

CSO PARTNERS THE VIEW FROM THE SOUTH

This document presents the views of Southern partners of Danish CSOs supported under Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs) and various pooled funds operating out of Denmark. It is based on two surveys administered to Southern partners as part of an evaluation of Danish support to civil society, and organised by INTRAC and NCG. The surveys were carried out between February and April 2021.

The document is based on findings from two surveys.

- The first was administered to 95 Southern partners supported through Danish pooled funds. The survey was sent to all supported partners of Danish CSOs receiving over 3 million DKK per year. The pooled funds covered were the Civil Society Fund / Pool (CSF) administered by CISU; CKU (formerly DMCCDD); and Dansk Handicap (DH) – Danish Disability.
- The second survey was sent to 106 Southern partners of 15 Danish CSOs in receipt of an SPA. The partners were chosen at random from a comprehensive list of around 646 partners provided by Danish CSOs.

Both surveys had a very high response rate. For the pooled fund survey, responses were received from 75 out of 95 organisations (79%). For the random SPA survey, responses were received from 96 out of 106 organisations (90.6%). The high response rates mean that the findings of the two surveys, taken together, are representative of the views of around 750 Southern partners.

Table 1: Percentage of Southern partners that say their capacity has been enhanced ‘a lot’ or ‘a moderate amount’ in defined areas of capacity

Area of capacity	Percentage
Engaging in advocacy	81.3
Internal systems (e.g. finance, human resources)	80.7
Technical skills and expertise	80.1
Strengthening gender equality and diversity	79.5
Leadership and governance	75.4
Compliance (e.g. anti-corruption mechanisms, safeguarding)	73.1
Mechanisms to support accountability to poor and excluded groups	72.5
Monitoring and evaluation	71.3
Fundraising and communications	60.8
Adherence to humanitarian standards	54.4

Within this document, findings have been divided into five sections, as follows:

- capacity support;
- impact on Southern partners;
- added-value of Danish CSOs;
- localisation; and
- overall satisfaction.

Capacity support

Over three-quarters of Southern partners said they had been supported ‘a lot’ or ‘a moderate amount’ in the areas of strengthening gender equality and diversity (78%), enhancing technical skills and expertise (77%), and engaging in advocacy (76%). Over 70% of partners also said they had been supported ‘a lot’ or a ‘moderate’ amount to develop internal systems (e.g. finance or human resources), develop mechanisms to support accountability to poor and excluded groups, and engage in monitoring and evaluation.

Lower numbers of Southern partners said they had been supported ‘a lot’ or ‘a moderate amount’ on leadership and governance (67%), compliance (66%), fundraising and communications (55%) and adherence to humanitarian standards (51%).

When asked how this had translated into enhanced capacity, over 80% of Southern partners said their capacity had been enhanced ‘a lot’ or ‘a moderate amount’ to engage in advocacy, manage internal systems and apply technical skills and expertise (see table 1). Applied across the entire portfolio of Southern partners, this means around 550 Southern partners feel their capacity has been enhanced in these areas because of the support they received from Danish CSOs.

Table 2: Percentage of Southern partners that say their Danish partners have had a ‘strongly positive influence’ over different areas of their work

Area of influence	Percentage
Their relationships with their constituents or beneficiaries	73.7
The reach of their work (the number of communities or beneficiaries they can support)	69.6
The visibility of their work	65.5
Their practices (the way they work)	61.4
Their strategies or policies	58.5
Their relationships with national or local governments	53.2
Their values and the way they apply them	52.0
Their ideas and the way they communicate them	49.7

The low numbers for adherence to humanitarian standards seen in table 1 can be explained because many partners do not engage in humanitarian work. More notable is the low percentage of partners that feel their capacity to engage in fundraising and communications has been enhanced. In particular, only 14 out of 96 partners of SPA agencies felt their capacity had been enhanced ‘a lot’ in this area.

Impact on Southern partners

Southern partners were asked to what extent Danish CSOs had influenced them in a number of areas, including their ideas, values, capacities and reach. Table 2 above shows the percentage of Southern partners that felt that Danish CSOs had ‘strongly influenced’ them in these areas.

It is noticeable that the two areas in which Southern partners feel they have been most influenced are in the quality of their relationships with their constituents or beneficiaries, and in their reach (i.e. the number of these constituents they can support). This means that nearly three quarters of all supported Southern partners think that their Danish partners have had a strongly positive influence on both the quality and the quantity of their work over the past four years.

By contrast, fewer partners believed that Danish CSOs had had as profound an influence around their values and the way they apply them, or their ideas and the way they communicate them. Although many Southern partners did state they had been influenced in these areas, either

‘strongly’ or ‘moderately’, the overall view is that the influence of Danish CSOs is stronger over the **way** they work (e.g. strategies, policies, practices and reach) than over their values, ideals and ideas.

