

# Evaluation of Danish Support to Civil Society

## Learning Synthesis II: Summarising Organisational Results



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# Acknowledgements

This paper makes extensive use of Nigel Simister's work on M&E systems. See Also N. Simister, "Summarising Change: Results Frameworks at Portfolio Level" at [www.intrac.org](http://www.intrac.org)

# 1 The Challenge of Summarising Results

International development CSOs have come under increasing pressure from donors in recent years to improve how they demonstrate and report on results. Most CSOs recognise the need to better summarise and communicate their results at a global level to their supporters and general public in a way that is both supported by the evidence and meaningful to the reader. This is true in the case of Danish CSOs with framework agreements, when multiple snapshots of change at project level are seen by donors as an incomplete and insufficient summary of the results of strategic funding.

Danish CSOs use different terminologies to describe what they aim to achieve in terms of results – strategic objectives, outcomes, domains of change, targets etc. so it is important to share a common understanding of key terms when discussing how to summarise results. Standard OECD definitions can be found in Annex A. In particular, we should clarify at the outset what is meant by summarising and aggregating results.

## Definitions

**Summarise:** To express the most important facts or ideas about something or someone in a short and clear form.

**Aggregate:** Something formed by adding together several amounts or things.

Source: Cambridge Free English Dictionary

Summarising results is a broad term that can cover a range of different approaches to present an overview of what has changed, what the CSO's contribution to that change has been, and what has been learned in process. Aggregated data can form part of a summary of results but aggregation has a more specific meaning in results reporting i.e. the use of numeric information from different sources to reach an overall figure that describes the totality of change across different projects, programmes or countries.

This short paper will try to illustrate the ways in which Danish CSOs can continue to present and improve a summary picture of the positive changes they have contributed to and when aggregation may or may not be appropriate. The paper draws upon the experience of Danish and international CSOs in reporting their results. It does not attempt to be a comprehensive account of all the issues but rather a prompt to further discussion among Danish CSOs. The paper will outline:

- *Tracking change:* How your results framework sets the basis for what you intend to change and how you will track those changes;

- *Measuring change:* How the use of indicators influences how you will measure, report and summarise those changes;
- *Demonstrating change:* What kind of tools and methods are appropriate to provide an evidence base in support of those changes;
- *Learning from change:* How summarisation might be used for learning as well as accountability purposes.

The careful design of a results framework and choice of indicators and tools can help to make it easier to gather and summarise results. Nonetheless, compiling a summary of results inevitably involves a trade-off between the quality and scope of the data collected and what is affordable. Summarising results requires evidence of change that is consistent in quality to be gathered from different countries and contexts. CSOs need to assess how much they are prepared to invest in this. Several Danish CSOs are reducing the number of their country programmes and projects or already work in a small number of countries. This may provide better conditions for summarisation. In other cases, it may be appropriate to gather good quality data from a representative sample of contexts or projects rather than draw on the whole portfolio.

## 2 Results Frameworks: Tracking Change

All Danish Framework CSOs include a results framework in their strategies which forms the basis of their reporting to Danida. These normally include, as a minimum, objectives, indicators and/or targets – loosely following the model of a logical framework. There has been a tendency in the past to assume that logic models such as the logical framework, which can work well at project level, can be applied more broadly as a results framework for strategic funding. Logical frameworks were primarily developed to help plan, monitor, and evaluate time-bound projects with clearly stated purposes. Their limitations as a means of summarising change across an organisations portfolio are increasingly recognised. For example, if the achievements reported in an organisational logical framework are the result in part of work carried in previous planning cycles the traditional link between outputs and outcomes is technically broken.

Many donors are becoming more open to more flexible results frameworks. For example, it is more common for CSOs to include theories of change in their strategies. A theory of change is a useful tool to test an organisation's assumptions about how change happens and how the pathways to change contribute to development outcomes. Some Danish CSOs also use their theories of change as the basis of their results frameworks. CARE Denmark, for example, bases its results reporting on domains of change and the levels of intervention in the DPOD theory of change form the basis of its results reporting to Danida.

The type of results framework used to capture portfolio change will reflect the nature and mission of the CSO; what it seeks to achieve; and how far it is possible to summarise or aggregate results. No one approach will fit all. Summarising results is a particular challenge for large, complex CSOs supporting portfolios of work in different regions, countries and sectors. (Although it is interesting to note that even the Danish CSOs affiliated to global federations often retain quite a specific thematic focus e.g. AADK and governance). It is less of a challenge for more specialised CSOs working in a small number of countries. CSOs with a specific sectoral focus such as DPOD or DFPA may find it easier to develop global objectives and indicators that are relevant across their country programmes. It may also be easier for CSOs such as ADRA that work directly with community based groups through their local country offices and who can, therefore, use a common M&E methodology to directly monitor and report on results.

Two aspects of change – the types and level of change – can influence how we summarise change in results reporting.

### 2.1 Types of change

The results frameworks of Danish CSOs frequently seek to capture different types of changes – for example, changes associated with the programmes' outcomes; changes through the value their organisation adds to Southern CSOs e.g. through partnership or capacity development; and change in their own organisational performance.

## Programme change

All Danish CSOs include developmental or programme outcomes in their results frameworks i.e. the medium-term changes they aim to have on the lives of poor and/or marginalised people and communities. These are outcomes over which they have an indirect influence but which normally they cannot directly control since they work through partners. CARE Denmark uses the terms sphere of influence and sphere of control from Outcome Mapping to illustrate this difference in their domains of change. DCA uses the term ‘effect indicator’ to refer to the desired programme outcomes over which they have an indirect influence and ‘strategy indicator’ to describe partner outcomes more within their sphere of control.

Since a CSO has only an indirect influence over programme outcomes it can be difficult to demonstrate its contribution to results. Many Danish CSO programmes, in contrast, seek to strengthen civil society through capacity development support to Southern CSOs and movements. It is not difficult to summarise the results of capacity development with Southern CSOs at output or activity level. It is more difficult to track how far these activities have contributed to organisational change and to demonstrate their direct contribution to improving end outcomes for poor and marginalised people

### **A note on contribution/attribution**

CSOs are rarely in a position to attribute social change as a direct result of their own interventions. For this reason, it is usually more appropriate to refer to contributing to change. Since:

- CSOs work in complex situations with multiple external factors affecting change - some known, some unknown;
- CSOs often work collaboratively and can rarely attribute social change to their own efforts

Advocacy programmes present special challenges in terms of summarising results, particularly in terms of outcomes and the impact on people living in poverty. For example:

- Policy change can take a long time to achieve and progress difficult to report on in the context of comparatively short-term reporting cycles;
- The contribution of the Danish CSO to policy or practice change is usually difficult to assess due to its indirect relationship via partners and the role and influence of other actors;
- The longer-term impact on the lives of people living in poverty is even more difficult to assess since policy or practice change takes time to filter through to benefit poor communities and can extend beyond the project/programme cycle.

