other countries would not provide reliable indications of the levels of productivity and efficiency compared to the human and financial resources available. The scope and type of responsibilities, and organisational set-up, arrangements, cultures and expectations are different.

the control of either Danida or the participating researchers, with systemic inefficiencies and conflicting demands with respect to PhD studies one of the most important reasons. Danida's empathetic accommodation of the delays is therefore appropriate and valued by all concerned. However, greater attention to risk management – and well-nuanced accountability for well-paced research – could have helped minimise the chance of such occurrences, and the associated transaction costs.

A large majority of projects in both the FFU and BSU modalities have been given no-cost extensions, ranging from six months to several years[145]. In the RQ+ sample of 25 projects, 24 were extended, on average by 15.5 months and up to 2.5 years (Figure 20); the longest project duration with extension was more than seven years. Case study country portfolios showed that this was not an exceptional situation; in Vietnam, the average extension period for the 18 partnership projects analysed for this purpose was 17 months, while in Ghana and Uganda none of the projects studied in depth had finished on schedule. In some cases, significant changes had to be made.[146]

Project lengths were therefore in general not realistically calculated. The reasons for delays are various and context-dependent, and while some could not have been foreseen or mitigated, others have been typical of projects executed in a resource-constrained context. For example, seasonal availability of materials, getting research permits and ethical approvals, PhD students' situations, maternity leaves, procurement, difficulties in hiring competent people, and problems with administrative processes. Much harder to anticipate were disruptions during election years, earthquakes, Ebola outbreaks, serious illnesses and death of partners, traffic accidents, and breakdown of crucial instruments.

DFC's empathetic approval of no-cost extensions shows that it is aware of the often challenging bureaucratic, administrative and technical contexts in which projects have to work. But such understanding treatment of grant holders should be balanced with accountability by projects for well-paced delivery. The monitoring system should therefore help to catch truly problematic cases before it is too late.

Everybody was very enthusiastic…. There were many young researchers with IT skills; having IT skills became very important and created possibilities – this changed the relationship between generations as the young generation suddenly were more competent than the older generation of researchers. However, it was also dangerous to throw so much money into such a situation…

Danish project partner

---

145   DFC allows delays of up to two years, but the evaluation found exceptions where the extension has gone beyond this period.

146   In one case, the Danish principal investigator who initiated the project left. Succession planning had failed, and uncertainty and lack of leadership among those who remained led to communication breakdowns, delays and budgeting problems.

FIGURE 19: PROJECT EXTENSIONS IN THE RQ+ SAMPLE OF PROJECTS

■ Intended duration (months)　　■ Extension (months)
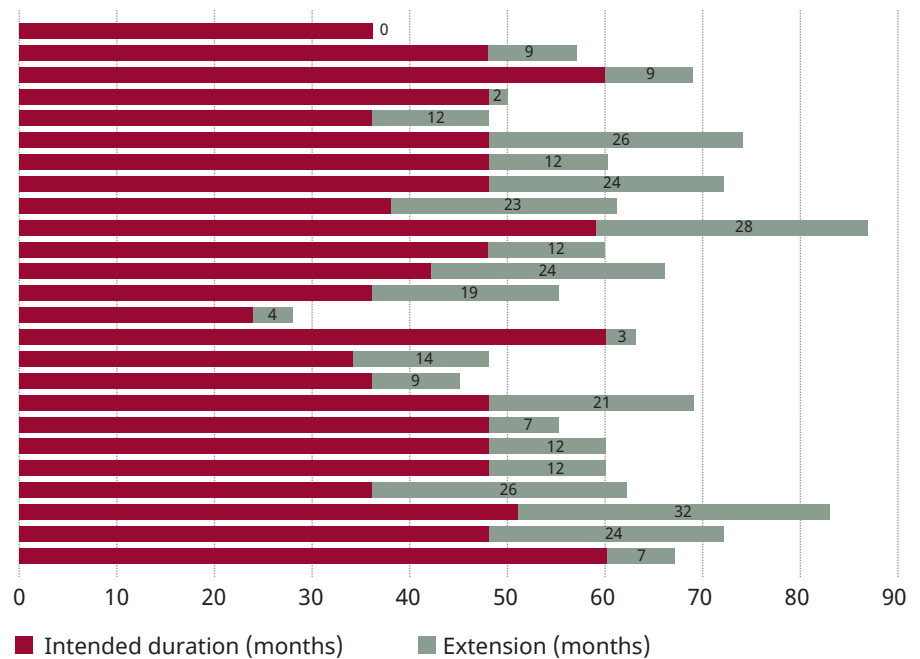
Discussions during the evaluation confirmed that systemic inefficiencies and conflicting demands with respect to PhD studies have been a main reason for the delays in project delivery. Analysis of the RQ+ sample of projects highlighted that project leaders wanted completion reports to show the promised number of graduates. Yet it is often the case that PhD students start late, their enrolment takes a long time, they do not get enough time off from other duties, getting research permits is slow, and PhD defences and graduation are delayed. In many partner universities PhD students' work plans were not well streamlined; until recently, PhD research proposals were written relatively late, with only two years planned for field work. Such strict timing can afford very few surprises. In many cases, PhD students have other academic tasks, including teaching. For some, the period from thesis submission to defence was overly long, up to ten months. Improving the efficiency of PhD enrolment, training and graduation process is therefore key to reducing project delays – yet outside Danida's or DFC's control. A balance is needed between encouraging research to be conducted at a brisk pace and recognising the difficulties in environments that are poor in both financial resources and mature institutions.

7.4　Tracking progress and performance

Finding 73. *The monitoring of Danida's modalities has been widely praised for its 'lightness' and the efficient support by DFC. However, important weaknesses related to learning, accountability and strategic management point to the loss of much of the potential value of the monitoring and evaluation system.*

The monitoring of supported projects is divided between DFC – responsible for screening the project progress reports to determine whether the formats and progress fulfil the formal requirements, assessing the reporting against what had been promised (each project has in recent years been required to have a logical framework or 'logframe'/ LFA), collecting additional information if needed, and so on – and FFU, responsible for monitoring the quality of the research.[147] Across the modalities, countries and types of grants, recipients and administrators considered Danida's light and simple reporting structure to be much less burdensome and bureaucratic than those of national or, for example, EU grants; the only commonly criticised item was the use of logframes for reporting. There are also in general serious limitations in the use of logframes,[148] with theories of change[149] marginally better as a framework for thinking through what is to take place. It is also essential to have assumptions made explicit as they are at the core of logframes or theories of change.

Given the lightness of requirements it is of particular concern that some of the of the reports were judged by DFC or FFU to be of poor quality. And the negative side to 'light' reporting is that unless the required monitoring data are carefully crafted, information might not be valuable enough – especially if it is to be used beyond routine monitoring of delivery on promises. In addition, the evaluation came across examples where the monitoring system was not able to catch projects in trouble due to the very few checks during the four to five years of FFU project support. The BSU programmes are monitored on an annual basis, and this appears to be reasonable. Indeed, one of the expected outputs of BSU III is the establishment of effective monitoring systems in partner universities. They also receive considerable support from DFC and are thus followed relatively closely.

