

Evaluation of Danish Support to Civil Society

Annex K: Study on Danida's support for the promotion of a 'vibrant and open debate' (Goal 1)

Information background working paper

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N.B. Informal background working papers are not intended as complete or polished reports but as notes primarily for use by the consulting to feed into the main evaluation report.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction -----	6
1.1	Scope and objectives -----	6
1.2	Methodology and evidence base -----	7
2	Findings -----	8
2.1	The goal and strategy itself -----	8
2.2	<i>Dimension of Change - A</i> : “Denmark will, together with civil society actors, endeavour to promote a vibrant and open debate on poverty reduction, nationally and internationally” -----	10
2.3	<i>Dimension of Change - B</i> : “Denmark will work for the establishment of a better framework for civil society’s participation and work in developing countries in relation to, for example, national legislation, cooperation processes and public financing” -----	18
2.4	<i>Dimension of Change - C</i> : “Denmark will contribute to ensuring the involvement of civil society in the implementation and further development of the Paris Declaration, nationally and internationally” -----	22
2.5	Issues cross-cutting the dimensions of change -----	24
3	Conclusions, lessons and recommendations -----	28
3.1	Conclusions -----	28
3.2	Recommendations and lessons -----	29

Executive Summary

This study is focused on the extent to which the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has operationalised its Civil Society Strategy (2008) by supporting Strategic Goal 1 (SG1) of the strategy internationally and nationally.

Findings

There is wide and deep ownership amongst civil society of **the strategy itself**, including the goal on ‘vibrant and open debate’, and the sub goals beneath it, all of which are highly valued. The goal lacks a clear definition and there is some lack of clarity about what the goal is aiming to achieve and how progress should be assessed. The attempt at monitoring the strategy via cross-cutting monitoring reports is a useful exercise in capturing stories, examples, successes and challenges, although there is no clarification of expectations around outcomes.

In terms of the **first sub-area of the goal: Denmark will, together with civil society actors, endeavour to promote a vibrant and open debate on poverty reduction, nationally and internationally**, interviewees were generally approving in their assessment of the support given by Danida in this area, although respondents were less certain about the extent to which embassies followed through on the strategy.

Evidence from the cross-cutting monitoring reports suggests that that in 2009 28% of the focus Danish organisations supported by Danida is on the broad area of ‘Rights, advocacy and debate’. Many of the organisations supported work on relevant issues and civil society groups in the South. Support is given to key initiatives and organisations focused on achieving change in this area. However, monitoring data, especially on outcomes is anecdotal and partial, but outcomes are also difficult to attribute. Anecdotally, support for key projects and organisations had important outcomes although there are limited examples of outcomes.

There was clear support for civil society to engage with **climate change processes**, with COP 15 in Copenhagen cited as a key arena for debate, with good access for civil society. Interviewees noted that they felt that more flexibility was allowed in terms of information provision and campaigning in a Danish context and NGOs felt they were able to hold the government to account in order to push for ambitious outcome at Copenhagen.

In terms of the area: **vibrant and open debate in Denmark**, recent polling has suggested that while support for giving aid is still relatively high, there is a general lack of confidence that aid works, suggesting that support is fragile. Danida has supported World’s Best News. There was widespread support amongst the majority of interviewees for this initiative, who pointed to the new and unusual styles of campaigning and considered it useful in promoting basic understanding of the MDGs, although some claimed it did not necessarily engage people at a deep level with the issues. There was also praise for Danida’s support for the recent Why Poverty? series of debates and TV programmes and for the support given to Concord Denmark.

There was concern amongst CSOs that funding that used to be allocated to development education work was redirected in 2006 away from some NGOs and into the promotion of Danida activities aimed at shoring up public support for aid. CSOs in general felt that they could be better utilised in supporting and generating debates in Denmark, and were not consistent and clear about the extent to which this was explicit aim of the strategy or support from Danida.

On the second **sub-area of the goal: Civil society operating space**, a good deal of Danida's civil society support has gone towards supporting civil society space, although changes at the global, regional and national levels are notoriously difficult to attribute to any one actor. Danida is supporting important initiatives including the high profile CIVICUS Civil Society Index. In terms of outcome there are signs of progress (in Burma, Uganda, Ghana for instance) but also signs of continuing problems. Embassy support for civil society space is, anecdotally, present in many places, but inconsistent.

On the **third sub-area of the goal: support for civil society involvement in implementation and developing the Paris Declaration**, nationally and internationally, this area was generally lauded as a successful and sustained implementation of the strategy, with Danida playing a very open, inclusive and supportive role vis-à-vis civil society involvement and participation. As a key part of its support for civil society on this issue, Danida has funded two global civil society organisation coalitions: Civil Society Voices for BetterAid and the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. A recent evaluation of these two programmes found that they made very relevant contributions to the aid and development effectiveness debate at the global level, and that they successfully supported ambitious, complex and dynamic processes. Although outcomes cannot be attributed to Danida, the outcomes were found to be broadly aligned with civil society aims.

Anecdotally **embassies** regularly intervene relating to civil society space, and fund organisations and networks on policy dialogues and other related areas. The Strategy outlines key modalities for embassies in the civil society area but these do not directly link with the goal on supporting a vibrant and open debate. Reporting from embassies is inconsistent and leadership-dependent rather than led by the strategy and monitored accordingly. A reported lack of capacity at embassy level includes lower overall numbers of staff, a lack of knowledge, connections and sophisticated understanding of civil society, and a tendency to favour a smaller number of larger capital-based NGOs and networks. Embassy buy-in to the strategy is relatively weak, partly due to the number of other strategies and political priorities – local and Danish – that they must contend with.

Danida funding given to civil society organisations is seen as reflecting a historical arrangement rather than representing a strategic vision of which organisation has what core and developing competencies in relation to the strategy. Importantly, some of the core-funded framework organisations have recently become part of an international 'family' or

federation. There is also lack of clarity relating to the rules that govern the allowance of Danida-funded advocacy activities within Denmark.

Recommendations

Danida should:

- Provide further guidance and clarification to help define vibrant and open debate, whether ‘vibrant and open debate internationally and nationally’ includes the promotion of such debate in Denmark, what the value of such debate is and whether it is limited to support for development aid, or goes further and includes deeper and broader engagement of the Danish public on such issues.
- Further clarify the extent to which PRO funds can be used for campaigning in Denmark, for work on policy coherence and points of disagreement and challenge for CSOs.
- Consider further defining the types of outcomes that Danida wants to see, for instance by outlining more specific process-oriented signifiers of contributed change, and include these in guidance to partners and embassies.
- Seek to ensure that embassies are clear about their respective contributions to vibrant and open debate. Embassies support for civil society space, enabling open and vibrant debate and policy dialogue should become more a consistent deliverable, by spelling out more clearly what their contribution the strategy might mean at embassy level and what the specific added value of embassy-level support (financial and non-financial) is on such issues. This should include the role of embassies in:
 - ensuring civil society participation in invited spaces for policy dialogues
 - supporting legal and enabling frameworks for (formal and informal) civil society space
 - funding a diverse range of organisations in terms of size, location and positioning
- Further explore new funding modalities that would allow better pooling of resources to fund organisations and networks that are strategically placed to deliver outcomes in this area, while also remain flexible enough to seek out small, local, unusual and innovative organisations that can usefully add to the debate while also growing in the future.
- Give further thought to the relevance of changes in civil society, in particular organisations that have become part of global ‘families’ or federations, and to what extent such groupings make possible greater strategic benefits in terms of large impact on the issue of vibrant and open debates, civil society space or on other specific areas relating to SG1.
- Think more comprehensively about what the types of organisations that are able to deliver outcomes towards a vibrant and open debate in the South, and provide funds accordingly. Greater synergies should also be considered in relation to reporting on

other areas of support, such as media support, which have direct and indirect outcomes and potential impact on SG1.