Given the level of difficulty associated with providing evidence of contribution in advocacy work, summarising policy-related results is more likely to focus on advocacy outputs or the number of policies influenced rather than on the people affected by the policies.

#### **Examples of Programme outcomes**

- Increased rights awareness and mobilisation of People with Disabilities (DPOD)
- Civil society participation and influence within governance (IBIS goal)
- Combination of agricultural production, income generation and accessing rights contributes to a reduction in food insecurity (DCA effect indicator)
- Steps taken by governments to introduce progressive system of taxation (AADK strategic objective)

#### **Partnership changes**

The Danish Civil Society Policy emphasises the need for Danish CSOs to be able to demonstrate the value they add to the efforts of their partners. Many Danish CSOs are now explicitly describing their approach to adding value in their strategies and include objectives and indicators in their results frameworks that reflect this. This most commonly reflects their capacity development support to their partners<sup>1</sup> - most frequently in advocacy and M&E.

A rigorous approach to monitoring and summarising these added value activities would help to assess and communicate what Danish CSOs achieve within their direct sphere of influence. DCA, for example, has constructed its results frameworks so that the outputs of its work directly with their partners, links to the desired programme outcomes. DCA's output below working with partners (*'strategy indicator'*) contributes to the programme outcome of increased food security illustrated above (*'effect indicator'*). This has the advantage of identifying two links in the results chain and enabling CSOs to track and report on both the changes they effect directly with their partners and the programme outcomes they effect indirectly through their support to partners.

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<sup>1</sup> The M&E of capacity development will be the next learning synthesis from the Evaluation.



## Organisational Changes

### Examples of Partnership Changes

- Number of partnership development plans implemented improving partners' organisational, thematic and advocacy capacity (IBIS)
- %age of partners in Right to Food programme including structural work on food insecurity etc. in their policies and plans and implement (DCA strategy indicator)
- Partners' programme management capacity in particular M&E and documentation of results (DPOD)

Although less interesting for some external audiences, evidence of organisational development can be important for the CSO's overall performance, learning and accountability. Most Danish CSO strategies include internal, organisational indicators in their results frameworks - for example, in relation to fundraising, staffing and finance. Organisational performance is arguably the easiest kind of change to summarise as indicators can be developed centrally and information on the indicators gathered at a central level or aggregated up from regional or country office levels.

CSOs can contribute to organisational change and improved organisational performance at a larger scale – by influencing the practice of the global con/federations to which they belong.

This is de facto what a number of Danish CSOs – for example AADK and SCFDK – are doing within their con/federations by leading in an area where they have acknowledged expertise. A CSO's influence more broadly within the sector could also be considered added value and help to highlight more the particular niche of the organisation and its contribution to innovation. Including these two aspects more clearly in results frameworks could provide a strategic view of the contribution and value-added of a particular CSO to the sector and to Danida's support to civil society.

## 2.2 Levels of Change

### Example of Organisational Change

The IBIS 2014-17 results frameworks includes a strategic area on organisational development which includes eight indicators on change management in relation to affiliation with Oxfam, the development of new internal strategies and policies; and the review of programme strategies. For example, one indicator is to develop a new organisational strategy and partnership strategy.

The level of change that the CSO seeks to achieve can be seen to reflect the scale of its ambition or, alternatively, to reflect the level of its realism. For example, one of the consequences of results-based funding has been a tendency for CSOs to lower the level of desired changes in their results frameworks in order to minimise risk and ensure success. There are many different versions of logic models and log frames, each with their own features and terminologies, but

most are based on a similar logic. The critical levels of change common to most frameworks are outcomes and outputs.

#### **Examples of summarising global outputs**

- 215,318 men and women benefitted from HIV awareness campaigns (DanChurchAid 2014 report)
- 52% of partner organisations carried out capacity building activities on DRR (DanChurchAid 2014 report)
- 222 radio programmes produced through the ASC programme in 2014 (ADRA 2014 report)

#### **Outcomes**

CSOs in Denmark and elsewhere are increasingly expected by donors and other stakeholders to present a summary of their results at outcome level or in terms of the impact on the lives of target populations. This is more appropriate to do at the end of a strategy or programme period than, for example, annually. It is always difficult to do well but it is relatively easier to do when a CSO is supporting service delivery and/or working with standard indicators for the sector e.g. in health and livelihoods. Elsewhere it can be more difficult to aggregate outcomes in the same way as outputs can be aggregated. Summarising outcomes, therefore, will usually involve some form of illustration, for example, of changes that are filtering down to beneficiaries. The more direct influence a CSO has over the desired change e.g. the development of partner capacity, the more practical it becomes to summarise change at outcome level.

It is also difficult to confidently claim a CSO's contribution to an outcome-level change. Observing a positive change in an outcome indicator is technically an insufficient basis to attribute the change to the programmes activities, even if they are deemed to be successful. Since other actors, events, and activities may also have contributed. Once again, the closer the outcome is to the CSO's sphere of influence the more practical it is to trace contribution.

#### **Outputs**

Danish CSOs summarise most of their results in the 2014 results report at output and some at activity level. Danish humanitarian strategic partnerships, for example, require results to be reported only at output level. Outputs are commonly considered to include any kind of deliverable such number of beneficiaries, groups or organisations supported; activities undertaken or trainings carried out. By this definition it is, of course, easier to demonstrate results at output level since they are within a CSO's direct sphere of control in contrast to outcomes which are only within a CSO's indirect sphere of influence<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> However, the OECD definition (see Annex B) allows that an output 'may also include changes resulting from [an] intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.' This potentially extends the definition to include output change directly

This is the easiest level at which to quantify and aggregate results. A common convention is to report the scale of these outputs in the numbers affected by them. SCDK, and other CSOs, use the term “total reach” to communicate the number of people reached directly or indirectly through their activities. It is important to bear in mind that, while summarising outputs or ‘reach’ can demonstrate the scale and diversity of what a CSO has done, it does not demonstrate the effectiveness of those activities i.e. an outcome.