During the first stage of South driven projects supported in Vietnam, an unexpected audit led after some controversy to the termination of three projects that had been progressing well up to that point, closing

---

147 Projects supported through both Windows 1 and 2 grants require a first-year, midterm and project completion report (PCR), as well as an annual accounts report. Some variations occur depending on the length of the project, no-cost extensions and so on. FFU, DFC, and EVAL representatives also occasionally visit projects, and reports based on a questionnaire developed by DFC. BSU II and III have been monitored based on logframes and narrative reports. For BSU II, bi-annual reports were required, but this was changed to annual reporting for BSU III when partners complained that it was too time-consuming and had no added value. Consequently, there as a switch to annual progress reporting.

148 Hummelbrunner, R, 2010, *Beyond Logframe. Using Systems Concepts in Evaluation*. Nobuko Fujita (Ed.), Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development (FASID), Tokyo, Japan.

149 Davies R, 2018, *Representing Theories of Change: A Technical Challenge with Evaluation Consequences*, CEDIL Inception Paper 15: London.

off opportunities for the emerging results to be further developed. Perspectives have been divided about the merit of what was done and how it was done, especially as guidelines about double salaries to project coordinators – the main issue of concern – were afterwards made clearer. The incident highlights the importance of due process acceptable to both when working between two very different cultures, with sensitive communication about a challenging situation as well as clarity about the boundaries within which projects have to operate.

Finding 74. *The monitoring and reporting system encourages the management of grants like a loose collection of projects rather than a portfolio, reducing opportunities for systematic and strategic learning and decision-making.*

Basic project data are collected[150] but seldom used, and FFU, DFC and EVAL do not do nuanced trends analysis and synthesis related to the composition, content and performance of the group of projects active in or across each thematic portfolio. Some allocation, proposal and progress monitoring, risk assessment and (emerging) results tracking are done per project, but without regular and systematic synthesis across projects. This diminishes the potential for strategic portfolio management that can be used for planning, decisions, learning and advocacy in MFA (for example in terms of the distribution of grants, integration of disciplines or sectors, the management of tensions in the portfolio, extent of gender-responsiveness, type and content of research results, quality of reporting or of the research, outputs after project expiry; utility and content of policy briefings).

There has also been some effort by DFC to enable learning, including about outcomes, but it does not have the necessary mandate for this important function. Experiences and lessons across projects and modalities are not shared among grant holders, embassies or in FFU, EVAL and DFC. Stakeholders need to get monitoring data that is from their perspective useful for accountability, decisions and improvements, and consideration should be given to how theories of change should best be applied to be useful. Furthermore, minutes show that despite important discussions in FFU, time to interrogate matters deeply to help frame decisions is not always available and decisions often do not follow. The fact that annual reports on development research have not been produced since 2014 contributes to the lack of deep reflection on strategic direction and portfolio performance.

Finding 75. *The quality of monitoring has improved over time, yet FFU quality control has become less thorough. The effect of the change is unclear.*

---

150   Number and size of applications and allocations per theme, project leaders' gender.

There seems to be considerable variation in the quality of the project monitoring reports: Overall the quality seems to have improved over the years, although meeting minutes confirm that complaints by FFU about quality persist. Several of the reviewed logframes were not of sufficiently high quality, suffering from poorly defined indicators and lack of targets which made it difficult to compare results against what had been undertaken. Expectations regarding information on impact and uptake of research results are also now less clear and therefore prone to insufficient reporting.[151] The BSU logframes are of reasonable quality with relatively well-defined objectives, outcomes, outputs and indicators, but assumptions are notably absent – an important oversight. Inconsistencies and gaps were also found in the indicator-oriented reporting and in the brief progress narratives.

DFC is responsible for the first check of the reports from grant holders. Since 2018, the reports have not been discussed at the September FFU meeting[152]; instead, DFC sends the assessments from the responsible FFU member directly to the research coordinator. Only general lessons or cross-cutting issues are discussed at the September meeting. While this lowers the burden of work on the committee, it also leads to less scrutiny. It was not possible to determine whether quality has been affected by this change in procedure.

7.5 Financial resource allocation

Finding 76. *The financial resources allocated to DFC have evolved with new responsibilities but are insufficient for key actions that are now needed to enhance the utility and uptake of the research supported by Danida.*

The financial support DFC receives from EVAL currently covers the administration by DFC of BSU, FFU and 38% of its total core budget. As new responsibilities were added, funds were allocated accordingly, rising over the decade from DKK 1 643 000 to DKK 5 705 800. DFC also has access to 'FFU-Rest-midler' – accumulated funds from commitments to project grants – which have been used for special studies, the payment of national screening members, smaller initiatives and thematic meetings or workshops. However, these funds have been declining. DFC has sufficient funding for basic day to day responsibilities, but not

---

151   In the earlier project completion report templates (around 2009) the researchers were requested to include information on impact: *"Describe how the outcomes of the project will have an impact on e.g. poverty reduction, national policies, user behavior, etc."* In later templates it only states "impact and/or outcomes" without any specification.

152   The FFU did not review all projects reports. Based on a traffic light system, FFU only reviewed the reports of projects that DFC had marked as yellow or red; random tests were done of projects marked as green.

enough to fulfil any strategic actions in support of the management of development research. The organisation has recently requested an annual allocation of DKK 0.5-1.0 million specifically for special studies and communication initiatives. This is well in line with the type of support that DFC can provide beyond pure grants administration. With the recently appointed additional programme officer DFC hopes to have the human resources to foster dissemination of research findings and encourage learning. Such efforts take time and expertise, and time will tell whether enough has been made available for this purpose.

7.6   Division of labour

Finding 77. *The division of labour between the key stakeholders in the Danish development research support system is well defined by their respective mandates, and there is general comfort with the arrangements. However, some frustration has been apparent in relation to the capacities in, and allocation of responsibilities between EVAL and DFC – especially with respect to the strategic, learning and knowledge transfer functions of the development research support system. This has the potential to diminish the value of close cooperation between the key actors in the system.*

In general, the different actors in the development research support system have clear roles and responsibilities: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA/Danida) acts as donor. EVAL (now ELK) is the donor unit providing strategic direction, well placed to combine the value of research and evaluation for evidence-informed learning and decision-making. [153] DFC is playing the important role of administering the funds and ensuring the smooth running of operations. FFU is the scientific advisory and assessment body for competitive modalities in particular, supported by Danish embassies and in two partner countries by national screening committees. The Innovation Fund approves the research grants as being eligible for support.[154]

---

153   There has been several changes in this system during the reviewed period, most notably the shift in the mandate of providing strategic direction for development research from being part of TSA/BFT/UFT to being part of the Evaluation Department, which also brought about reduction in the number of staff involved in directing and administering development research. The division of labour between EVAL and DFC has also been continuously updated, captured in a Collaboration Agreement and detailed task list (2017-2019).

154   As outlined in the law: "Lov om Danmarks Forsknings- and Innovationspolitiske Råd og Danmarks's Frie Forskningsfond", the Innovation Fund should approve all research funds granted through competition ("konkurrence udsatte midler"). This implies assessing the application procedures and processes as well as the final assessment of proposals. The basic criterion is that initiatives supported should be "forskningsfaglige støtteværdige" (eligible for support as research).