- Seek to ensure in future that Danida's own communications on shoring up support for development aid support the wider objective on rights based approaches
- Work to ensure that schools and schoolchildren are more involved in debates around international and poverty, (possibly by working with the Ministry of Education).

1 Introduction

1.1 Scope and objectives

This short study is part of a larger project: *Evaluation of Danish Support to Civil Society*, the overall purpose of which is to collate the lessons learned from the operationalisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008 *Strategy for Danish Support to Civil Society in Developing Countries* (hereafter civil society strategy) with a particular focus on results. The objective of this sub-study is to evaluate:

- **To what extent the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has operationalised its Civil Society Strategy (2008) by supporting Strategic Goal 1 (SG1) of the strategy internationally and nationally.**

The overall evaluation has identified an impact framework which consists of four elements - dimensions of change, indicators, assumptions and lines of enquiry. Taken together these elements form basis on which to identify results, targets, indicators and milestones with regard to the operationalisation of the civil society strategy. The dimensions of change are the types of changes expected in association with the achievement of the civil society goals and these are represented by A, B and C below. These are referenced in Chapter 2 below.

SG1 overarching goal is: **The Promotion of a vibrant and open debate nationally and internationally.**

This is further defined as follows:

- A. Denmark will, together with civil society actors, endeavour to promote a vibrant and open debate on poverty reduction, nationally and internationally;
- B. Denmark will work for the establishment of a better framework for civil society's participation and work in developing countries in relation to, for example, national legislation, cooperation processes and public financing, and
- C. Denmark will contribute to ensuring the involvement of civil society in the implementation and further development of the Paris Declaration, nationally and internationally.

The specific objectives of the evaluation were further achieved by looking at:

- the contribution of Danish cooperation to civil society engagement with Busan;
- the funding for regional and international policy engagement and advocacy channelled through Danish NGOs or other mechanisms;
- the policy engagement or advocacy at an international level directly undertaken by MFA/Danida;

- the debate within Denmark itself, including the Danida-funded work of Danish CSO’s on issues around policy coherence and campaigning.

1.2 Methodology and evidence base

Interviews

A key method of data collection for the evaluation was semi-structured interviews with key informants, both internal (staff members) and external. In total 15 interviews were carried out, some face-to-face in Copenhagen, others by phone or via Skype calls. These interviewees were selected on the basis that that they had direct and historical knowledge and experience of, or insights about, the issues above.

Of those that were interviewed directly as part of the review, the breakdown of categories is as follows:

Interviewees by category	
MFA/Danida	5
Civil society	12
TOTAL	17

Documentation

The other key methodology in this review was an analytical review of relevant documentation. A number of internal documents – mainly strategies, policy reports and monitoring data - were reviewed as part of the data analysis for the review.

Limitations

A key limitation in terms of data collection was that the study was not able to collect information and evidence from multiple locations in the South and therefore lacks a degree of internationally disaggregated analysis.

The attribution to trends and variations in policy, political, cultural and social change is always difficult to assess. Such changes tend to be dynamic, multi-faceted and almost always engages actors at multiple levels in complex ways. Instead, signs of contribution to changes are noted, and supplement by interview and documentary evidence.

2 Findings

2.1 The goal and strategy itself

The area of the civil society strategy delineated by the goal of a vibrant and open debate is broadly supported by civil society, in a strategy seen as “a model for other donors”¹. It is widely seen to represent an important statement of intent with regard to the importance afforded by Denmark towards advocacy, campaigning and policy analysis by civil society organisation, support for a vibrant media and space for civil society to operate, question and hold to account governments and other duty bearers.

Definitions

The overarching goal of SG1: the Promotion of a vibrant and open debate nationally and internationally is underscored by three sub-goals. The first of these echoes the overarching goal – Denmark will, together with civil society actors, endeavour to promote a vibrant and open debate on poverty reduction, nationally and internationally, while the second and third – Denmark will work for the establishment of a better framework for civil society’s participation and work in developing countries in relation to, for example, national legislation, co-operation processes and public financing, and Denmark will contribute to ensuring the involvement of civil society in the implementation and further development of the Paris Declaration, nationally and internationally – are more detailed and pointed.

There is no precise definition of the exact meaning of the overarching goal and the sub-goal (SG1A) of an ‘open and vibrant debate’. The strategy itself contains no specific definition of what ‘vibrant and open debate’ means, although some pointers are given in terms of what the strategy sees as key supporting sub-goals and also in the supporting text. For instance the strategy states, “many organisations generate debate about democracy and rights in situations where legislation and authorities do not effectively guarantee law and order. It is such potential in civil society that Denmark particularly wishes to strengthen.”

The current strategy, an updated and revised ‘version’ – referred to as a “soft revision” by one interviewee – of the civil society strategy of 2000, allowed new thinking to emerge including language on rights, the Paris declaration, international standards and South-South networking, without dropping the essence of the earlier strategy and its focus on advocacy, capacity building and partnership.

The focus on ‘open and vibrant debate’ is seen by variously interviewees as being about civil society space and the role of civil society in challenging government, encompassing a ‘watchdog’ role, supporting an enabling environment for the involvement of people in policy and other development-related debates and supporting a rights-agenda and a rights-based approach. Where appropriate it is may also involve supporting a strong media or media-

¹ OECD, 2012, *Partnering with Civil Society: 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews*.

related activities as a platform for such debate to take place. There was a strong feeling amongst respondents that this is important for development and poverty reduction and in many ways it is also a precondition for quality, sustainable development, as has been widely recognised, although sometimes contested².

The issue of debate and dialogue is also outlined in the Accra Agenda for Action³: “We will engage in open and inclusive dialogue on development policies ... Donors will support efforts to increase the capacity of all development actors – parliaments, central and local governments, CSOs, research institutes, media and the private sector – to take an active role in dialogue on development policy and on the role of aid in contributing to countries’ development objectives.”

There is also a view, less strongly held perhaps, but nevertheless widely present that, in the Global South at least, there is an inherent value in diversity and vibrancy of debate engendered by civil society as an end in and of itself, as a key way of enhancing and deepening democracy.

The degree to which this area of the strategy applies to Denmark itself, that is, to support a vibrant and open debate about international development in Denmark, is a contested area. Most respondents believe that it is relevant to Denmark, but there was contention over the degree to which the end of debate within Denmark is purely to support the ODA budget, or whether it goes beyond this, and is about holding the government to account, engage the public more widely.

Ownership amongst civil society organisations

There is wide and deep ownership amongst civil society of the strategy itself, including the goal on ‘vibrant and open debate’. This has been achieved largely through a process of allowing civil society organisations a high degree of influence over the strategy through their involvement in the shaping of the strategy. Civil society organisations in particular are keen to stress that key aspects of the strategy – flexibility, the emphasis on rights, the focus on partnership and the highlighting off the issue of supporting an open and vibrant debate – were both helpfully aligned to their own strategies and important areas of focus for Danida.