### **Domains of change**

Some CSOs have used their theory of change to focus results reporting on broad areas or domains of change. These function a bit like a post-box for collecting and structuring results. CARE DK’s global monitoring and reporting system is aligned to the three domains of change in its theory of change. These domains of change relate to the role of civil society in empowering people who are poor and dependent on natural resources to realise their right to food i.e.

- CSOs mobilise citizens for action
- Partners are well-governed, representative and legitimate
- CSOs effectively influencing policies.

DPOD has developed broad areas of change that it identifies are commonly necessary to achieve recognition and inclusion of persons with disabilities. These include:

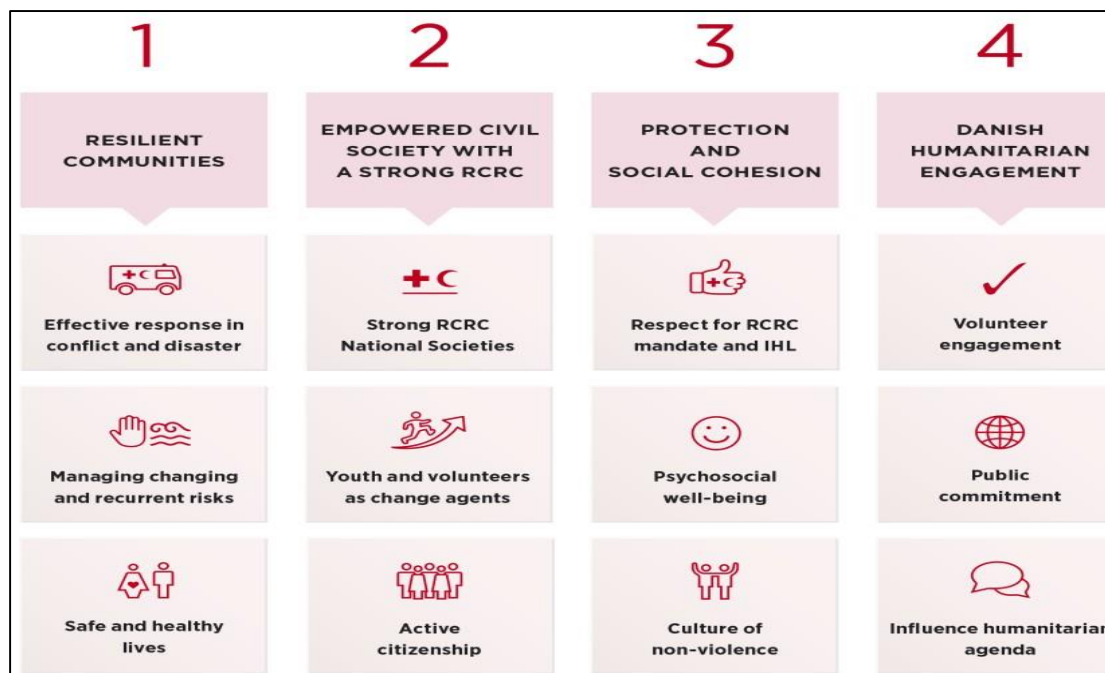
- Organisational development of disability movements,
- Empowerment of persons with disabilities,
- Attitudinal change in society,
- Advocacy with government and duty bearers,
- Mainstreaming of the inclusion of people with disabilities in all sectors.

The Danish Red Cross does not have an overall theory of change for the organisation but has also structured its global strategy and reporting around a series of goals and key change areas.

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arising out of a deliverable such as community organisations engaging with government following community mobilisation meetings.

Figure 1 International Strategy 2015-2020



Organisations often go on to develop global indicators for these change areas. These are usually left quite generic to enable programmes and partners to identify what aspects are most relevant to them and what indicators would be most appropriate (see Section 3 under framing indicators).

#### Tracing Change: Key points for summarising results

- A results framework identifies what changes a CSO seeks to achieve and how it hopes to contribute to them.
- The possible ways of summarising change is affected by the focus of the CSO's mission, the levels and type of change it seeks to achieve.
- It may not be appropriate for a CSO to summarise results at a global level. It is likely, depending on the complexity of the CSO, that a CSO will need to summarise within different types and levels of change.
- Changes are most easily summarised if:
  - a) The CSO has a specialised, focused mission;
  - b) The results framework focuses on outputs within its direct control;
  - c) CSO organisational performance forms part of the results framework.
- Summarising results at outcome level is potentially costly in time and resources. Careful attention, therefore, should be paid to how success will be measured and demonstrated.

### 3 Indicators: Measuring Change

Most Danish CSOs include indicators and/or targets in their strategy documents and report on progress to these in their Annual Results Reports. The choice of indicator determines what will be measured or assessed in relation to the achievement of the outcome or output. It influences the kind of data that will be collected as evidence to summarise change and the tools used to gather it. Annex B illustrates how different types of indicators, in particular standard and ranking indicators, require different approaches and tools for data gathering.

The choice of indicator may also have organisational implications both for the Danish CSO and its Southern partner. The Civil Society Policy says that Danish CSOs should “*monitor their progress .....while seeking to respect the monitoring systems and indicators of their partners*”<sup>3</sup>. A good Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system should allow flexibility for different countries and partners to adopt their own MEL processes to serve their own needs in their particular contexts. This is a key dilemma with regard to producing summary results. There are two basic approaches:

- “Early coding” i.e. Danish CSOs develop and define the indicators and require country programme offices or Southern CSOs to gather the data in this format. The rationale for this is one of consistency to enable the CSO to process and aggregate the information in summarising results. The risk is that partners, for example, are required to gather data in a way which may be time-consuming but of limited use to them.
- “Late coding” i.e. Project or programme information is gathered in different ways and subsequently sorted and categorised at a later stage. This is easier for Southern partners who can use their own MEL systems to gather data but it requires greater capacity for data management on the part of the Danish CSO. The advantage is that partners can use their own MEL systems to gather data (“ownership”). The disadvantage is that the post-hoc analysis of this data may be unreliable.