The collaboration between MFA and DFC is generally good, but some frustration was apparent at the time of the evaluation – EVAL at not being more closely involved with DFC where it matters and can add value and, in turn, DFC at not being recognised for its potential to complement the work of EVAL beyond pure administration, for example, in the dissemination of research results and supporting linkages to policy. The division of labour between EVAL and DFC has been incrementally updated through a Collaboration Agreement and detailed task list (2017-2019), but this slight tension in roles was already confirmed in the 2015 *Review of DFC's Administration of Danida's Support to Development Research*[155]*,* commissioned by MFA. It found that DFC was fully able to manage all administrative and management tasks for the support to development research, but that there was a need to "refresh and re-institutionalise" the division of labour. This observation is still valid today.

The staff of EVAL also confirmed that they found the outsourcing of administration to DFC appropriate and appreciated the collaboration. However, EVAL was (at the time of the evaluation) in need of enough human resources to ensure the full use of the value of development research for the Ministry, for Denmark and partners in the South. This meant sufficient expertise and time to guide and collaborate with DFC on relevant information and analyses to be used for knowledge transfer and strategic purposes, both in the scientific communities in Denmark and the South, and in the ministry and Danish society more broadly. The evaluation did not study the implications of EVAL's recent integration into ELK, but the observation stands that the unit should have sufficient resources and linkages to the rest of the research and development research system – DFC, FFU, the rest of MFA, as well as other bodies supporting research in Denmark more broadly – to enhance its strategic role and facilitate evidence-informed learning in service of research and development.

Finding 78. *Valid concerns have been raised about the perceived stronger emphasis on the research rather than development aspects of Danida's support to development research – and, in the process, about the role and authority of the Innovation Fund in the development research support system, as well as the position of Danida in relation to the national system supporting research.*

In a recent external review commissioned by EVAL of the first stage of implementation of Window 2, certain overlaps between the foci of the Innovation Fund and Window 2 were identified. This has raised

---

155 "*Review of DFC's Administration of Danida's Support to Development Research.* MFA. 2015. Prepared by Impakt. The overall objective of the review was to assess the division of responsibilities between MFA and DFC and to assess if adjustments in the responsibilities should be made.

questions about their respective roles in the system, and potential for synergy *and* conflict in roles. Several key informants in this evaluation were concerned that the influence of the Innovation Fund is growing beyond its intent, with potential to usurp the role of EVAL/ELK – given the lack of time and focus of the latter on strategic matters across the research system in Denmark. Some efforts at creating complementarity are apparent through the recent decision that Danida's research support and the research funded through the Innovation Fund should not be allocated in the same countries.

The evaluation did not study the whole system, nor the details of the relationship between Danida/EVAL and the Innovation Fund. But it is important to ensure wherever possible complementarity and synergy across the research support system in Denmark without threatening the domain of any particular organisation. Strategic engagement by EVAL/ELK in collaboration with FFU and DFC with the rest of the national research support system in Denmark can also create opportunities to infuse in-depth development research information and insights of benefit to funding agencies, science councils and researchers who are not used to working in the Global South.

A critical issue that has arisen from assessment processes and the division of roles is the notion that there is a too-strong focus on the *research* part (a matter for FFU) of development research, assessed primarily on academic quality, and too little emphasis on the *development* part (a matter for EVAL and embassies), assessed on relevance and strategic programming. Given that the Innovation Fund is given its responsibility by law, and that FFU is made up of research specialists only (without development specialists or persons with significant experience in the private sector or in government) the emphasis on the *research* part of Danida's support to development research is unavoidable. The fact that the proposal assessment processes veer towards technical quality will become more problematic as Window 2 evolves. Thus, the question is rather how the *relevance, i.e.* the *development* part, can be strengthened in the assessment and monitoring of project proposals, and in the expertise make-up of bodies such as FFU.

Input from embassies, the two FFU members from the Global South and the national screening committees in two countries may help ensure more in-depth understanding. But if any part of the development research support system is weaker than the rest, as has been reported with respect to embassy contributions, the balance between the different criteria will shift.

If not attended to, this situation can weaken the effectiveness of the development research support function and its connections with development cooperation – and thus the utility of development research in service of national interests in the South.

Finding 79. *FFU has played a very important role in evolving Danida's funding modalities in line with imperatives and strengths. However, its capacities and its role as advisory body for development research have not been fully developed to fulfil its important mandate in the system.*

As an independent body appointed by the Minister, the FFU has to "*assist the MFA by providing scientific advice in relation to the allocation of funds for research projects, strategic and policy issues, calls for proposal and monitoring of ongoing projects. Advising on the effective communication of research results in order to influence development policies is also important.*"[156] As findings elsewhere in this report highlight, FFU has over the years made major, very credible contributions, primarily through the competitive FFU proposals for research support with their elaborate assessment processes.

However, these contributions are highly dependent on the technical expertise of the FFU members[157], whose selection is based on strong professional experience and competencies in development research and/or in a relevant thematic area. It inevitably means that members do not have the capacity to assess with equal merit all applications across different scientific fields or, for that matter, across sectors where policymaker and private sector interests matter. They are therefore heavily dependent on the quality, expertise and biases of peer reviewers. What defines the role of FFU is their ability to ensure consistency throughout the assessment process and advise the ministry on adjustments across the development research and scientific systems to ensure high quality, relevant research for development.

Members can serve for a period of up to three terms of three years. While this brings some consistency to the process, it also means that without appropriate management of staggered exits from the committee, there is a very limited chance of renewal through bringing on board different types of expertise as funding channels and thus need for expertise change.

With respect to their advisory role, minutes of FFU meetings indicate many discussions on pertinent issues of both operational and strategic value, including on their own role and expertise. Yet *strategic* discussions about the nature of development and changing trends in relation to the grant portfolios are fairly rare. Issues raised at meetings frequently appear to be unresolved, with topics reappearing in next meetings. The

---

156   Rules of procedure for the Consultative Research Committee for Development Research (FFU), Ref. 2017 - 30290.

157   According to key informants, EVAL rarely challenges the FFU prioritised list of projects, but keeps a close eye on the rules and regulations. It is perceived to be a sound 'gatekeeper', ensuring legitimacy and essential links to policy and political actors in Denmark.

advice to MFA has been focused primarily on how to ensure project by project safeguarding of 'high quality' and, to a lesser extent, 'relevant' research – as defined by FFU. It has not spent much time on "*strategic and policy*" issues demanded by their mandate. It has therefore not addressed topics such as the evolving nature of development research and how it can best serve societies in Denmark and the South, the result of the absence of a guiding strategy, the nature and value of development research findings, and/or how the research contributions can best be taken up and used to strengthen development and development cooperation.