The ownership over and importance given to SG1 – ‘vibrant and open debate’ – within the strategy is also very strong. Respondents were keen to stress that this aspect of the strategy was key for supporting their work at home and abroad, in terms of outlining a vision of a vibrant debate which support both space for civil society and enhances its role within policy formation and public discussion. It also represents a consensus within the Danish international development sphere that is highly valued by civil society.

² See, for instance: Pratt, Brian, 2009, *Civil Society and Development: Challenges from European Governments? A review of official aid policies in Europe and their implications for civil society*, INTRAC; Banks, Nicola, with David Hulme, June 2012, *The Role of NGOs and Civil Society in Development and Poverty Reduction*, BWPI Working Paper 171, Edwards, Michael, 2004, *Civil Society*, Polity.

³ 3rd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2008, *Accra Agenda for Action*, Accra, Ghana.

CSO respondents also welcomed the lack of what might be seen as a potentially onerous, results-based, reporting framework, as well as the lack of a formal baseline, and an ‘over-clarified’ definition of what vibrant and open debate means. The current government was praised for sometimes going further than the strategy, in some ways, in terms of encouraging debate, openness, and setting up a policy advisory board on ‘policy relevant for development’.

Respondents were also keen to outline what they saw as a trend in Danida’s civil society department of fewer staff and lower capacity, which has reportedly affected the ability to engage with key debates in the sector. In this sense there was a warning to keep the strong and open relationship with NGOs and: “be careful not to lose insights and understanding into the sector. We have had a tradition of having good, open dialogue. It has been a good relationship and we hope to be able to maintain it.”

Monitoring and baseline

There was no specific baseline for this aspect of the strategy. This is recognised in part as a feature of the issue: that it is difficult, possibly undesirable, or perhaps impossible, to outline a baseline for an area of strategy as broad and discursive as the one in question. This is partly because the setting of a baseline on something that multiple actors and influences are constantly and dynamically brought to bear would almost inevitably suffer from a gross error of attribution.

Nevertheless, as outlined above, there are areas of progress sought and indications and signs of progress can be harvested by process of qualitative evaluation (such as this one) as well as qualitative monitoring as undertaken in each of the last three years by Danida⁴ and explored further below.

At the level of funding activities and framework agreement with grantees and partners, it has been possible to set more specific indicators and objectives, and each framework partner undertakes its own annual report and periodic thematic reviews.

It is important to note that, notwithstanding the above arguments, future efforts to capture progress could be better elucidated, and that greater attention to process-oriented signifiers of contributed change could be made.

2.2 *Dimension of Change - A: “Denmark will, together with civil society actors, endeavour to promote a vibrant and open debate on poverty reduction, nationally and internationally”*

Activities in the South and international activities

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009-11 (three editions), *Danish organisations’ cross-cutting monitoring of the implementation of the Civil Society Strategy*,

The vast majority of the money spent by Danida on fostering an open and vibrant debate is spent on supporting civil society in the South. While this study was not able to gather information from a South-based set of actors, there is a good deal of data around that can be gathered from documentary sources, supplemented by interviews with those in Denmark and beyond.

Interviewees were generally complimentary in their assessment of the support given by Danida in this area and there was general agreement that Danida's strategic support for civil society organisations aligned to this area was helpful in general promotion of activities to boost such debate. The key NGOs, however, have different strategies and to a greater or lesser extent might be involved in the promotion of vibrant and open debate, although given the lack of a defined set of outcomes, most could include much of their work in the policy and public sphere – media work, work on rights, policy analysis etc – as part of this goal. As outlined below, respondents were less certain about the extent to which embassies were consistently and strategically following the strategy in this area.

Some interviewees pointed out that the trend in recent years towards supporting advocacy needed to be tempered with and understanding that service delivery, while not the main activity for NGOs to be funding does however need to be a continuing plank of support in certain circumstances, to provide legitimacy for organisations working in particular communities and in certain fragile states.

Interviewees were also keen to stress that the flexibility of funding allowed Danish organisation to respond to unfolding events and rapidly emerging opportunities, for instance in Sub-Saharan Africa and in the MENA region.

Danida's cross-cutting monitoring of the strategy

The attempt at monitoring the strategy via cross-cutting monitoring reports is a useful exercise in capturing stories, examples, successes and challenges in the report. As the pre-study⁵ notes, there is however no clarification of expectations around 'outcome'. Reports to Danida from each organisation were also differently formatted, reportedly making comparisons difficult. The reports do show some the impressive breadth and depth of Danida's interventions, mainly via examples given by Danish NGOs.

At the level of activities as identified in the, the 2009 and 2010 reports note that, respectively, 28% and 24% of the focus Danish organisations supported by Danida is on Rights, advocacy and debate, although this is not broken down further. The 2009 report did include a specific section on vibrant and open debate which later reports do not include. In the report it was noted that the few responses that were received on the public debate reported on

⁵ IOD Parc, 2012, Pre-Study for the Evaluation of the Strategy for Danish support to Civil Society, For Danida.

“informing the population about their rights through radio programmes”⁶, although the report also recorded difficulties in outlining trends in the areas of human rights and vibrant and open debate, given level of responses received in that area.

However CSO partners did report on contributions to “the adoption of national policies that promote respect for human rights or to the ratification of human rights conventions, and that initiatives aimed at promoting public debate primarily take the form of information about rights”. The report also notes that there are few descriptions of the organisations’ initiatives and interventions to promote a vibrant and open debate in developing countries, “considering that this is one of the strategic goals in the Civil Society Strategy ... it is assumed that more organisations devote focus to achieving this goal than reflected by the number of responses, it would be interesting to have more light shed on this topic area in next year’s reporting process”. It seems that that this hope was not fully realised in subsequent monitoring reports.

The report does also outline some examples where Southern partners have contributed to developing and formulating political proposals or influencing legislation in another way. Examples given include:

- Save the Children Denmark partners in Bangladesh work on child labour policies and UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- The LO/FTF Council supported the East African confederation of trade unions work on the East African Community on social security and employment.
- Danish Red Cross and WWF Denmark work securing vulnerable groups increased influence on their own development.

The 2011 report does not show a figure for the percentage spent on rights, advocacy and debate. In terms of work on civil society operating space it notes that although Danish organisations and their partners “are attentive to developments in framework conditions for civil society ... only a few cases cite how partners have tried to exert influence on the framework conditions”. The report suggests that this may stem from the enormity of the task of doing so, along with the concomitant risks associated with this type of work. It records an example that shows “the potential of using social media to publish reports on conditions for civil society and on various restrictive mechanisms in play”.

The report has appears to have a richer evidence base on which to judge the work on a vibrant and open debate. Examples of work given include:

- Disabled People’s Organisations Denmark’s partner in South Africa is “raising awareness about the capabilities of persons with disabilities through events” and other methods

⁶ This included ADRA Denmark’s project in Malawi where radio programmes and a popular TV series were used to bring about change and increase awareness of HIV and AIDS-related issues.

- Dialogos’s partner in the Philippines work on banning mercury use in gold extraction, which has “succeeded in getting their message across in the media
- Malawi’s ‘Malawi Democracy Day’ which used theatre shows was “an effective way of creating debate and drawing attention”
- UNICEF Denmark’s partner organises sporting events for schoolchildren to raise awareness on education, HIV/AIDS
- Caritas Uganda has “public dialogues” targeted the government on biotechnology industry development
- Danmission’s partner in Egypt ‘Roundtables’ to influence and “take advantage of the political tensions and gaps appearing in the aftermath of the Revolution”
- The Danish Association of the Blind’s partner in Ghana used photos of non-accessible footbridges offered
- ActionAid Denmark’s partners in Kenya, Uganda and Nepal get women to record their activities in diaries “in order to generate data that will highlight women’s economic contributions”
- Capacity building of the media included:
 - The Danish Association of the Blind’s partner in Mongolia organised a seminar for 20 journalists, “where blind people told their life stories and the journalist carried out practical exercises in balanced reporting”.
 - The partner of Ghana Friendship Groups established partnership with selected media houses which has “been effective in promoting the election of women to the district assemblies”.