Each approach has its implications. If the Danish CSO relies on its own staff to post hoc summarise information provided by partners (late coding) it may have to invest in its own M&E capacity. If it predefines formats and methodologies in order to make summarisation easier (early coding), it may have to negotiate this with partners and invest in the capacity of the Southern CSO. The choice of indicators, therefore, as a foundation for how results will be summarised requires careful consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> Civil Society Policy p.38

### **Choice of indicators: key criteria**

**Validity.** Will the indicator provide good evidence of the desired result?

**Precision.** Do stakeholders agree on exactly what the indicator measures?

**Practicality.** Is data currently being collected? If not will it be easy to collect and analyse?

**Reliability.** Can we gather data on it consistently over time and across different contexts?

**Sensitivity.** When the result changes, will it continue to be susceptible to change?

**Clarity.** Are we sure whether an increase is good or bad?

**Utility.** Will the information be useful for summarisation, decision-making, accountability, and learning?

**Ownership.** Do stakeholders agree this indicator makes sense to use?

Source: OECD Ibid

This section will seek to explain how different types of indicator can be used to summarise change beginning with the most standardised approaches that enable some form of aggregation through to indicators that allow for local variation. We will consider indicators under three headings:

- *Global indicators* i.e. indicators that can be used to aggregate results by gathering data across a programme or portfolio by sharing a common definition.
- *Framing indicators* i.e. indicators that involve a mixed approach to summarising results i.e. that involve some degree of standardisation while allowing for locally defined indicators and supplementary evidence.
- *Cluster indicators* i.e. indicators that provide a summary of results at global level only as disparate results from lower levels such as programmes or projects

The establishment of baseline data is closely associated with use of most types of indicators (although less so with framing indicators - several Danish CSO Annual Results Reports do not include baseline information). Data is collected on the indicators included in the results framework at the outset of a programme/project/activity) to identify the conditions against which future changes can be measured. The methods of data collection used in establishing a baseline may be qualitative or quantitative. Baseline studies can also serve to test whether the initial set of indicators are the most appropriate to measure the proposed changes. A baseline study is separate from a situational analysis since it is more likely to collect primary data and will be used for setting and monitoring targets.

### 3.1 Global Indicators

Global indicators can enable a CSO to provide a global summary of results by requiring a standardised measurement of changes at country or programme level. There are three types of indicators that enable a CSO to aggregate results across a global portfolio:

- Direct indicators i.e. indicators to which data is gathered centrally or from external sources.
- Standard indicators i.e. indicators which have a common definition at all levels.
- Ranking indicators i.e. the use of ranking or rating systems according to standard definitions.

#### Direct Indicators

Direct indicators are global indicators that allow an organisation to assess its global impact directly by gathering data from internationally available data such as monitoring reports on UN Human Rights Conventions. Direct indicators are normally appropriate only if the organisation is sufficiently influential in a specific field of work to be able to directly measure its contribution to change at the level at which the data is gathered e.g. country level. This requires the organisation and/or its partners to have sufficient ‘critical mass’ to directly influence the change it is reporting. There is also the more general challenge of how it demonstrate its contribution to an outcome to which many factors might have contributed.

#### **LO/FTF use of direct indicators**

LO/FTF is one of the few Danish CSOs that uses direct indicators in its results frameworks. LO/FTF work with trade union partners in developing countries is based on the four pillars of the ILO Decent Work Agenda i.e. creating jobs, guaranteeing rights at work, extending social protection and promoting social dialogue. LO/FTF uses eight global indicators to report on its support to partners under these four pillars e.g. “% of countries with reported increase in national or sector minimum wages”. Data on country performance to the indicators is gathered from its own annual, global labour market profiles (LMP’s) which are based on data derived from the ILO databank and LO/FTF’s contribution to outcomes is informed by its own Sub-Regional Office) reports.

#### Standard indicators

A standard indicator is defined and interpreted in the same way at all levels. Many organisations use standard indicators to aggregate results from different projects at a global level. DFID, for example, uses standard indicators in all its bilateral programmes to aggregate outputs, intermediate outcomes and outcomes in thematic areas such as governance or climate change, as well as its own operational effectiveness.

Data collected under standard indicators can be aggregated to summarise results, for example, only if a number of conditions are in place i.e.

- The same indicator definition is used;
- All relevant projects collect the information (or a statistically significant sample of projects);
- Change is assessed over similar timescales;
- The same (or similar) tools and methods are used to collect the data;
- The quality of information collection is consistent.

Organisations should aggregate their results using standard indicators only when these conditions are in place. A CSO can use a standard indicator such as ‘# of local government decisions influenced by CSOs’ but it would be meaningless to add together numbers from different projects if there were different understandings of what was meant by ‘local government decisions influenced’. For example, one project might only report on cases where local government officials explicitly recognised the contribution of the CSO, whereas another project might include all cases where a CSO representative attended a decision-making forum.

This means that all relevant projects/partners need to use the standard indicators and comply with the other conditions. This may be a burden on partners in collecting information on projects to use indicators that are not of their own choosing, and which may not be relevant to them.

The most common use of standard indicators is to demonstrate ‘reach’ or beneficiaries i.e. the number of people (or groups or organisations) that the CSO claims to have affected positively through the activities it supports. This is useful to explain the scale of the CSO’s work although how reach or beneficiary numbers are calculated can be a difficult area e.g. calculating the ‘reach’ of a radio programme. It is easier to aggregate data at output level as in the above examples. It is extremely difficult to aggregate results at outcome level. Outcomes tend to be more intangible and context specific, particularly, in complex sectors such as governance, conflict resolution or civil society.

In reality, the difficulty of ensuring consistency in the collection of data on standard indicators is a challenge even at output level and has led to many organisations reducing the number of standard indicators which are mandatory (See above examples: Oxfam has 6, DFID has 22 but this is for its entire bilateral programme in 9 sectoral areas).

A number of Danish CSOs use standard indicators with a view to enabling them to aggregate and/or summarise their performance. Programmes/projects can choose which are the most appropriate to them but must use the same definitions. Some Danish CSOs, affiliated to global confederations, use indicators supplied by their global MEL system and aligned to their global strategy e.g. AADK uses global indicators linked to AAP’s Key Change Promises and SCDK similarly to SCI’s Global Initiatives. These are sometimes combined with the CSO’s own indicators but the use of global indicators is often mandatory in a global con/federation.



Other Danish CSOs have developed or are developing standard or shared indicators e.g. IBIS, DCA, and CARE have standard indicators most of which are targeted more at outcomes. All have introduced detailed guidance to country programmes on how to assess achievement of the indicators although it will not be straightforward to report consistently on e.g. the number of quality education interventions with concrete results achieved (IBIS) or the number and type of policies, programmes and practises influenced by partners in favour of the impact groups (CARE DK).