Finding 80. *While FFU's wide use of international peer reviewers is commendable as part of efforts to safeguard the integrity of the proposal selection processes, its 'independence' has been questioned as a result of perceptions of potential conflicts of interest.*

FFU suffers from perceptions among some in the research community of potential conflicts of interest. EVAL and FFU are well aware of this situation, and guidelines for disqualification of FFU members have been developed. Peer reviewers are also drawn primarily, if not exclusively, from the international rather than Danish scientific community.[158] But this does not resolve the issue. The guidelines stipulate when FFU members or working groups would be disqualified due to conflict of interest in relation to a particular project. They further define what it means to be disqualified – personal or financial interest; interest of relatives, and so on. These guidelines are the same as those followed by the Innovation Fund and have guided cases of disqualification.

However, FFU members are not disqualified from submitting proposals, and there are many cases where they have won FFU grants under the conditions stipulated in the guidelines.[159] Records show that in almost every FFU meeting, members had to recuse themselves from the discussion of a proposal with which they were somehow associated. This was most recently very well on display with respect to Window 2 proposal selection.[160]

While sympathy with the reason provided may be warranted - that it would be very difficult to recruit FFU members if they are prevented

---

158   Confirmed by DFC in conversation with the evaluation team leader. Systematic data on the origin of reviewers, and their gender, were not available.

159   *"Members must not make a decision, take part in a decision, or otherwise influence the consideration of the matter in question or in any way exert influence on the outcome of the matter. A disqualified person must leave the meeting room during the discussion of the matter and cannot provide advice on the matter to any of those who are to participate in part or in whole in its consideration."*

160   Assessed in 2018, for example, when nearly every proposal required a disqualification.

from making use of this important funding opportunity, and the Danish development research community is small – the situation is clearly problematic due to the dynamics within such a committee, unfair advantage resulting from in-depth understanding of how criteria are applied, as well as the optics apparent to an external observer. It therefore remains important for Danida and FFU to consider how best to address this situation, for example by bringing more international specialists on board, as well as a diversity of sector experience.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPTIONS

The recommendations in this chapter are based on the notion that it is not sufficient only to focus on areas in need of improvement. Instead, informed by the evaluation findings, it is important to determine what will provide Danida's support with the best chance to make a difference to development – balancing between the boundaries, imperatives and societal values within which it has to operate, the programming tensions and trade-offs it has to address, and the strengths and weaknesses the evaluation brought to the fore. In essence, it requires a balancing act (Figure 21).
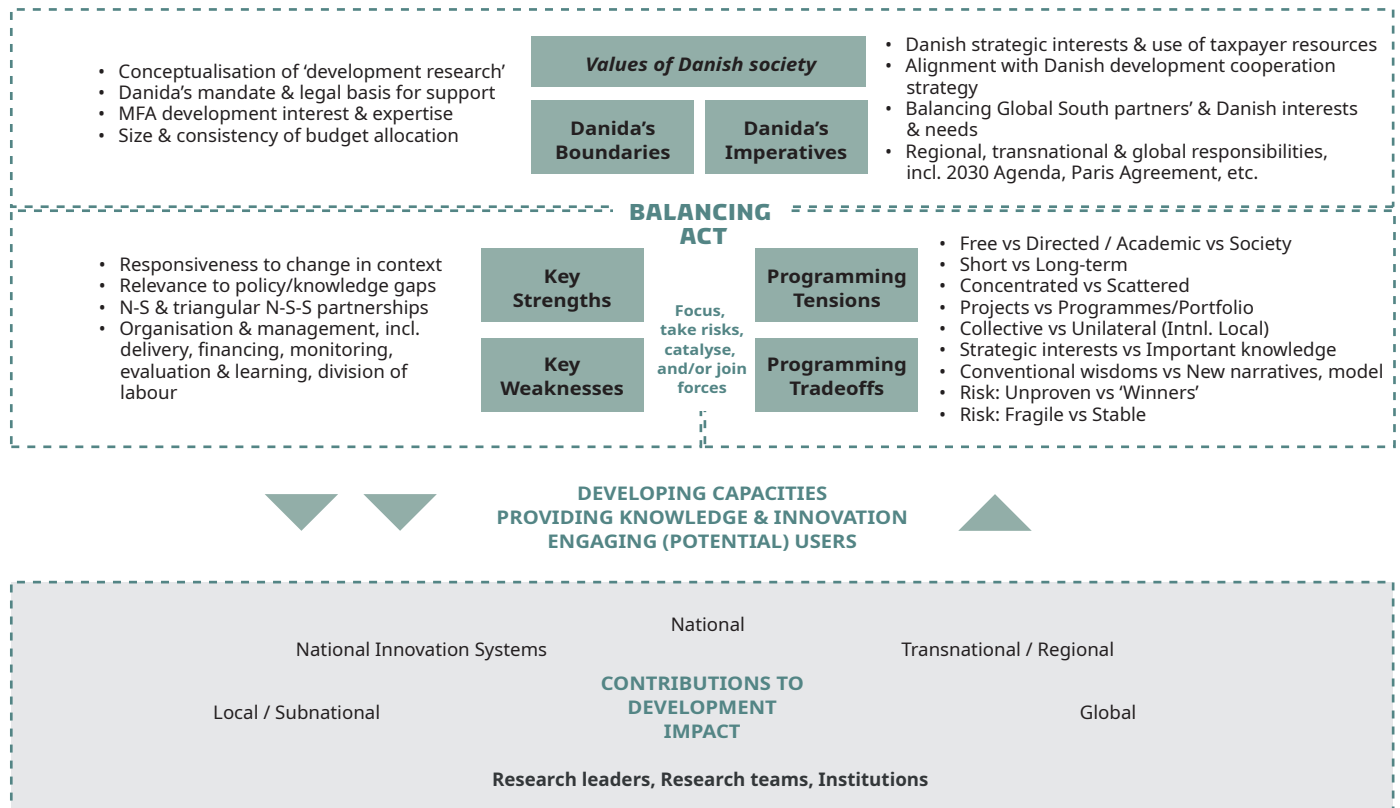
As a fairly small actor in the international development evaluation space, Danida also has to follow one or a combination of several key strategies to establish a clear niche that gives it a profile and greater impact while ameliorating the constraints of its size: (i) **concentrate** efforts and resources on carefully identified foci; (ii) **take risks** that can yield higher payoffs if successful; (iii) find **catalytic pathways** to change; and/or (iv) **create synergies** through the collective impact that joining forces with others can facilitate. Several recommendations and options are given here with this in mind.

Prioritising recommendations is not something the evaluation includes, beyond the options provided here. It will be important to identify those actions with the most catalytic potential; this will in part depend on the political context and available resources and expertise, as well as the strategic vision of the organisational leadership in MFA, DFC and FFU. All proposals are based on evaluation findings and have the potential to enhance the effectiveness and impact of the research supported, and the efficiency and effectiveness of the system responsible for the support.

FIGURE 20: FRAMEWORK FOR DETERMINING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE IMPACT OF DANIDA'S SUPPORT TO RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

INFLUENCES ON DANIDA'S SUPPORT TO RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

• Conceptualisation of 'development research'
• Danida's mandate & legal basis for support
• MFA development interest & expertise
• Size & consistency of budget allocation

Values of Danish society

Danida's Boundaries   **Danida's Imperatives**

• Danish strategic interests & use of taxpayer resources
• Alignment with Danish development cooperation strategy
• Balancing Global South partners' & Danish interests & needs
• Regional, transnational & global responsibilities, incl. 2030 Agenda, Paris Agreement, etc.