It is noticeable (and understandable) that although these examples are rich and diverse in terms of activities there are limited examples of outcomes harvested. It is difficult to compare across the three years as slightly different categories and volumes of reporting were used.

The 2011 report also usefully gives some challenges to the partners for the future. These include

- Greater potential for the use of UN Conventions and other international instruments by partners
- Positioning needs more thought: are partners in a clear watchdog position; in an engaged, policy-making mode, or co-opted by government to deliver services?
- On media and technology, there is only one reported “incidence of interactive/social media or strategic media work and ... one case of more long-term media partnership”.

Climate – COP 15 and Rio+20

There was clear support for civil society to engage with climate processes, with COP 15 in Copenhagen cited as a key arena for debate, with good access for civil society. Interviewees

noted that they felt that more flexibility than usual was allowed in terms of information provision and campaigning in a Danish context – and NGOs felt they were able to hold the government to account in order to push for ambitious outcome at Copenhagen. However recently, at COP 17 for example, CSO access has been more limited⁷. Favourable comments were also made on efforts to involve civil society organisations in the run up to, and during, the Rio+20 process.

Danida has been a key funder of the *Southern Voices* project which aims to strengthen the voice of people most vulnerable to climate change in international climate negotiations and in domestic climate policies. One of the main outputs of the project, a report⁸, provides an analysis of the tools and tactics advocacy groups use to influence policy responses to climate change. More than 20 climate networks and their member organisations have contributed to the report with their experiences of advocacy on climate change, including over 70 case studies from a wide range of countries – including many of the poorest – in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific.

Among its other findings, a review⁹ of the first year of the programme found that:

- CSOs and networks in selected developing countries have increased their capacity for carrying out advocacy and monitoring activities and for raising public awareness at national, regional and international levels.
- More than 20 participating networks have been able to influence different national policies and engage in active dialogue with their governments on climate change policies and have undertaken studies, developed position papers and carried out public information work.
- The international report during COP 17 to which network members contributed was found to be of high quality.
- The composition of the Consortium members was considered crucial: the ‘added value’ that the Danish NGOs are providing from their longstanding presence in, and partnerships with, many of the Southern countries involved.
- Collaboration with CAN-International and their regional nodes in Asia, Africa and Latin America, was a major advantage.

Other activities and support

One organisation that has both direct and indirect relevance to the issue of vibrant and open debate both in Denmark and around the globe and that is increasingly funded by Danida is International Media Support (IMS)¹⁰. According their 2011 Annual Report 58% of their

⁷ See Civicus, 2012, *The State of Civil Society 2011*, CIVICUS.

⁸ Reid, H., Ampomah, G., Olazábal Prera, M.I., Rabbani, G., Zvigadza, S., 2012, *Southern voices on climate policy choices: analysis of and lessons learned from civil society advocacy on climate change*, International Institute for Environment and Development.

⁹ INKA Consult, April 2012, *Review of the first phase of the Southern Voices programme 2011-13*.

¹⁰ In 2011 58% of IMS’s funding came from Danida, according to their *Annual Report 2011*.

funding support comes from Danida, although this support comes from a variety of sources in Danida, and not necessarily support falling under the auspices of the civil society department¹¹. IMS undertakes numerous media-related activities in developing countries such as supporting investigative journalism and strives for outcomes in relation to media freedoms, independence and rights, often working closely with civil society organisations and actors.

Denmark hosted the 23rd Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in May 2012. According to the Danida website, several CSOs arranged side events on various topics. These topics covered debates on issues such as small-holder farming; Rio+20; the European Development Fund; biofuels and policy coherence for development; food speculation, price volatility and food security; global health and R&D.¹²

Vibrant and open debate in Denmark

Trends in Danish development debates and opinion

Public debates in Denmark around international development are, anecdotally, relatively sophisticated. A quick comparison of a recent initiative by the Danish Broadcaster DR and the BBC called *Why Poverty?* which was supported by Danida, has had a bigger presence and higher profile in the Danish media than in the UK. Danish support for development aid has always been high, by international standards, although as one interviewee pointed out the support is “blown around by scandals and bad news”. The trends were characterised by interviewees as mixed: positive features around the globalisation of ideas but also increasing inward looking societies and an increasing lack of social concern and decreasing international solidarity.

However recent polling has suggested that while support for giving aid is still relatively high, there is a general lack of confidence that aid works, suggesting that support is fragile. A study done for the World’s Best News (see below) suggest that support for development has dropped amongst Danes in recent years and polling showed that 75% of Danes answered the question ‘To what extent do you think that there is progress with regard to eliminating global poverty?’ with the answers: “not at all” and “to a lesser extent”. 80% answered the question ‘Do you think that one day, we will succeed in combating the majority of the world’s hunger, poverty and need?’ with “no”.¹³

Research centring on trawling Danish opinions about development aid conducted for Danida¹⁴ found that while there is strong support for the development of the population support among the population, this has declined in 2011. The polling suggested that the

¹¹ For instance a major programme of IMS The Partnership for Dialogue and Reform programme comes under the regional programme.

¹² Danida website.

¹³ Ravn-Pedersen, Thomas, (Head of Secretariat NGO FORUM, Denmark), 2012, *Verdens Bedste Nyheder Presentation August 28th, 2012 United Nations Association of Norway*.

¹⁴ Epinion, 2011, *Danish Attitudes to and Knowledge of Development*, Danida (summary only translated using Google Translate).

deeper the knowledge about development that segments of the public have, the more likely they are to support development aid, suggesting that a vibrant debate in Denmark would stimulate such support. On the other hand, the “politicisation” of aid, was given as one reason for recent drops in support. Interestingly, the study found that the main sources of knowledge about development are news and discussion programmes on television, printed magazines and newspapers and similar media on the Internet.

As far as this evaluation can discern, there is no further or more comprehensive research data available on the broader issues of what might constitute ‘vibrant debate’ in Denmark.

‘The World’s Best News’

One of the key interventions that Danida has made in recent years is to support the World’s Best News, a Danish campaign formed by the UN, Danida and more than 80 Danish aid organisations. The campaign is based around the Millennium Development Goals and specifically slanted towards showing the progress that has been made by development aid and against the MDGs.

The campaign, which started in 2010, claims to have “moved the needle” on the awareness of Danes on these issues. The campaign identified key factors which need to be surmounted in order to raise awareness about the progress towards the MDGs. These include prejudices and low knowledge, the use of stereotypical images, negative media coverage and aggressive fundraising by some NGOs. The campaign, partly informed by the *Finding Frames* thinking¹⁵ in the UK, has sought to highlight MDG progress, set standards for a new discourse and ultimately seeks to change the views Danes on development. It is one of the few such initiatives that engages the private sector.

There was widespread support amongst the majority of interviewees for this campaign, who pointed to the new and unusual styles of campaigning, and use and engagement of “not the usual suspects” in the campaign. There were suggestions that while the campaign was useful in promoting basic understanding of the MDGs, it did not necessarily engage people at a deep level with the issues.