DCA, CARE DK and IBIS have also developed standard indicators to monitor and report on the results on their support to partners e.g. % of partners who have developed long-term advocacy strategies; and % of partners who document their specific contribution to changes in government frameworks or practices. This makes it easier for the CSO to verify whether there is a good evidence base for what partners have documented they have achieved in their reports.

### **Action Aid Denmark use of standard or global indicators**

In 2013, AADK supported AAI in developing global indicators for the ten Key Change Promises (KCPs) in the global AAI strategy “People’s Action to End Poverty”. AAI has three change indicators and three performance indicators for each change promise. All AAI countries working on a Key Change Promise have to report annually to AAI on these indicators. For example, ActionAid Denmark uses the AAI global indicators “Number of people living in poverty who experience improvements in quality and gender responsiveness public services; number of local governments where steps are being taken to increase accountability to their communities; steps taken by governments to introduce a progressive system of taxation” to report on progress towards the Key Change Promise on democratic governance.

AAI also has a standardised matrix for each country to monitor progress to the objectives in their Country Strategy Paper. Countries can include as many indicators as they like on each Key Change Promise as long as they also refer to the global change and performance indicators. Some of the country-based indicators are similar to the global indicators so performance to Key Change Promises can be monitored at national level. AADK’s monitoring system is, therefore, aligned with both the AAI the Global Monitoring System and the national M&E frameworks of our programme countries.

### **Ranking and rating indicators**

Ranking or rating indicators enable CSOs to convert qualitative processes into quantitative data using pre-established, consistent scales. Ranking and rating tools are widely used in areas of work such as policy influencing, partnership, and capacity development. For example, complex organisations with more diverse programmes have an option of producing summary results at portfolio level through the use of this type of indicator. In this case, the rationale and methodology behind the ranking needs to be transparent and appropriate. The use of ranking indicators can be attractive to donors<sup>4</sup> since it appears to provide a clear summary of performance for accountability purposes. Their great advantage is that they enable a CSO to

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. DFID Civil Society Challenge Fund and others

quantify aggregate change even though the changes are different and inherently qualitative. It also allows them to track shifts in particular country programmes. Their disadvantages is that there is a to risk of subjectivity in rankings even though guidance is consistent, and ranking scores are not very meaningful the CSO itself for learning purposes unless supplemented by other evidence e.g. narrative illustration.

Two Danish CSOs – IBIS and CARE DK – use ranking indicators to report on the results of country programmes. IBIS has developed a ranking scale with regard to progress towards strategic objectives for each of the ten indicators in its 2014-17 strategy, ranging from highly satisfactory to highly unsatisfactory or not-rated. Country performance is rated according to this scale in the IBIS 2014 Results Report based on country and thematic reports, feedback from programme staff and external evaluations and reviews where relevant.

CARE Denmark’s Annual Results report rates its country programme performance against specific indicators in three domains of change. CARE DK provides country offices with guidance on ranking for fourteen Indicators across the three domains of change. Country teams, in consultation with CARE DK, rate the fulfilment and sustainability of results in each country. Country programme performance is scored 1-5 (5 being maximum) in each change domain based on country programme reporting, as illustrated below. This ranking is included in the results report at country level but not at a global level. CARE DK acknowledges that such rankings do not make much sense to the reader unless they are supplemented by further evidence. In the case of CARE DK, the use of outcome mapping is encouraged to enrich the annual report with by reflecting on progress under the relevant domains (see Section 4.2)

The challenge in using standard indicators and ranking and rating scales to summarise results is how to apply them consistently in gathering data across diverse country programmes and avoid subjectivity in the assessment of complex achievements. There is a natural tendency in most M&E systems, in particular in the context of increasing cuts, to ‘over-claim’ achievements. Taking this into consideration, it would be advisable for CSOs using these methods of measurement, for example, to periodically verify a sample of country reports and review how well staff are interpreting guidance on their use.

<b>Domain 1</b>	<b>Goal fulfillment</b>	<b>Sustainability</b>
Nepal	3.5	3.3
Vietnam	4	3.8
Niger	3.5	3.7
Mozambique	2.5	3
Uganda	3	3.3
Ghana	3.5	3.5
Tanzania	3	3

### **3.2 Framing Indicators**

Most Danish CSOs use ‘framing’ indicators to enable them to usefully summarise results without necessarily standardising indicators at a local level. There are different ways in which CSOs can summarise their results on the basis of locally defined indicators.

## Framing indicators

Several Danish CSOs use framing indicators to measure progress within broad domains of change. Framing indicators are broad at global level and become more focused at country, programme and project levels. This enables data collected under the programme or project indicators to be usefully summarised but not aggregated under the global framing indicator. IBIS, for example, is considering developing a ‘translation table’ that would allow country programmes to nest their own indicators within a set of global indicators so as to allow for summarisation.

Framing indicators, therefore, can be used to summarise changes from different contexts under a common theme, but cannot be used to aggregate those changes. The two examples below illustrate how broad framing indicators can be used to monitor and report on changes in the representation and legitimacy of Southern CSOs. Tangible information is collected under the indicators and summarised to illustrate how the Danish CSO is contributing to a stronger, more accountable civil society across different countries and regions. These indicators may be quantitative or qualitative or a mixture of both.

The first example illustrates how CARE DK uses broad framing indicators to monitor and report to a domain of change.

Domain	Indicators
CSOs are well-governed and representative, legitimate voices of the impact groups	<p>Evidence of increased or sustained legitimacy, representation and inclusion of the civil society organisations.</p> <p>Evidence that accountability mechanisms enable solicited and unsolicited feedback and complaints from constituencies</p> <p>Evidence of impacts accrued to impact groups/constituencies to which partners have contributed substantially</p>

The second example illustrates how DPOD uses slightly more detailed indicators to report to a similar outcome.

Outcome	Selected Outcome Indicators	Possible Target Areas
Strengthened legitimacy and democracy of partners	<p><i>Participants</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support to organisation of PWDs at local levels</li> </ul>	<p>Dev. + impl. Of bylaws</p> <p>General assemblies</p> <p>No. of member org.</p>

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*Accountability*

- Structures to ensure democracy & member influence  
Disability types represented on board  
Gender strategy
- Recognition as legitimate representative of disability movement by MO government and society at large  
Youth Wing

*Non discrimination*

- Effective inclusion of different disability groups  
Job descriptions  
TOR for board
- Effective promotion of gender equality
- Effective promotion of youth participation

*Transparency*

- Clear division of roles and responsibilities between board and staff  
HQ and local level
- 

The advantage of this type of indicator to a country programme is that it can collect evidence and produce reports that are useful to it.