BALANCING ACT

• Responsiveness to change in context
• Relevance to policy/knowledge gaps
• N-S & triangular N-S-S partnerships
• Organisation & management, incl. delivery, financing, monitoring, evaluation & learning, division of labour

Key Strengths

Focus, take risks, catalyse, and/or join forces

Key Weaknesses

Programming Tensions

Programming Tradeoffs

• Free vs Directed / Academic vs Society
• Short vs Long-term
• Concentrated vs Scattered
• Projects vs Programmes/Portfolio
• Collective vs Unilateral (Intnl. Local)
• Strategic interests vs Important knowledge
• Conventional wisdoms vs New narratives, model
• Risk: Unproven vs 'Winners'
• Risk: Fragile vs Stable

DEVELOPING CAPACITIES
PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE & INNOVATION
ENGAGING (POTENTIAL) USERS

National Innovation Systems

National

Transnational / Regional

Local / Subnational

CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

Global

Research leaders, Research teams, Institutions

With all of this in mind, the evaluation provides in this chapter **four options** to encourage consideration of different approaches to getting the best results for the investment in development research. Based on analysis of the evaluation findings, under Option 1 is a set of six recommendations with priority actions, more than what is normally proposed in an evaluation. However, all six areas are deemed important; the actions detailed underneath can change depending on resources, interest and further prioritisation by those responsible for follow-up to the evaluation.

'Business as usual' is not an option in an era defined by the Anthropocene, problems without borders, common global interests yet differentiated responsibilities at national level, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, geopolitical power shifts, and competition for resources. The options emphasise this, but they are not cast in stone, nor the only possibilities. Different aspects of each option can be blended to provide new possibilities. All options are based on the notion that by balancing in in sensible ways the key elements highlighted in Figure 21, the research supported will make a real difference to people, institutions and countries in the Global South.

A niche for Danish development research is not explicitly suggested, but it can be crafted by drawing from the recommendations. Focusing rather than scattering efforts will be required, and combining a careful selection of one or more thematic areas in line with Danish societal values and strengths, as expressed in *The World 2030*, with one or more specific ways of working – for example, supporting long-term field-building in key areas that define development (one of the main recommendations in option 1); or mastering how to enable research that has impact in the policy arena (proposed in option 2); or building expertise in fragile contexts as well as strategic areas (proposed in option 3); or focusing exclusively on international collective action (proposed in option 4).

Only the first option is laid out in detail as it is the basic option that will be reflected to some extent in all others, albeit with some tailored adjustments in foci and modalities of support.

Option 1. Strengthening core capabilities

This option is aimed at strengthening existing capabilities and two modalities – competitive FFU Window 1 and BSU – so that research capacities and knowledge in the Global South and in Denmark can address challenges and make use of opportunities to solve development problems.

The proposed changes are not radical, and support continuity and low risk interventions. They focus on building on proven abilities to develop research capacities and knowledge in support of development in the South, while also strengthening the Danish research community. They are interconnected, and many require only small once-off adjustments in current practice. Few are major strategic shifts.

The option is based in the argument that much good has been done that should be built upon; that only two successful modalities – competitive Window 1 and Building Stronger Universities – should be retained in order to focus efforts; and that key improvements can be made based on somewhat stretching the boundaries within which Danida has to operate; dealing with key tensions within limited trade-offs; and building on strengths while addressing identified weaknesses. Among the countries to which Danida provides support, low-income countries with emerging or fairly well-developed science systems will be the main partners.

Some of the proposed adjustments can be done through some realignment of existing financial resources, but the implementation of all will require additional specialised staff in ELK and DFC, as well as some (limited) funding for data management and special strategic studies under auspices of DFC and/or ELK.

All adjustments proposed will be under the collective planning and responsibility of the three key actors in the system – Danida, DFC and FFU, led by ELK. A shift away from these agencies is not suggested.

Recommendation 1. *Bring guidance and coherence through a principles-informed, strategic portfolio approach to development research support.*

Action 1.1 Develop a principles-based strategy. Design and implement a development research strategy that can provide consistency and coherence in initiatives, guiding all relevant actions until 2030 in line with key aspects of *The World 2030* and cognisant of developments and trends in the rest of the research system in Denmark. Such a strategy will highlight where complementarities and synergies within Danida's programming, and with other donors and development financing initiatives can be maximised. It will be valuable to structure the strategy around a set of principles that reflect Danish societal values, clear boundaries and imperatives for development research, and the strengths identified through experience. Such an approach can steer and give stability to development research in the long term outside the political ideology of a particular government.[161]

Action 1.2 Introduce portfolio-based planning, monitoring, reporting and advocacy. Move from treating grants and projects as groups of isolated entities, to treating them as one overall development research portfolio, made up of a set of thematic portfolios. This approach will require FFU, EVAL/ELK and DFC to work with portfolio as well as project data. It will be reflected in how annual allocations are planned, in how FFU selects projects for support, in how portfolio features and trends are monitored and used, and in how reporting is done. All of these efforts will require a review of the monitoring system to provide appropriate data – identified as useful by the major stakeholders – that can be consolidated on a regular basis to show meaningful qualitative and quantitative patterns and shifts that can inform plans, decisions and reports, and support advocacy for more financing (from more diverse sources) by Danida as well as the researchers.

Action 1.3 Report annually. Reinstate annual reporting (but in modern formats) with a view to providing useful portfolio information for accountability as well as advocacy for development research within MFA, in the Danish research community, and in Danish society at large.

Recommendation 2. *Refine the concept of research for development to fit the demands of this era.*

---

161   It also provides a clear basis on which such a strategy and its implementation can be evaluated. See Patton, M.Q. (2017). *Principles-Focused Evaluation: The GUIDE*. Published by The Guilford Press. 435 pp.

Action 2.1 Explicitly incorporate new features in the concept. Make explicit the notion that development research that can make a difference amidst the challenges faced by the Global South and by the world, has to have qualities in line with the demands of this era. While some researchers refuse to be taken out of comfort zones, others have the capability and responsibility to lead in shaping how development research is conceptualised and done. In support of a refined conceptualisation of 'development research', research valuable for development in this era has to go beyond 'applied research done in developing countries', to incorporate specific features that define the type of research needed to build appropriate capacities.

- *Core SDG concepts*. Better engagement with the core concepts in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular the indivisibility of the SDGs, the need for transformation or large-scale change, the focus on inequality and 'leaving no-one behind', and an systems approach that emphasises the relationship between society and nature as well as the sustainability of ecosystems.

- *The 4th Industrial Revolution*. Set to revolutionise the world, it will affect development and how it is conceptualised and done.

- *Multidisciplinarity, sustainable development and systems insights*. Linked to systems insights, combining natural and health sciences with societal and environmental sciences to reflect an emphasis on sustainable development. And deeper understanding is needed of the implications of the emergence of new (mostly complex systems-informed) development frameworks, models and narratives around the world that counter conventional wisdom and worldviews (including in many high-profile academic institutions) about how change happens[162] as well as about how development research is assessed[163].