Other initiatives and support

As mentioned above Danida has recently supported the initiative of Danish broadcaster DR to promote debate about international development and poverty in the recent series of TV programmes and debates called *Why Poverty?* This is another widely appreciated strand of Danida support, although there it is a little early to see any evidence of impact.

Danida also supports the Danish platform of Concord, part of Concord Europe which works to increase leverage between the different policy areas of the EU. This was widely appreciated and lends itself to stimulating debate at the policy level.

¹⁵ Darnton, Andrew, with Martin Kirk, January 2011, *Finding Frames: New ways to engage the UK public in global poverty*, initiated by Oxfam, and supported by DFID, published by BOND.

Development education

There was concern amongst CSOs that funding that used to be allocated to development education work was redirected in 2006 away from some NGOs and into the promotion of Danida activities aimed at shoring up public support for aid. One point that was raised in relation to this was that work supporting the case for aid, particularly the argument that aid has to be for the benefit of the Danish people which has the risk of, according to CSO interviewees, a dilution of rights-based approach to public communications. There was also a feeling that work in schools has suffered and that more opportunities exist in terms of development education in schools, via, CSOs and possibly through the Department of Education.

Some CSO interviewees said that the challenge of raising counterpart funding has diverted resources and energy from advocacy to public communications for fundraising. According to a recent study of private aid organisations in Denmark¹⁶, in the last five to six years, rather than concentrate quite so much on producing and disseminating information and development education related materials, “Danish NGOs have devoted much energy to developing leaflets and products with the purpose of collecting money”. However the study also found that although many are still “involved in campaigns and policy advocacy where one element is information, communication and mobilisation of the public”.

Policy debates and coherence and NGO campaigning

An open and vibrant debate is also marked by policy debates in Denmark and discussions amongst and between CSOs and the government, played out in the media and in other public forums. This area is reasonably lively in Denmark and interviewees said that disagreements sometimes come to the fore. Section 6.2 of the civil society strategy also recognises the importance of Danish civil society organisations “information activities”¹⁷. CSOs in particular were keen to point out the contribution that these debates made to people knowledge, awareness, understanding of, and engagement with, international development issues. It was not entirely clear to most interviewees, however, whether work on policy coherence could be financially supported from the funding that CSOs get from Danida, or indeed whether it is a healthy thing for an independent civil society to rely too heavily on.

The campaigning undertaken by Danish CSOs is also an area which can support, foster, and be part of a vibrant debate. One interviewee said that it was not always appreciated by government that campaigning and advocacy needs “points of difference” in order to make a debate vibrant and open. Vibrant debate in this view comes from sometimes more open disagreement: “the public need a point of departure (from government). True engagement comes through campaigning”.

¹⁶ Engberg-Pedersen, Lars and Neil Webster, with Adam Moe Fejerskov and Torsten Geelan, 2012, *Corporatism and the development of private aid organisations in Denmark*, DIIS, Copenhagen, chapter from a forthcoming book.

¹⁷ MFA, 2008, op cit.

While the overall quality of the campaigning work in Denmark was described as “piece-meal”, “fragmented” and “ad hoc” it was said to have become far more professional in recent years with more and better cross organisation platforms for joint efforts. A point was also made that since recent increases in fundraising (due to the cut in development education funding and the requirement for at least 10% matched funding) the competitive atmosphere has not helped joint NGO campaign and spread negative and off putting messages about development “now the only time you meet anyone talking about development they told a negative story”.

2.3 *Dimension of Change - B: “Denmark will work for the establishment of a better framework for civil society’s participation and work in developing countries in relation to, for example, national legislation, co-operation processes and public financing”*

The issue of space – the legislative, enabling and other more informal support – for civil society to operate is widely recognised as key in terms of providing the platform from which civil society can perform its functions of holding government to account, providing links between communities and government and upholding key freedoms and rights. Indeed this is explicitly recognised by the strategy which states: “The formalisation of civil society’s rights and responsibility in national legislation, the development of management principles incorporating citizens in dialogue, and the development of forms of support that promote independence and sustainability can contribute to reducing confrontation and promoting constructive dialogue and public debate”¹⁸. This also relates to a number of other strategic goals.

Danida is a key supporter of CIVICUS’s¹⁹ work on the Civil Society Index (a participatory needs assessment and action planning tool for civil society around the world with the aim of creating a knowledge base and momentum for civil society strengthening initiative)²⁰. The funding previously went through the Project Advice and Training Centre (PATC) which is now called Network Civil Society in Development (CISU), an independent association of 260+ small and medium-sized Danish Civil Society Organisations, but has more recently been funded directly by Danida²¹.

This is an area that most of Danida’s civil society partners consider crucial to the ability of civil society to foster and support open and vibrant debate. The overall picture according to CIVICUS’s latest State of Civil Society report, which draws heavily on primary data from the Civil Society Index, suggests that although protest and civil society action continues to flour-

¹⁸ MFA, 2008, op cit.

¹⁹ According to their website, CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation) is an international alliance of members and partners which constitutes an influential network of organisations at the local, national, regional and international levels, and spans the spectrum of civil society.

²⁰ CIVICUS Civil Society index website.

²¹ This is apparently the only such direct funding that Danida does.

ish and grow, there been some “state pushback in both democratic and authoritarian states”. In particular, “Legal and extra-legal measures were employed by both state and non-state actors to intimidate or cause harm to civil society personnel to deter them from carrying out their work. There were also several attempts to introduce repressive laws to regulate CSOs, while the key role played by mobile and social media in civic action in 2011 brought fresh attempts to place technical and legal restrictions on this evolving space”²². Interviewees were mostly downbeat about the recent restrictions and challenges to civil society space, although most saw the longer terms trends in civil society activism, the role of social media, and

Nevertheless Interviewees were quite confident that a portion Danida’s support in this area had gone towards supporting civil society space, although changes at the global, regional and national levels are notoriously difficult to attribute to any one actor or set of actors and can of course not be directly attributed to Danida, it’s partnerships and immediate sphere of influence. As noted below, embassies’ support in this area was inconsistent and depended on the interests and aptitude of local staff. Interviewees felt that embassy staff could sometimes be more pro-active and outspoken in their support for civil society space.

In terms of civil society space, there are signs of progress (Burma, Uganda, Ghana were mentioned) but also signs of continuing problems (with Ethiopia frequently cited). But, as mentioned above, any progress within these wider trends are difficult to attribute to – or even show a clear contribution from – Danish development assistance.

Many of Danida’s Danish civil society partners work on this area. For examples, DanChurchAid has 10 ‘fully fledged’ political space programmes in Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, India, Cambodia, Myanmar, Honduras, Guatemala, Central Asia and South Asia, which, according to DanChurchAid’s reporting in 2011, have in five cases achieved their goals and in five cases, exceeded them²³. These results were measured against indicators delineated as follows: 1. Laws, policies, administrative practices, budget allocations etc are in the process of/have been modified/introduced with contributions from DanChurchAid partners for eliminating gender and other forms of discrimination and exclusion; 2. Indication of an increase in number of discriminated women and men taking action on their rights, accessing entitlements and represented in decision-making structures; 3. Indication of a reduction in discriminatory practices and violation against particular groups of women and men and of increased access to justice and to services and/or resources from government institutions.