Framing indicators also provide some sort of structure to results reporting across very different contexts. However, there is a risk that the richness of data gathered to project indicators may be lost in translation. Reports have a tendency to end up being consecutive country case studies which are structured in a similar way but that do not really illuminate learning across a portfolio. There is also a tendency in reporting to track individual indicators/areas of change rather than to explore the relationship between different factors and what this tells us about how change happens or to test and explore underlying assumptions. Investing more in global reflection and analysis of country level data as well as a better use of theory of change to suggest interesting lines of enquiry which could supplement more standard reporting (See Section 5) could be a useful way of strengthening this approach.

## Mixed indicators

Mixed indicators allow for some level of quantification while recognising that many aspects of change will be different. Numeric indicators often need to be supplemented by qualitative information if they are to make any sense. An indicator such as *'number of policy changes'* makes no sense on its own without understanding more about the nature of the policies changed and the broader political context. There is a big difference between being invited by a sympathetic government to add something to the wording of a policy that is due to be legislated and achieving a policy change that previously was not on a government's agenda.

IBIS has a number of indicators in its 2014 Results Report which are constructed as follows - *"number of advocacy initiatives/ quality education interventions etc..... With concrete results achieved"*. The inclusion of *'# and description of advocacy initiatives/ quality education interventions.....'* would produce a mixed indicator that would enable it to producing aggregated numbers while using narrative techniques to describe illustrate the concrete results achieved (without claiming that all initiatives had the same value or importance).

An important advantage of mixed indicators is that they can be used to define baselines, milestones and targets in quantitative terms whilst still providing qualitative reporting. In other words, they can be used to report the big picture in numbers whilst investigating the more qualitative, in-depth changes at the same time.

## 3.3 Cluster indicators

Cluster indicators are used when results are reported at global level as disparate results from lower levels such as programmes or projects. This type of indicator is often used in programmes where there is little interaction between component parts and programme change is viewed as the sum of the individual parts. The results demonstrated by the different indicators can be summarised but there is no attempt to show how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

CSOs most commonly use cluster indicators to summarise country-based results at global level – for example, when a global results framework contains a series of different indicators from different country programmes. Cluster indicators are sometimes used in humanitarian work, for example, by using a different set of output indicators for each country without attempting to develop consolidated indicators at a global level. This is possible when a CSO works in just a few countries but for CSOs working in many different countries the number of indicators concerned quickly becomes unmanageable in a single framework.

The following example from Danmission gives an idea of this approach:

<b>PROGRAM OUTCOME</b>	<b>PROGRAMME OUTCOME EFFECT</b>	<b>COUNTRY OUTCOME INDICATORS – 2016</b>
<b>Community-based organisation structures are mobilised as CBOs to represent community</b>	<b>2017 effect indicator:</b> 1662 communities find themselves represented by	<b>Myanmar:</b> Youth initiate 'Reflect Circle' community groups to practice self-reliant community development and

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**based affairs in a democratic manner, and CBOs serve as catalysts for the community to analyse and influence their own situation.**

CBOs that are relevant, democratic and supporting of the local communities in changing their situation.

to increase public participation in peace building and state building.

**Cambodia:** Various CBO in Prey Veng and Svay Rieng provinces have come together with the view to explore whether a cross-provincial CBO network could be established to promote collective voice synergy.

**Tanzania:** 2016 indicator: 75 community-based committees are working on gender and child rights and document active engagement with duty bearers around clearly defined advocacy issues.

**Egypt:** AI target CBOs and ECs have received technical training on advocacy that enable them to design advocacy initiatives. At least 86 formed electoral committees and other CBOs are planning and implementing the advocacy plans and campaigns on the identified related issues.

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### **Measuring change: Key points**

- The choice of indicator is critical since it defines what (and influences how) change will be monitored and reported on. It may also have organisational implications for both Danish CSOs and their partners.
- The use of standard, ranking and direct indicators will enable a CSO to summarise results through aggregation. This requires partners to ‘own’ the indicators and to gather data consistently across programme using the same definitions.
- Framing indicators enables CSOs to summarise and illustrate results in a meaningful way while respecting locally defined indicators. This has resource implications for the CSO. A participatory approach to selecting framing indicators draws on stakeholders’ experience and knowledge and helps build ownership.
- Mixed indicators combine a quantitative and qualitative element which enables a CSO to define baselines, milestones and targets in quantitative terms whilst still providing qualitative reporting.
- Use the checklist to assess each indicator for its suitability and effectiveness. Select the indicators that will provide useful information at an affordable cost. CSOs will need to balance the quality of the data to be gathered with the cost and time to collect it.

## 4 Methods: Demonstrating Change

The careful use of indicators is only one element of a good summary of results. The credibility of results is also dependent on the tools used to provide evidence against the indicators in support of the results.

The choice of indicators and data gathering methods are closely related. The choice of indicators by a Danish CSO will normally have a direct implication for how its Southern partners will gather data when monitoring and reporting on the work supported. The commonly accepted protocol is to first develop which indicators to use in tracking change and then select the tools or methodologies to provide the information. However, it may be the case that the data gathering tools which are available to a CSO or which they prefer will shape or influence their choice of indicator.

### Data Collection Methods: Key Criteria

**Validity:** Do the collection methods measure what they declare to measure?

**Reliability:** Do the collection methods consistent i.e. over time and different situations?

**Timeliness:** Can the data be collected routinely enough to inform management's decision-making?

**Cost:** Can the data be collected within budget constraints?

Source: adapted from OECD

### 4.1 Using tools to provide an evidence base

There are a wide range of tools and methodologies available to gather data in support of reported changes. Many of these tools have been developed by CSOs themselves<sup>5</sup>. In addition to the more familiar methods such as monitoring reports, focus groups, and key informant interviews there are a variety of formal and informal methods. Informal methods such as field visits and direct observation tend to be quick and easy to implement but can be considered to be insufficiently robust as an evidence base. The use of participatory methods and community monitoring has the additional advantage of empowering communities with the relevant skills. Formal methods such as sample surveys which are considered to have high validity tend to be more time consuming and expensive since they require staff to be trained in the data collection tools. In general, it is advisable to use a selection of different tools and approaches where possible to offer breadth and depth of information.