- *'Decolonising minds'*. Linking to the ongoing efforts at creating awareness of the need for 'decolonisation', especially in the higher education sector.[164] [165] This will require a concerted, joint effort

---

162   There are many resources available that explain this issue, among others Lent, J. (2017). *The Patterning Instinct. A cultural history of humanity's search for meaning*. Published by Prometheus Books. 569 pp.

163   See for example Kraemer-Mbula, E., Tijssen, R., Wallace, M. and McLean R. (2020). *Transforming Research Excellence: New ideas from the Global South*. Published by African Minds. 287 pp.

164   See wa Thiong'o, Ngugi (1986). *Decolonising the mind*. Published by James Currey Ltd/Heinemann. 114 pp.

165   Ndlovo-Gatsheni, S. and Zondi, S. (2016). *Decolonising the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa*. Published by Carolina Academic Press. 204 pp.

by North-South partnerships prepared to take on new ways of thinking and working, with both having to explore the implications of such an approach.

- *Respect for the normative nature of development*. Reflecting norms integral to respectful development in the Global South, as articulated in the Research Legitimacy dimension of the RQ+ assessment framework (Section 3.4).

Action 2.2 Embed the revised concept. Reflect an adjusted conceptualisation of development research in criteria for proposal assessment, and in the dissemination of newsletters, in social media and other communication materials – even if only on an experimental basis among some.

Action 2.3 Make use of the strengths or triangular (especially South-South) cooperation. Where it has worked, triangular (North-South-South) cooperation has proven to be very enlightening and inspiring for both more experienced and younger researchers. Despite more challenges in coordination, in success cases it has proven to be a very useful conduit for new ideas and practices between countries in the South. This type of cooperation provides potential for insights and ways of working that might not be apparent in North-South relations but has to be deliberately cultivated through triangular cooperation.

Recommendation 3. *Strengthen the chance of development impact through focus, connections and long-term field building.*

Action 3.1 Build valuable fields of work through stronger emphasis on synergy, synthesis, long-term support and/or connections to formal systems. Build on the shift to larger 'programmes' a decade ago by deliberately concentrating efforts. This can be done through (i) developing synergies in portfolios and with the work of other donors, (ii) balancing 'scattering' and 'concentrating' efforts, (iii) supporting syntheses to build solid bodies of knowledge, and (iv) a mixture of short- and long-term support.

For BSU, it is in line with the current approach, but with more proactive focus on cultivating synergy and complementarity in Danida's portfolios and with other initiatives. For Window 1, extend the time for allocation of grants to six years, but with annual monitoring to catch and help resolve emerging problems. In carefully identified cases, continue supporting very pertinent, proven (*i.e.*, low risk) research efforts well beyond six years as 'prestigious' research efforts. Enable connections and synergies with other research groups as well as financiers who can help create and support the long-term development of a solid body of knowledge. This can be done around exceptionally important needs in the South coupled to Danish values and areas of expertise, and around excellent research leaders who are highly adept at developing a variety of up-to-date

capacities in young researchers. Fund special studies or projects that have the task to synthesise across projects or findings to create evidence maps or fill key knowledge gaps. Where possible, connect to or craft formal platforms between Danida (or with other donors) and government bodies, advisory structures or societal networks in the South.

Action 3.2 Balance with some 'new blood'. In order to prevent dominance by a few, especially if long-term engagement is sought, track and manage the Window 1 portfolio to understand trends in this regard and attract, at least occasionally, 'new blood' as research leaders – even if somewhat less experienced researchers or engaged from outside the development research domain, but with new ideas and ways of working. This might require some innovative approaches based on special incentives or awards, adjusted criteria, and/or wider dissemination of opportunities to apply – balancing merit, content importance and diversity.

Action 3.3 Focus on the sustainability of results. This is particularly but not exclusively important in the case of BSU, where universities report many impressive efforts to establish institutional systems and mainstreaming of content. While this appears to point to sustainability, there are many other factors that could affect the potential to sustain 'research' universities or PhD programmes of quality, particularly in fragile contexts. The notion of cultivating a developmental university[166] requires high risk but should be promoted – as BSU is doing. However, it then has to be done with sufficient attention to both monitoring and evaluation information that can track the level of risk to the sustainability of what remains after funding comes to an end. It also demands greater attention, from the beginning, to exit strategies that can help ensure the sustainability or further development of what had been achieved.

Recommendation 4. *Rethink and improve 'quality' for within an adjusted notion of 'development research'.*

Action 4.1 Expand the notion of 'research quality' with key cross-cutting elements. Spearhead and embed understanding and assessment of research quality within a deep understanding of key features of development research, especially with respect to the fact the complex systems nature of development. This has to be part of the thinking when designing development research. recognising the need to bring insights about society and the relation of society with nature to

---

166 "Developmental universities carry out training and research activities in response not only to the demands of local industries but also to the needs of marginalised and less-empowered sections of society. They recognise the need to generate new and relevant knowledge and innovations that respond to local needs but also the need to build the capability of communities to absorb this new knowledge. African universities are increasingly asked to play generative and developmental roles to ensure economic development." See for example http://eac.ac/articles/2069.

bear on all research designs. In addition, include as cross-cutting areas 'research legitimacy', and 'positioning for impact' as defined in the RQ+ assessment framework (without holding researchers accountable for the actual uptake and use of their research outside the academic sector).

Action 4.2 Ensure that the monitoring system supports precise and expanded notions of 'quality'. Adjust the calls for proposals as well as the monitoring and evaluation system to enable regular data analysis aimed at highlighting quality trends in the grant portfolios. Include monitoring of the quality of policy briefs, websites and related materials with a view to sharing good practice.

Action 4.3 Safeguard the interests of the Global South. Do everything possible to ensure that priorities are those of the partner countries, and ideally areas of critical importance from a national policy or national priority perspective. Reflect the importance of serving the interests of the Global South through proposal assessment criteria, monitoring of dynamics in partnerships and opportunities to learn and share among Southern partners, for example through triangular cooperation and the availability of information about what makes for good (and poor) North-South and triangular partnerships. Determine how the national screening committees and scientists in the South can play a more dynamic, visionary role in the process of setting criteria, themes and reviewing proposals.

Recommendation 5. *Harness the value of monitoring and evaluation to provide for new insights, accountability, strategy and advocacy.*

Action 5.1 Streamline the collection and integration of monitoring, evaluation and research data. These actions will require some com- mitted human and financial resources, in particular in DFC, with needs guided by EVAL/ELK and FFU. Proposal and reporting templates already provide valuable information, but can be adjusted support the sys- tematic synthesis of valuable information on an annual basis.[167] Based on a portfolio approach, integration of research findings as well as of descriptive and performance data by DFC can help MFA, DFC and FFU to highlight the value of research for development, and inform decisions and strategies. Tailored briefings to embassies and influential actors in

---

167   Some might require more (regular) targeting, such as the pace of delivery, the type and scope of deliverables against promises, the value of trian- gular cooperation, interesting research findings, systematic examples of the uptake and of materials used to promote the uptake of the research, performance outliers (with reasons) useful for accountability and learning, and success factors in North-South and triangular partnerships, as well as descriptive information about what is supported, and assessment processes (including for example the type of peer reviewers) are just some that can be considered.

the South can strengthen the link with development cooperation and partners.