DanChurchAid’s Global Report goes on to give impressive examples of work funded by Danida on political space at activity and outcomes levels, although these ranged from work on political rights for migrants (in Kyrgyzstan) and women’s rights (in Gaza). DanChurchAid’s partner network were involved in discussions on the revision of the Civil Society Organisation Code of Conduct to include new provisions to ensure participation, reference to

²² CIVICUS, 2012, The State of Civil Society 2011, CIVICUS.

²³ DanChurch Aid, 2011 *Global Report*.

respect for human rights, non-discrimination and equality, legal compliance, networking and partnership.

International Media Support supported a number of initiatives aimed at supporting media space and an enabling environment for free speech. It supported for instance Azerbaijan Media Center, a platform for civil society and public debates which hosted an array of training sessions for Azerbaijani journalists and editors in investigative journalism, photography, social media and business journalism.

It is clear, however, from both the literature and interviews, that International NGOs sometimes find working directly on civil society space difficult as they are prone to getting singled out as agents of foreign agendas or similar, as witnessed by recent legislation in Russia²⁴ and Ethiopia²⁵. In this sense Danish organisations sometimes look to embassies to better support this area of work.

Danida's cross-cutting monitoring of the strategy

The 2010 cross-cutting monitoring report²⁶ notes partners exerting pressure for the “passing of laws to promote compliance with human rights conventions ... (making) widespread use of advocacy to gain influence on legislative bills or on enforcement of existing laws, both through networking and on their own” but also that advocacy aimed at governments and authorities can be challenging.

The report also notes that, as outlined above, deteriorating geo-political conditions have forced Danish organisations to realign and, in some cases, limit support for partners in this area. “Attacks on organisations, more restrictive legislation and a general encroachment on civil society’s freedoms are tendencies confirmed by international surveys, including those of the international civil society organisation CIVICUS. In a few developing countries, conditions for civil society support are so testing that the Danish organisations have refrained from reporting on their experiences in this year’s Report in order to spare their local partner”.

Other documentary evidence

A study – the ‘Joint Evaluation of Support to Civil Society Engagement in Policy Dialogue’²⁷ – was recently commissioned by Danida and two other donors to help them gain a better understanding of how best to support CSOs in the area of policy dialogue. This found that

²⁴ The Guardian, 2nd July 2012, *Russia plans to register 'foreign agent' NGOs*.

²⁵ See the adoption of the Ethiopian *Charities and Societies Proclamation* in 2009.

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010, *Danish organisations' cross-cutting monitoring of the implementation of the Civil Society Strategy*.

²⁷ ITAD/COWI, October 2012, Joint Evaluation of Support to Civil Society Engagement in Policy Dialogue, Synthesis Report, [The evaluation was commissioned by Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), Danida and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). They commissioned this behalf of a larger group of bilateral development partners including Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland and Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) which support the evaluation through their participation in a Reference Group, which also includes Open Forum and Better Aid.]

enhancing the enabling environment is of critical importance and that CSO freedoms are often under threat, particularly when they are perceived as critical of Governments. It also highlighted the importance of the promotion of legal measures which support the formalisation of space for civil society engagement as a critical element of the enabling environment. In this regard “DPs have made efforts ... particularly by providing support to oversight bodies, but they may be too cautious in challenging diminishing freedoms”.

The report recommends that development partners should be more proactive “in influencing the enabling environment for policy dialogue” by:

- Encouraging enhancements of the enabling environment by taking specific action to improve the regulatory environment in which CSOs operate, as well as promoting the adoption of general democratic principles more systematically across all sectors.
- Directly promoting the establishment of invited spaces for CS and CSO engagement as a matter of principle in all sectors.
- Ensuring continuous monitoring of the actors and processes of engagement within these spaces with built in opportunities for adjustments
- Taking action to enhance freedom of speech and access to information
- Supporting programmes to improve civic education: supporting civic education to demand state accountability and develop democratic norms beyond the ballot box.
- Providing support to regulatory bodies: provision of direct support to Government CSO regulatory bodies so that they transform into institutions which promote and encourage rather than control and restrict third sector participation.
- Making resources available for contemporary platforms for engagement: provision of resources, training and exposure to contemporary platforms for engagement (e.g. e-governance, productive use of social network and other internet based forms of civil society-state interface).

The recommendations also notes that funding modalities should endeavour to support to the range of organisations, movements and spontaneous activism “which cannot (or prefers not to) be registered but which contributes importantly to policy dialogue”. This is important for understanding the increasingly diverse and non-uniform nature of civil society in the South, and for providing space for nascent movements which large donors and INGO do not always have the antennae to pick up on. The report notes that the immediacy of social media and globalised communication platforms means that movements can form almost instantly. The implications for aid funding suggests a great focus on the enabling environment “rather than a focus on support of individual CSOs, alongside greater attention to CSO programming that facilitates citizen and community empowerment activism”.

Overall it is difficult to assess the degree to which Danida has implemented this area of the strategy effectively. There is certainly evidence of important work of Danish CSO’s and of Danida initiatives and funding of key groups. The contribution this has made to a better

framework for civil society's participation in legislation and policy making is less clear, although some key outcomes are closely associated to Danida and its partners, amongst a wider set of actors.

2.4 *Dimension of Change - C: "Denmark will contribute to ensuring the involvement of civil society in the implementation and further development of the Paris Declaration, nationally and internationally"*

A key priority identified in the strategy is the strong engagement of Danida and civil society partners in the "ensuring the involvement of civil society in the implementation and further development of the Paris Declaration, nationally and internationally"²⁸. In interviews this area was generally lauded as a successful and sustained implementation of the strategy, with Danida playing a very open, inclusive and supportive role vis-à-vis civil society involvement and participation, for instance in Busan. One said: "Danida (along with the Nordic Plus group) played a progressive role in getting civil society, the concept of democratic ownership, the rights based approach ... and the enabling environment into the Busan declaration".

While Danida did not directly support the involvement of Southern civil society partners this was achieved via other forums (see below) that it funded as well as via Danish CSO's working on aid effectiveness.

As the key part of its support for civil society on this issue, Danida has funded²⁹ two global civil society organisation coalitions: Civil Society Voices for BetterAid and the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. BetterAid focused on development effectiveness in aid reform and Open Forum focused on CSO development effectiveness. Such pooled funding donors mechanisms are becoming increasingly popular with donors³⁰.

A recent evaluation³¹ of these two programmes found that they made very relevant contributions to the aid and development effectiveness debate at the global level, the programmes successfully supported ambitious, complex and dynamic processes, while the programme design could have been more explicit with regard to the intervention logic and theory of change. Some additional relevant findings were:

²⁸ Danida, 2008, op cit.

²⁹ Danida's funding represented about 4% of the total programme funding according to: Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, March 14th 2011, *January-December 2011 - Finance Report Presentation of the incomes and expenditures related to the implementation of the project "Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness"*.

³⁰ See, for instance, Giffen, Janice and Ruth Judge, May 2010, *Civil Society Policy and Practice in Donor Agencies*, An overview report commissioned by DFID undertaken by Intrac.

³¹ Christie, Angela, Jean-Michel Rousseau, Jonas Norén, with Ian Christoplos and Jessica Rothman, December 2012, *Evaluation of the BetterAid and Open Forum Programmes*, Indevlop AB, for Sida.