The choice of methodology must be appropriate to the nature of the programme and within the resources available to the CSO and/or its partners. Methods such as surveys and organisational assessment tools lend themselves to aggregation when summarising results. Development

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.pathways4change.org](http://www.pathways4change.org) for a range of tools and methodologies. UK CSOs have collaborated in recent years to collate standard and 'customised' tools through the BOND Impact Builder. See <https://my.bond.org.uk/impact-builder>



outcomes, however, are normally the product of multiple, complex processes. This poses a challenge to CSOs to demonstrate a plausible contribution to the reported changes at outcome level. This is true also for policy and practice change. The Danish Civil Society Policy acknowledges the difficulty of reporting advocacy outcomes<sup>6</sup> but, as advocacy plays an increasing part in the programmes of Danish CSOs the challenge remains of how to monitor and report on their contribution to policy and practice change. This is one of the reasons several Danish CSOs are using Outcome Mapping to summarise change across a portfolio of similar projects, though theory-based methods such as process tracing and contribution analysis that seek to identify and/or validate the causal processes associated with the reported outcome are becoming more popular.

## 4.2 Using stories to illustrate change

All Danish CSOs use stories of change in some form to supplement their results reporting. CSO narratives are sometimes viewed only as illustrations of positive change for communications purposes. Stories need to be more than this to be a valid and valuable element of a results summary. First the stories need to be accurately researched and honestly communicated. Secondly, the method by which stories have been chosen to summarise a result should be transparent and systematic. It needs to be clear what a spread of stories represents to avoid the risk of appearing misleading. There are different methods of using stories to summarise change. For example:

- *Random selection of narrative cases.* Random selection can only be treated as representative if the sample is large enough. Narratives can range from short descriptions of individual outcomes to longer pieces of work such as evaluations (Oxfam example taken out and used elsewhere).
- *Categories of case studies.* Some CSOs divide stories into different categories such as best cases stories, worst case stories, learning cases, representative cases and comparative cases. If enough stories are told, readers should be able to establish the best and worst of an organisation, along with key lessons that are being learned along the way. But this is only the case where CSOs are honest about what the stories represent. Stories used in this way can provide a window into the richness and complexity of an organisations' work but it can be hard for outsiders to tell the difference between genuine cases and those developed for marketing or communications purposes if there is not a transparent categorisation of the narratives.
- *Most Significant Change (MSC).* The MSC methodology is good example of a using a purposeful sample of stories to contribute to a results summary on the basis of a clear, transparent methodology. MSC seeks to produce stories representing the most significant changes brought about by an organisation within pre-specified domains of change. The domains can represent broad areas of change. The method of story generation and

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<sup>6</sup> P25 "Monitoring advocacy is often based on self- assessment and monitoring processes, rather than focusing exclusively on the end results".

selection is transparent and replicable, and, if the methodology is followed correctly, stories are verified by a range of different stakeholders before being used.

## 5 Learning: Understanding Change to improve

The process of producing summary results is only one part of the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) needs of a CSO. Producing evidence of portfolio change can play an important role in a CSO's accountability and communications but it may need to explore other ways of identifying, sharing and using learning. A key element of a CSO strategy must also be to understand the factors that contribute to its results so that it can improve through learning.

Until recently the dominance of the logical framework approach with its focus on objectives and indicators has not left much room for incorporating, for example, the facilitation and sharing of learning in a results agenda. There are signs that this is changing. People within the sector<sup>7</sup> are increasingly questioning whether the logic frameworks and forms of reporting to emerge with a results-based approach really tell us anything interesting about what we are achieving. The following are some ideas about how we might better learn from our portfolios in order to become better change agents.

### Theories of change as a tool for learning

A key rationale for developing a theory of change is to test our assumptions about how change happens. It can also serve a purpose as the basis of a results framework. If it is used for the latter purpose, it is important that it is used not only to identify what we aim to change and how we aim to achieve those changes. Part of the evidence gathering process should be to test our assumptions and identify key learning in the process.

### Learning questions to guide monitoring and reporting

One way of doing this is to incorporate a series of learning questions in the results framework to ensure that learning is consistently monitored across projects and programmes. Some consistency in reporting can be achieved by asking a common set of questions across different programmes or projects. These might focus on the learning to emerge from the changes reported. The following are examples of some general learning questions that could be made more specific in line with the CSO's mission:

- What significant changes have occurred in the lives of poor women, men and children?
- What changes in policies, practices, ideas, and beliefs have happened?
- To what degree has [the INGO] contributed to the change?
- How cost-effective has the intervention been?
- What particular lessons have been learned?

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, "The Politics of Evidence and Results in International Development: Playing the game to change the rules?" Eyben, R. et al Practical Action Publishing, 2015.

### **In-depth sampling as part of annual reporting**

Another way of incorporating learning in summary results reporting approach is to complement annual reporting with a deeper review of a sample of programmes/projects or with more detailed research on a particular area of work. This allows for rigorous research methods to be applied to evaluating achievements and potentially yield useful insights for the sector.

Oxfam for example, in addition to aggregating quantitative outputs across all its projects, evaluates the impact of its work by reviewing a sample of randomly selected projects under thematic areas using standard methodologies. Oxfam argues that with a portfolio of more than a 1,000 projects, 400 of which complete each year, this is the only cost-effective way of reporting on the effectiveness of its portfolio.

### **Identify and focus on learning from emerging changes**

It is increasingly acknowledged that development work often takes place in complex, uncertain environments that require adaptive rather than linear models of programme development and monitoring. The challenge is to identify the patterns of change that emerge in reality rather than being overly focused on monitoring progress to predetermined, anticipated changes, and to generate learning and evolve and adapt accordingly. These emergent areas of learning can become the focus of future research and data gathering.

## 6 Conclusions

Reporting results in summary form helps Danish CSOs communicate their achievements effectively and strengthens their accountability to donors and the general public. The challenges facing Danish CSOs in summarising their results will vary according to the nature, breadth and complexity of their mission and programmes.

CSOs should consider when and where to summarise results at a global, portfolio level. If the CSO has a focused, specialised mission it may be able to use standard indicators for the sector to aggregate results across its portfolio. For most Danish CSOs, however, it may be a challenge to summarise (and even more so to aggregate) their results at a global portfolio level. It may be appropriate to recognise this and to summarise development results at programme, thematic or country levels while focusing on giving evidence of their unique contribution or added value in the sector at a global level. It will be interesting to learn from the experience of Danish CSOs using unified global frameworks at the end of the evaluation period.