Action 5.2 Support special studies. As part of the effort to draw value from research efforts and portfolio information, allocate more funding for special studies and strategic evaluations, in line with other agencies active in development research, for example the International Development Research Council in Canada on research excellence[168] or gender transformative research[169]; Sida, on how to provide development research support in fragile contexts; and Norad, on analysis of institutional capacity development in the NORHED programme[170].

Action 5.3 Provide pertinent information that can help grant holders perform better. Using performance information – for example on what makes or breaks North-South or triangular partnerships, what makes institutional strengthening work sustainably – join forces with other donors, think-tanks, government initiatives, etc. to establish simple sources of information, or even more formal training modules and materials.

Recommendation 6. *Strengthen the development research support system in Denmark.*

Action 6.1 Adjust the role of DFC. Given the performance and commitment of DFC to date, the evaluation supports 'Option 2' posed in the 2015 Review of the Administration of DFC's Support to Development Research. This will allow DFC to take on all administrative and management functions, including the compilation of all necessary data and information related to portfolios, performance, trends and results in close cooperation with EVAL/ELK; studies and sharing-learning initiatives based on the analysed information; and representing the interests of Danish development research in international fora in close cooperation with EVAL/ELK.

Action 6.2. Strengthen the strategic capacity of EVAL. As part of what is now ELK, 'EVAL' has to have sufficient human and financial resources to enable leadership in strategy as well as connections with DFC, FFU and the Ministry, including the embassies. It is also the primary representative of Danida's development research profile internationally, with

---

168   Ofir, Z. and Schwandt, T.S. (2012). *Understanding Research Excellence in IDRC. Final Report* (December 2012). Available at https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/ files/sp/Documents EN/RE-study-Understanding-RE-at-IDRC-full-report.pdf

169   *Gender-Transformative Research: Lessons from the International Development Research Centre*. Published by IDRC, November 2018.

170   Tor Halvorsen, Kristin Skare Orgeret & Roy Krøvel (eds) (2019). *Sharing Knowledge, Transforming Societies: The Norhed Programme 2013-2020*. Published by African Minds.

participation in important international fora. Its position at the intersection of evaluation and research provides it with a robust capacity to be a source of evidence-informed decision-making in the Ministry.

Action 6.3. Strengthen FFU for its task. Change the criteria used by FFU to reflect changes in the conceptualisation of development research and of research quality. In order to address perceptions of too-high potential of conflict of interest, aim to prevent capture by any particular group of persons through regular staggered rotation of members, use blinded proposals for relevance and quality, and international peer reviewers from both the North and the South, as well as a significant percentage (the evaluation suggests at 50%) of international FFU members. Videoconferencing should be able to keep the costs of such an arrangement within limits.

Action 6.4. Treat development research as part of the larger research system in Denmark. Devise connections that can help development research experts funded by Danida infuse their expertise and experience into the rest of the Danish research system, including into the work of the Innovation Fund – especially if the movement towards serving Danish interests in the Global South continues. It is not the task of this evaluation to study the Danish research system but it is important to ensure that what has been done and achieved inspire other researchers as well as management processes that touch on Southern interests.

Option 2. Strengthening the Chance of Development Impact

This option complements and builds on Option 1, essentially becoming an Option '1 Plus' through the same modalities operating in the same countries. Rather than focusing exclusively on actions that can improve existing core strengths – developing capacities and building relevant problem-solving knowledge – it shifts focus to how to best position the research processes and findings for uptake and use by influential actors outside the academic environment.

This option still focuses on what Danida and the research teams can control (actions in the so-called 'sphere of control'), but shifts attention to how best to influence change in the 'sphere of influence' which, in turn, is aimed at enhancing the chance of development impact in the 'sphere of interest' (Figure 21). It does not propose radical change, but rather a shift to strengthening the effectiveness of the research throughout the processes of proposal assessment, grants portfolio management, research, and engagement with potential users of the research findings.

FIGURE 21: THE 'SPHERE OF CONTROL' OF DANIDA AND ITS GRANTHOLDERS AS FOCUS FOR ACTION ACROSS ALL OPTIONS.[171]
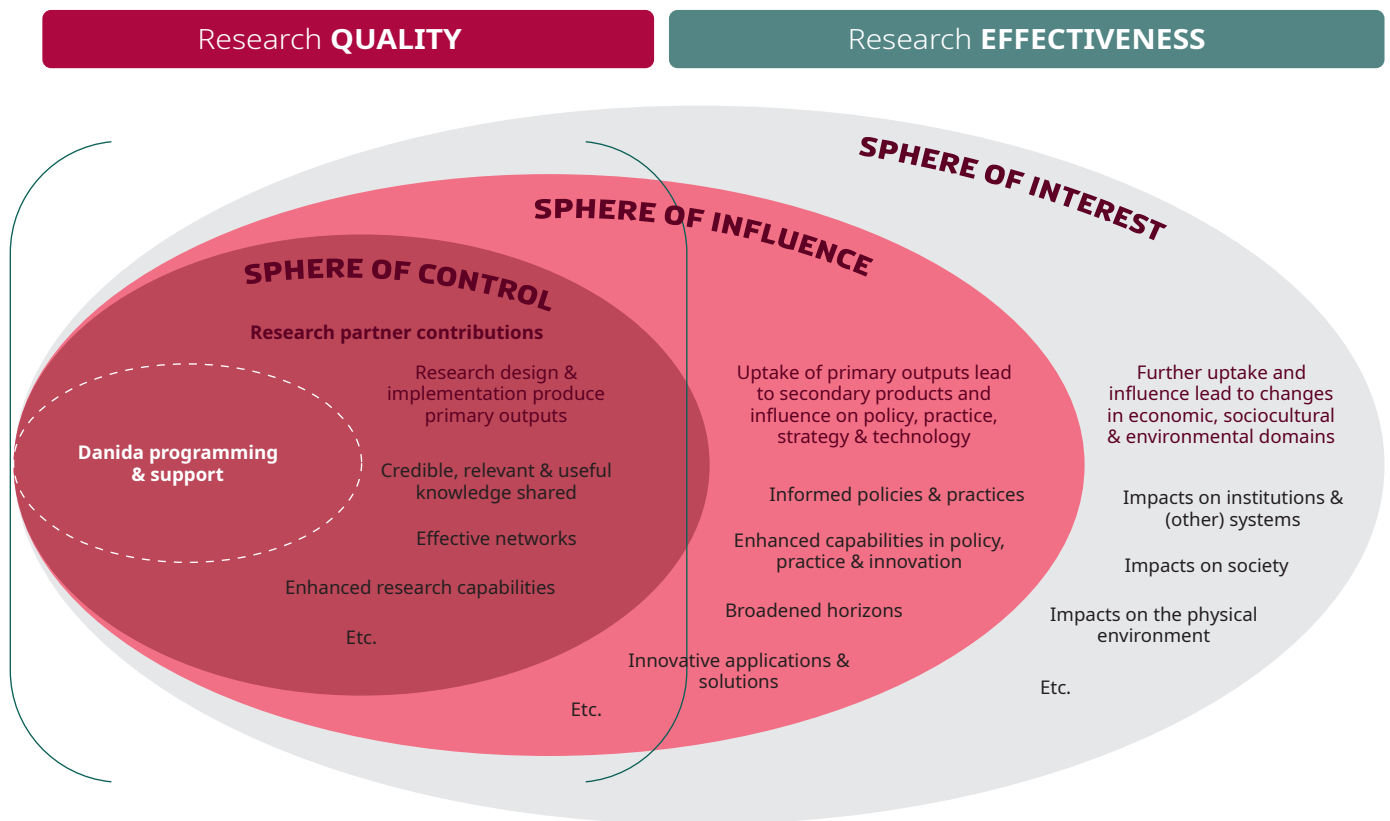
Source: Adapted from Ofir, Z. et al, IDRC, 2016.