Added-value of Danish CSOs

Southern partners were also asked to what extent Danish CSOs had added-value to their work in a number of pre-defined areas. These areas were chosen partly to reflect the purposes of Danish support, as outlined in the CSO policy. Options provided were ‘a lot’, ‘a moderate amount’, ‘a small amount’ or ‘not at all’. Again, it is most interesting to look at the numbers of Southern partners that feel Danish CSOs have added-value ‘a lot’ to their work in specific areas (see table 3 below).

More than half of Southern partners felt that Danish CSOs had added-value ‘a lot’ in the areas of enhancing capacity, and facilitating linkages and cross-learning with other agencies. Advocacy work also featured prominently with 48% of Southern partners saying Danish CSOs had added-value ‘a lot’ in linking their advocacy work to the work of others, and 46% saying the same regarding strengthening their presence at international or national events.

Only 14% of Southern partners felt that Danish CSOs had added-value ‘a lot’ in supporting them against threats or intimidation, but of course this is highly dependent on context, and many CSO partners do not need this form of support.

Table 3: Percentage of Southern partners that say their Danish partners have added-value ‘a lot’ to their work in defined areas

Area of influence	Percentage
Enhancing capacity through formal capacity building support (e.g. training)	57.3
Facilitating synergies and cross learning with other agencies or networks	55.0
Linking advocacy work to the work of others at local, national and/or international levels	48.5
Strengthening partner presence at national or international events	46.2
Supporting partners to adopt best global practice	45.6
Helping partners to identify new sources of funding and/or providing access to donors	38.0
Introducing partners to new research, tools, methodologies or ways of working	32.7
Providing protection from threats or intimidation	14.6

Southern partners were also asked to identify in which **three** areas they would like to receive further support in the future. In both surveys, the highest numbers of partners wanted more support to identify new sources of funding and/or providing access to donors. This included 68 out of 96 SPA agency Southern partners and 64 out of 75 pooled fund Southern partners. In second place in both surveys was the desire to receive more formal capacity support (65% of SPA agency Southern partners and 72% of pooled fund Southern partners).

Thereafter, Southern partners of SPA agencies wished to see more support in introducing them to new research (52 out of 96), strengthening their presence at national and international events (49 out of 96) and linking their advocacy work to the work of others (48 out of 96). The third option for pooled fund Southern partners was linking advocacy work to the work of others (49 out of 75).

Overall, Southern partners generally wished to see more added-value support in areas where they feel they are already receiving significant support. The exception was in the area of helping them identify new sources of funding, where some Southern partners clearly feel that a) they are not receiving that much support at present; and b) they would like to receive more in the future. This reinforces the low scores on enhanced capacity in this area mentioned above.

Southern partners of pooled fund agencies were also asked how they think they add-value to the work of Danish CSOs. The top responses were:

- providing updated information on beneficiaries, areas of intervention and the local environments and contexts;
- contributing to Danish partners' institutional or strategic objectives;
- engaging in mutually beneficial learning and knowledge sharing, or promoting spaces for reflection and analysis;
- connecting Danish partners with other local organisations through contacts and social networks;
- providing stories of change for fundraising (or for development education in Denmark);
- helping provide visibility and communication for Danish partners in-country;
- providing evidence for advocacy work or policy-influencing work;
- piloting innovations to serve as a basis for learning and scaling up, or upscaling work to other project areas; and
- acting as an advocate or mediator for the Danish partner with local communities.

Clearly, Southern partners do not see added-value as a one-way street, and feel they bring many contributions to the table.

Localisation

Southern partners were provided with a list of statements, phrased both positively and negatively, and were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements. The comments below are based on an analysis of the answers they provided.

- Most Southern partners agreed that they were provided with “long-term, strategic capacity development support”. However, when asked whether the support they received was “short-term and project-based rather than long-term and strategic” a sizeable minority (37% of SPA Southern partners and 49% of pooled fund Southern partners) agreed. This suggests some dissatisfaction with the short-term, project-based nature of some support.
- When asked whether their Danish partners provided “some long-term funding that can be used flexibly” 36% of pooled fund Southern partners disagreed, as did 51% of SPA Southern partners. Across both surveys, over half of the Southern partners agreed that the Danish CSOs “only provide short-term funding, or funding tied to specific projects.” This reinforces the views expressed above.
- There was fairly unanimous agreement that Danish CSOs “recognise and make use of Southern partners’ full capacities” and do not “often overlook or underestimate” their capacity. The vast majority of Southern partners also felt that their Danish partners “involved them early in project design and planning and listened to their views”.
- When asked whether they felt they were “often treated as a sub-contractor or grantee rather than an equal partner” 30% of SPA Southern partners and 12% of pooled fund Southern partners agreed. There is clearly dissatisfaction on behalf of a sizeable minority.
- In the pooled fund survey, almost no Southern partners felt that Danish CSOs took credit for the work they did or failed to name them in external communications. However, 8 out of 96 SPA Southern partners did feel that this happened, and a further 7 were ambivalent – neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- 37% of Southern partners did not agree that they were “involved in discussions or communications with donors (e.g. Danida or in-country donors)”. Views were also mixed when asked whether Danish CSOs usually managed the relationships with donors themselves. This supports other evidence that Southern partners can at times feel cut off from processes.
- On the other hand, 87% of Southern partners agreed that they were consulted, and their views regularly taken into account in major decisions. Only 12% felt that their Danish CSO partner(s) often take major decisions without consulting them or taking their views into account.