Some level of aggregation of results should be possible at output level. The challenge is how to summarise results at outcome level. In particular, the use of mixed indicators offers CSOs the opportunity to 'headline' their achievements through some level of aggregation while offering more insight into, for example, the factors contributing or impeding the success of the work through the methodical use of stories. This will normally involve both quantitative and qualitative data - for example, numeric evidence of performance against targets and strong, compelling stories of change which illustrate positive trends from the evidence. Qualitative research methods are indispensable to ensuring that the changes reported are derived from strong evidence of the CSO's contribution to these changes.

In general, the main issues to address in future summary results reporting are to ensure that:

- The results framework is appropriate to the mission and acceptable to donors and partners;
- The types of indicators chosen are best suited to capture results in summary form while minimising the increased cost to them and partners in time and resources;
- A mixture of approaches and methods is used to build the overall story of organisational achievement;
- The reporting includes basic data on the size and scope of the achievements where possible i.e. count the things that can be counted;
- Credible methodologies are used to offer evidence-based narratives in support of achievements;
- Reporting is not restricted to the results but include reflection and analysis on what the results mean and the questions they raise.

The guiding principles are that the choice of methods to achieve the above must be relevant, proportionate and realistic

- **Relevant:** The methods chosen must be relevant to the need of the CSO, partners and donors to demonstrate the results of their efforts. Each CSO is different and is likely to need a different mix of approaches. However meeting the needs of the three stakeholders is not straightforward as each may have different expectations.
- **Proportionate:** Producing good summary results, particularly at a time of reduced budgets, involves a number of trade-offs, as does good M&E more generally. First, CSOs and donors must decide how much is an appropriate level of investment in M&E capacity, vis-à-vis programme spend. Second, CSOs must discuss with partners how much time and energy is appropriate for them to spend on M&E, and what are the costs and benefits that this entails. In particular, asking field offices or partners to gather data that facilitates aggregation or summarisation may not coincide with the way they would like to collect and present information for their own purposes. Unless partners acknowledge the benefits to their own organisations of improved M&E – for example, in terms of their increased effectiveness and/or ability to attract further funding – it is unreasonable to expect them to adapt with enthusiasm to the needs of the Northern CSO or donor.
- **Realistic:** Finally, the key is to be realistic about what can actually be achieved. It is realistic to expect Danish CSOs and partners to summarise the changes to which they have contributed within the boundaries of what is possible. It is unrealistic to expect, for example, Southern CSOs to provide data for aggregation at portfolio level where that is theoretically and practically impossible.

# Annex A Definition of key terms

The following definitions are derived from OECD documents<sup>8</sup>:

Term	Definition
<b>Goal</b>	The higher-order objective to which a development intervention is intended to contribute.
<b>Impact</b>	Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.
<b>Results</b>	Changes in a state or condition that derive from a cause-and-effect relationship. Results can take the form of impact, outcomes and outputs.
<b>Outcome</b>	The intended or achieved short-term and medium term effects of an intervention's outputs, usually requiring the collective effort of partners. Outcomes represent changes in development conditions that occur between the completion of outputs and the achievement of impact.
<b>Output</b>	The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.
<b>Indicator</b>	What will be measured in relation to the achievement of the outcome or output but not what is to be achieved? Should be specific and measurable but not include elements of the baseline or target.
<b>Baseline</b>	An analysis describing the situation prior to a development intervention, against which progress can be assessed or comparisons made.
<b>Target</b>	A variable that helps verify changes in the development intervention or shows results relative to what was planned. A target specifies a particular value for an indicator to be accomplished within a given time frame.
<b>Assumptions</b>	Expectations about external factors (or risks) that could affect the progress or success of a development intervention, but over which the management has no direct control.

<sup>8</sup> See OECD. 2010. Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.

## Annex B Human Rights and Democracy types of indicator

Outcome: Increased civil society influence over local government policy and practice for the benefit of poor and marginalised.			
Area	Type	Indicator	Methods
Policy implementation	<i>Framing</i>	Effective implementation of policy benefiting poor and marginalised people	Any method can be used to gather data
	<i>Standard</i>	# of legal cases where official complaints have been upheld regarding non-compliance of local government with existing policies	Standardised tracking tool to capture complaints made and results of process
	<i>Ranking/Rating</i>	# and % of targeted policies that are assessed as being partially or fully implemented	Practice change assessment tool
	<i>Mixed</i>	# and description of policy-related commitments made by duty bearers	Scrutinising of media reports / website
Policy change	<i>Framing</i>	Evidence of CSO submissions being incorporated into government documents	Any method can be used to gather data
	<i>Standard</i>	# of policy changes realised	Policy change tracking tool
	<i>Ranking/Rating</i>	Average policy influencing contribution scores, as ranked by evaluators conducting process tracing	Process tracing, contribution analysis
	<i>Mixed</i>	# and description of policy changes to which CSOs have made a significant or verifiable contribution	Any method can be used to gather data
Policy influence	<i>Framing</i>	CSOs influencing policy debates at local or national levels	Any method can be used to gather data
	<i>Standard</i>	# of meetings with duty bearers to discuss policy	Basic record-keeping
	<i>Ranking/Rating</i>	# and % of advocacy initiatives assessed as having fully or mostly realised concrete results	Standardised surveys administered to partner CSOs
	<i>Mixed</i>	# and description of cases where CSOs influence policy debates	Any method can be used to gather data
Partner capacity	<i>Framing</i>	Verifiable examples of greater capacity to undertake advocacy amongst supported CSOs	Any method can be used to gather data
	<i>Standard</i>	# and % of partners that have been invited to attend at least one official engagement with local government over the previous two years	Standardised survey administered to partner CSOs, backed up by INGO
	<i>Ranking/Rating</i>	Percentage of partners demonstrating increased engagement and influence in policy and advocacy work in at least one area of support	Voice and accountability tool
	<i>Mixed</i>	# and description of cases where CSOs perceive that their capacity to carry out local level advocacy has been enhanced	Standardised survey administered to partner CSOs
Population awareness	<i>Framing</i>	Evidence of increased awareness amongst key constituencies	Any method can be used to gather data
	<i>Standard</i>	# and % of sampled population that are able to correctly identify at least 2 of their rights [within a stated policy area]	Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey
	<i>Ranking/Rating</i>	# and % of people interviewed that are assessed as being 'highly knowledgeable' or 'knowledgeable' [within a stated area]	Standardised survey administered to populations
	<i>Mixed</i>	# and % of cases where there has been an increase in awareness amongst targeted populations	Different methods at CSO level can be used to generate and report this