Option 2 will require more expertise and financial support – both to the researchers and to DFC – aimed at helping research teams increase the chance that their research processes and findings will be used, especially among national to global level policymakers or industries that can facilitate large-scale change. It will deliver more rounded, boundary-spanning researchers who, in addition to the basic capacities developed through Option 1, can deal better with that which drives and directs policymaking, civil society and/or business interests in their specific contexts.

Actions could include requiring from applicants to position their problem-solving research directly within an urgent and challenging development priority – ideally with early engagement in the design of the research by potential users, and with potential to make a difference on a reasonably large scale; map the systems within which their findings

---

171   Adapted from Ofir, Z. and Schwandt, T.S. (2012). *Understanding Research Excellence in IDRC. Final Report* (December 2012). Available at https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents EN/RE-study-Understanding-RE-at-IDRC-full-report.pdf

are intended to make a difference so that the full scope of what is to be done and achieved is clear; develop strategies based on state-of-the-art insights into what might best work to reach and communicate with potential users and, with facilitation by Danida and embassies in selected countries, identify structures and opportunities for the systematic introduction of their research and/or research findings to influential actors.

Option 3. Harnessing Research for Danish Development Cooperation

This option focuses on aligning very closely with *The World 2030*, in order to use the strength of research and specialist knowledge to complement and support Danish development cooperation. Rather than disperse limited resources, in both BSU and the current Window 1 focus will shift to help Danish researchers establish a solid niche by using their expertise in some of the poorest, most fragile contexts in the South to build up solid, coherent bodies of knowledge in service of the societies living under these circumstances. Capacities and knowledge will be developed through triangular cooperation with stronger, more established partners in the South. This part of Option 3 will require attention to the protection of researchers as well as formal linkages, where possible, to relevant ministries, the Danish embassy, other development partners, civil society organisations and/or business to form strong coalitions that can help ensure relevance, strategic direction and sustained results at a scale that can make a difference in challenging contexts.[172] Using state of the art experience in working in such countries, including in bridging the gap between humanitarian aid and development, will be imperative for success.

This option provides the advantage of shaping a high-risk yet potentially very productive niche for Danish development research support – given the potential to build on the existing expertise in the development research community in working in challenging contexts, and the chance of significant pay-off for limited investments despite (usually) expensive logistics and the challenge of sustaining good results in complex contexts.

A second part of Option 3 will focus on expanding successes in the Window 2 funding channel and evolving the modality of support to middle-income countries based on in-depth monitoring and evaluation of the current pilot. Establishing processes and cooperation approaches that safeguard and balance the interests of both Denmark and the

---

172 A transition phase to this type of coalition-based support in fragile contexts has been mooted in a 2019 report on options for the future by DFC.

partner countries will be a priority for Danida, FFU and DFC, and for the development research communities in the participating countries. The experience gained to date through Danida's support, and the proven value of well-managed North-South and triangular partnerships can help offset challenges in this regard.

The roles of ELK and DFC will have to be adjusted accordingly. FFU will have to be reconstituted, or better integrated with the rest of the Danish research system – also in order to infuse the system with the expertise of the development research community. Embassies will have to commit to a more dynamic role, with more expertise – and will require additional resources – to assist with some of the processes and help direct priorities and plans. Youth, gender and other norms noted in *The World 2030* will cut across all initiatives.

Option 4. Partnering for Collective Power

In order to face the major challenges in the world to which research should contribute, collective rather than unilateral or bilateral action is becoming the norm. Becoming again part of joint international initiatives will provide Danida with soft power in the research and development arena and enable it to punch above the weight of its relatively small financial contribution.

This option therefore focuses exclusively on mobilising and enabling participation in international partnerships and funding coalitions, with a strong focus on the interests of the Global South while also capitalising on the connections to Danish research priorities and expertise. In line with several other Nordic and other OECD agencies such as Sida and IDRC in Canada, these efforts will identify, support and participate in (potentially) powerful and impactful initiatives and organisations at transnational, regional and global level.

This has been done to some extent by Danida in the earlier part of the decade under review, through modalities such as the funding of the CGIAR system, partnership clusters such as those through UNU-WIDER and ReCom, and the support of Global South-based initiatives and organisations such as CODESRIA. Sida provides additional examples of the potential of a focus on supporting key organisations in the South, including regional organisations such as the African Academy of Sciences and the Science Granting Council Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa. It facilitates participation of Southern researchers in major programmes and international networks, for example the EU or those working on the SDGs such as the Belmont Forum. Such an emphasis can also give Denmark the opportunity to help shape major initiatives, for example the 'Ensuring Value in Research Funders' Collaboration and Development

Forum'[173] focusing on health-related research, or the 'Global Forum of Funders' which has called for a decade of global sustainability funding action that can 'scale up on impact through game-changing action within funding, research and science systems throughout the world'[174], and the recent call to African Union and European Union leaders by the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities (The Guild) to create a substantial fund for research collaboration between African and European universities in order to 'address the profound demographic, social and environmental changes facing both continents'.[175]

Such a shift to international action will have implications for the support to Danish researchers and Danish-specific interests. Some funding opportunities will diminish, but a focus on the youth, in line with *The World 2030,* can be included through, for example, supporting young Danish as well as Global South development researchers to link into such coalitions and networks.

Blending this focus with elements of some of the other proposed options might have the dual benefit of ensuring that even limited Danish support can be part of something larger, while still serving the interests of the South and of Denmark, and inspire new cohorts of Danish and Global South researchers to enter development research for the benefit of the world as a whole.

173   See for example Chinnery F. et al (2018). *Ensuring value in health-related research.* The Lancet, Volume 391, Number 10123, p. 813-910, Mar 3, 2018.

174   See https://council.science/current/news/funding-science-for-sustainability/

175   Detail can be found at https://www.the-guild.eu/news/2020/leading-african-and-european-universities-issue-jo.html

EVALUATION OF DANIDA SUPPORT TO DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH (2008-2018)