- Nearly three quarters of Southern partners (74%) agreed that they were supported to engage in international fora and debates around policies. However, when presented with a similar negative statement – “Your Danish partner(s) often exclude you when they engage in international fora and debates around policies” – 19% of Southern partners agreed. This was more pronounced in the SPA partner survey, where 23% of Southern partners agreed they were excluded and a further 23% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Southern partners were also asked a series of questions about how they would like their relationships to develop in the future. 71% of Southern partners agreed that they were “satisfied with their current relationship with their Danish partners and would like things to stay as they are”, although a sizeable minority (15%) disagreed. However, over two-thirds of Southern partners (68%) also said they “would like to have more equality with their Danish partners”. This suggests a level of satisfaction with the current status quo, but a strong desire to have more equality in future. Things are good but could be better.

As far as the direction of travel going forward is concerned, 74% of SPA Southern partners and 89% of pooled fund Southern partners agreed that their “relationship with their Danish partners was getting more equal” although this tended to be ‘agreement’ rather than ‘strong agreement’. However, around 29% of SPA Southern partners felt their relationship with their Danish partners had not changed much since it began.

Overall satisfaction

Finally, Southern partners were asked how far they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements regarding different aspects of their practical relationships with their Danish partner(s). Most striking was the extremely high agreement that their Danish partner(s):

- are responsive to their reports and provide feedback (97%);
- interact with them in a friendly and supportive manner (97%); and
- listen to their concerns (95%)

This suggests that overall the relationships between Danish CSOs and their partners are extremely positive, and that there is mutual respect and affection.

Satisfaction was also over 80% for the timely transfer of funds, the ability to change budgets as circumstances allow, M&E requirements, and flexibility of support during times of crisis.

Satisfaction was noticeably lower in two areas. One was the statement “there are no gaps in funding, allowing for smooth continuity”. Only 57% of SPA Southern partners agreed with this statement, although 86% of pooled fund Southern partners did so. The other area was around exit strategies. Only 64% of SPA Southern partners and 58% of pooled fund Southern partners feel there is a “well-planned and executed exit strategy for the partnership

Summary

- Over 80% of Southern partners said their capacity had been enhanced to engage in advocacy, manage internal systems and apply technical skills and expertise, respectively. Applied across the entire portfolio of Southern partners, this means around 550 Southern partners feel their capacity has been enhanced in these areas because of the support they received from Danish CSOs over the past four years.
- In addition to enhanced capacity, large numbers of Southern partners felt that Danish CSOs had added-value ‘a lot’ in the areas of facilitating linkages and cross-learning with other agencies; linking their advocacy work to the work of others at local, national and/or international levels; and strengthening their presence at national or international events.
- Southern partners wished to see more added-value support in areas where they feel they are already receiving significant support. The exception was helping them identify new sources of funding. Many partners feel that they are not receiving that much support in this area at present; and would like to receive more in the future.
- Generally, Danish CSOs have a greater influence over the way Southern partners work (e.g. strategies, policies, practices and reach) than over their values, ideals and ideas.
- A sizeable minority of Southern partners expressed dissatisfaction with the short-term, project-based nature of some support they received from their Danish partners. Across both surveys, over half of the Southern partners agreed that the Danish CSOs “only provided short-term funding, or funding tied to specific projects.”
- There was widespread agreement that Danish CSOs recognise and make use of Southern partners’ full capacities, listen to their views, and take their views into account when making major decisions.
- When asked how they would like relationships to develop in the future, over two-thirds of Southern partners said they would like to have more equality with their Danish partners.
- Southern partners overwhelmingly feel that their Danish partners are responsive to their reports and provide feedback; interact with them in a friendly and supportive manner; and listen to their concerns. However, there was a higher level of dissatisfaction with the continuity of funding (avoiding funding-gaps), and the lack of clearly planned exit strategies for the partnerships.