- BetterAid had a significant impact on the outcome because it was recognised as a credible actor in its own right; CSOs were seen to engage constructively from a well-informed position.
- Open Forum performed well against its performance framework, achieving all outputs and most outcome targets although the key outcome document did not go as far as had been hoped in defining the enabling environment.
- The pooled funding mechanism reduced reporting costs; on the donor side it may, by diffusing accountability, have led to a certain level of donor disengagement; donors and CSOs have had communication misunderstandings over value-for-money - CSOs saw donor insistence on value for money as a focus on immediate and tangible outcomes.
- A tendency for CSO to have too many priorities and lack of clear focus during global processes in which they are engaged.
- There was confusion between donors and CSOs on the meaning of Value for Money and CSOs saw donor insistence on VFM as a focus on “immediate and tangible outcomes”.
- Many CSOs believe that BetterAid and Open Forum would have served their constituencies better if they had focused on capacity building at the national level.

The outcomes from Busan and the Paris process were broadly welcomed by civil society including Open Forum and BetterAid. The final document, *The Busan Partnership*, recognised that CSOs play a central role in “enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation” and governments promised to “Implement fully our respective commitments to enable CSOs to exercise their roles as independent development actors, with a particular focus on an enabling environment, consistent with agreed international rights, that maximises the contributions of CSOs to development.”

BetterAid and Open Forum were keen to show that many of the outcomes they sought were adopted but they were also eager to stress their “deep disappointment that commitments from partner governments and donors on providing favourable conditions for people’s organizations to operate are not fully defined according to international rights standards on which they can be held accountable, particularly in light of the growing evidence of a crack-down on civil society in many parts of the world”³². The evaluators take on this was it was a “partial achievement in terms of enabling environment (although a specific indicator was developed post-Busan)”. Of course the attribution to this from Danida support for CSOs is difficult to assess.

³² BetterAid and Open Forum, December 1, 2011, *Busan Partnership a compromise, says civil society. Civil society standards acknowledged but enabling environment remains stumbling block*, Press release.

2.5 Issues cross-cutting the dimensions of change

Embassies

According to the pre-study³³ for this evaluation DKK 1.29 billion was spent via embassies between 2009 and 2011, 18.5% of the total funding for civil society, although respondents tended to think this an underestimate.³⁴ No comprehensive monitoring of the work embassies do on the issue of open and vibrant debate was made available to this review, although from 2010 onwards some embassies³⁵ did report in to the cross-cutting monitoring of the civil society strategy, although this is not disaggregated and so it difficult to discern what support was actually provided. It is clear that as embassies are responsible for a sizeable portion of the civil society budget, that they do support, at least anecdotally a good deal of intervention relating to civil society space, and fund organisations and networks on policy dialogues and other related areas.

The Civil Society Strategy outlines key modalities for embassies in this area including analysing the civil society sector in the given country, support in the role of civil society in sector programme support, supporting civil society directly and participating in joint funding mechanisms with other donors. The modalities do not directly link with the goal on supporting a vibrant and open debate.

Interventions by the Rwenzori Anti-corruption Coalition in Uganda which with Danida's support has, according to local Danida staff, "created a wave of positive activism within the community to demand for improved service delivery".³⁶ The Good Governance and Human Rights Programme, funded by Danida in Ghana, was also singled out for praise, in terms of work on space, voice and dialogue. There were anecdotal references to what disabled groups and trade union federations have achieved in Uganda, Ghana and elsewhere.

Many respondents in this study mentioned a lack of capacity at embassy level. This capacity weakness, according to some informants, includes the following facets:

- Lower overall numbers of staff, which has suffered from recent cut backs which are "worse at embassy level" than in HUC.
- A mindset, and lack of knowledge, connections and sophisticated understanding, that does not help in the strategic choice of partners that would support vibrant debate.

³³ IOD Parc, 2012, Pre-Study for the Evaluation of the Strategy for Danish support to Civil Society Danida.

³⁴ Although it is not entirely clear from the figures in the pre-study, there is a general assumption amongst CSOs that embassy funding has increased vis-à-vis the total funding envelope and will continue to increase (at the expense of CSO funding).

³⁵ 15 embassies reported in in 2010, dropping to 14 in 2011.

³⁶ By Charles Magala (Project Officer at the Danish Embassy, Uganda), 16-03-2012, *Grassroots Fight Against Corruption*, Jyllands Posten, 'Debate' section.

- A tendency to favour a smaller number of larger capital-based NGOs and networks, which might exclude smaller, less ‘professional’, but more grassroots organisations, which might be more pointed and debate-enhancing (or less co-opted) in their approach.
- A lack of engagement with, buy-in to and ownership of, and/or time and staff to engage with, the civil society strategy itself.

These findings are supported by the Joint Evaluation of Support to Civil Society Engagement in Policy Dialogue³⁷ which found a reduced connectedness by donors to grassroots reality, with staff needing to better understand the dynamics of the wider civil society in order to advocate on their behalf, and which warned of a danger that “People worldwide increasingly want to engage 'on their own terms' rather than through conventional CSOs ... global communication has demonstrated the power of spontaneous mass demonstrations (e.g. convened through mobile phones or social network sites) and immediacy of response which confirms the efficacy of these approaches”.

In addition embassies sometimes tend to favour less risky and ‘oppositional’ partners and be generally risk averse, which may have implications for the ability of embassies to support partners who are genuinely able to foster and engender debate. This was also a finding of the Joint Evaluation of Support to Civil Society Engagement in Policy Dialogue, which found that CSOs have said that donors such as Danida are often “too soft” on recipient Governments and not speaking out on behalf of civil society and “should put more effort into examining ways in which they can support controversial issues indirectly rather than side-step them completely”³⁸.

CSOs reported that a lack of strategic approach to funding and support by embassies could be assisted if embassies worked more with local partners and offices of Danish NGOs and their respective federations. One said: “we work better with partners in South ... we have a track record of longer partnership and shared visions that are similar (to the local CSOs). We have a constituency in Denmark while embassies are tied up in government concerns. We are more open ... more in a watchdog role and yet (they are) not increasing the funding for Danish NGOs (but increasing embassy’s funding).” There was also an anecdotal suggestion that embassies do not always use their convening power to invite local civil society into policy dialogues at the national level.

Overall it seems that the ability of and willingness to implement the strategy in general, and SG1 in particular, is patchy with some embassies providing good practice and strong examples of support to civil society in this regard while others less so, depending on staff, leadership, knowledge and environment. This is reported to be in part a function of the lack of any direct accountability from the embassies to the civil society department in Danida, and the

³⁷ ITAD/COWI, 2012, op cit.

³⁸ ITAD/COWI, 2012, op cit.

competing pull of the “forest” of strategies, guidance and over-riding political priorities coming from Central government. Added to this, and in some views a more prominent factor, the embassies have local politics to navigate and respond to local priorities and politics.

Danida civil society staff acknowledge that they do not have the direct authority to ensure the overall operationalisation of the strategy across Danida departments and through the embassies.

Funding matters relating to SG1

According to figures gleaned as part of the mapping exercise where a review was carried out of the extent to which projects and programmes funded aimed to address the goals of the Danida civil society strategy, 4% was identified as civil society Strategic Goal 1 – to Promote Vibrant and Open Debate.

Recently, framework organisations in particular have been given more flexibility in their funding and reporting arrangements. Framework funding is expanding to medium sized organisations, which theoretically might help their flexibility in contributing to vibrant and open debate, by giving these organisations greater flexibility and sanctioning them to do more policy analysis, development education, advocacy and campaigning work, and respond to emerging events and opportunities better.

There is a sense, however, amongst many of the respondents, and given levels of funding given to organisations in recent years that backing for civil society organisations reflects a historical arrangement rather than representing a strategic vision of who has what core and developing competencies in relation to the strategy, including on the issue of promoting a vibrant and open debate. One of the aspects that has changed most is that some of the core-funded framework organisations have recently become part of an international ‘family’ or federation, with attendant consequences for funding and strategy. This is a development that needs to be considered alongside the wider strategy as organisations with global reach may offer greater potential for implementing SG1, and also opportunities for joint and pooled funding mechanisms with other like-minded donors.

This study has picked up a lack of clarity relating to the rules that govern the allowance of Danida-funded activities *within* Denmark. In the 2007 DAC Peer Review it states: “In addition, all NGOs receiving funds from Danida’s NGO grant can spend up to 2% of their grant on information activities in Denmark, but can no longer receive funds from the special budget for development education”³⁹.

A Danida strategy 2011 updated the rules and guidance on spending the 2% stating that Danish organisations can spend the funds that are used for programme and project activities in developing countries on information activities in Denmark. The guidance states that “the

³⁹ Development Assistance Committee, 2007, *Peer Review Organisation for Economic Cooperation And Development: Denmark*.

intended purpose of this is to maintain and expand the people's understanding of Danish participation in international development cooperation work and, more specifically, to strengthen the dialogue with developing countries, to create debate about, awareness of and understanding for the problems and challenges developing countries face and also the ways these are experienced by the people in developing countries.⁴⁰

Although this seems quite an open and broad guidance for CSO's to operate within, there were notable differences expressed in the interpretation of these rules in practice, with some respondents saying that the money could only be used to support programme related advocacy and others willing to take a broader approach. The guidance does not currently specifically indicate whether supporting open and vibrant debate in Denmark is allowed, which many respondents said they thought was a legitimate use of this small proportion of the funds.

There were also comments that funding should reflect international opportunities more clearly. Currently the funding model assumes that the funding for Danish organisations working in the South should be spent in the South (except for the 2%). However, stepping back from this bifurcation, the issue of where the funding is spent is perhaps less important than the outcomes it achieves. If international and regional opportunities and threats are overlaid on to the funding model, for instance in supporting thematic strands such as civil society voice and space, funding might be more strategically deployed.

⁴⁰ Danida, 2011, *General Principles Governing Support to Development Activities Implemented by Danish Civil Society Organisations*.

3 Conclusions, lessons and recommendations⁴¹

3.1 Conclusions

On balance and in general terms, Danida has been broadly successful in supporting the goal of a vibrant and open debate.

Overall there is wide and deep ownership and appreciation amongst civil society of the goal itself although goal lacks a clear definition of the outcomes sought, and embassies lack buy-in to the strategy.

Through funding activities directly and via Danish CSOs Danish aid does endeavour to promote a vibrant and open debate on poverty reduction, nationally and internationally, with support given to key initiatives and organisations focused on achieving change in this area. However monitoring data, especially on outcomes is anecdotal and partial, but outcomes are also difficult to attribute.

Within Denmark Danida has also supported some important initiatives that have helped to generate debate, but there is concern amongst CSOs that funding is now aimed at shoring up public support for aid rather than on supporting and generating debates and development awareness.

A good deal of Danida's civil society support has gone towards supporting civil society space, although changes at the global, regional and national levels are notoriously difficult to attribute to any one actor. Embassies support for civil society space is, anecdotally, present in many places, but inconsistently applied in practice.

Support for civil society involvement in implementation and developing the Paris Declaration has been upheld, with Danida playing an open, inclusive and supportive role, in part leading to outcomes that mostly support civil society space and enabling environment, with civil society outcomes sought in this area mostly achieved.

Anecdotally, embassies often intervene to support civil society space, and fund organisations and networks on policy dialogues and other related areas. Modalities for embassies in the civil society area exist but these do not directly link with the goal on supporting a vibrant and open debate. Reporting from embassies, who lack of capacity, is inconsistent and leadership-dependent rather than led by the strategy and monitored accordingly.

Danida funding given to civil society organisations is seen as reflecting a historical arrangement rather than representing a strategic vision of which organisation has what core and

⁴¹ The recommendations here supplement the set of recommendations in the ITAD/COWI report 'Joint Evaluation of support to CS engagement in Policy Dialogue'.

developing competencies in relation to the strategy. There is also a lack of clarity relating to the rules that govern the allowance of Danida-funded advocacy activities within Denmark.

3.2 Recommendations and lessons

The strategy, guidance and monitoring

The strategy does not define vibrant and open debate and is not currently entirely clear about whether ‘vibrant and open debate internationally and nationally’ includes the promotion of such debate in Denmark, what the value of such debate is and whether it is limited to support for development aid, or goes further and includes deeper and broader engagement of the Danish public on such issues. Providing further guidance and clarification in this area would serve to ensure a strengthened role of Danish civil society organisations in promoting such debates.

Danida has provided clarity on the use of the PRO⁴² funds for spending on information related activity in its guidance published in 2011. However there remains a lack of clarity amongst framework organisations and other about the extent to which these funds can be used for campaigning in Denmark, for work on policy coherence and points of disagreement and challenge. Further clarification of this operating space for CSOs could potentially help unlock more campaigning and advocacy work to generate debate and greater openness.

In this regard CSOs should consider whether the funding of such activities by the MFA/ Danida, and the extent of funding, potentially compromises their independence and should seek to mitigate these risks.

Results-based monitoring of this area is notoriously difficult and it is not recommended that organisations are further constrained in terms of detailed and complex reporting requirements. However, Danida should consider further defining the types of outcomes that it want to see, for instance by outlining more specific process-oriented signifiers of contributed change, and include these in guidance to partners and embassies.

Embassies and funding modalities

Danida should seek to ensure that embassies are clear about their respective contributions to vibrant and open debate. Embassies support for civil society space, enabling open and vibrant debate and policy dialogue should become more a consistent deliverable, by spelling out more clearly what their contribution the strategy might mean at embassy level and what the specific added value of embassy-level support (financial and non-financial) is on such issues. This should include the role of embassies in:

- ensuring civil society participation in invited spaces for policy dialogues

⁴² “Project related” funds.

- supporting legal and enabling frameworks for (formal and informal) civil society space
- funding a diverse range of organisations in terms of size, location and positioning.

In addition, Danida should further explore new funding modalities that would allow better pooling of resources to fund organisations and networks that are strategically placed to deliver outcomes in this area, while also remain flexible enough to seek out small, local, unusual and innovative organisations that can usefully add to the debate while also growing in the future. Historical funding modalities and organisation should not be a constraining factor in such decision-making. Preference should be given to South-based or international organisations, where these groups and networks can show strategic advantage and competences.

Further thought should be given to the relevance of changes in civil society, in particular organisations that have become part of global ‘families’ or federations, and to what extent such groupings make possible greater strategic benefits in terms of large impact on the issue of vibrant and open debates, civil society space or on other specific areas relating to SG1.

Overall, Danida should be should think more comprehensively about what the types of organisations that are able to deliver outcomes towards a vibrant and open debate in the South, and provide funds accordingly. Greater synergies should also be considered in relation to reporting on other areas of support, such as media support, which have direct and indirect outcomes and potential impact on SG1.

Development awareness

Danida should seek to ensure in future that Danida’s own communications on shoring up support for development aid support the wider objective on rights based approaches. Danida should also work to ensure that schools and schoolchildren are more involved in debates around international and poverty, (possibly by working with the Ministry of Education).