

# Evaluation of Danish Support to Civil Society

## Learning Synthesis VII: Innovation case studies



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# 1 Danida Fund for Innovation in Civil Society Partnerships: Areas for Future Learning

## 1.1 Background

In October 2013 Danida invited 15 Danish CSOs with current framework agreements to submit proposals for innovative civil society partnership projects. The Call identified three dimensions of innovation – selection of partners, partnership dynamics and choice of methods. Priority was to be given to proposals with strong implications for future partnerships. The evaluation was particularly interested in Projects “*emphasising the gradual transfer of responsibility to partners in the global South*”<sup>1</sup>. Two projects offered the potential for future learning with regard to innovation in civil society partnerships:

- *Social Movements in Cyber Age*. (DanChurchAid). Focused on the access to and use of social media by the social movement in support of human rights and democracy in Cambodia.
- *Insecure Lands: New alliances for the promotion of universal values*. (CARE Denmark) Focused on advocating for pastoral rights in relation to illegal occupation and land grabbing in pastoral lands in Niger.

The opportunities for learning in a ‘re-balanced’ model of partnership was central to both projects and of particular interest to the evaluation. Short case studies were produced on both projects with the agreement of the CSOs, drawing upon the funding applications, subsequent status reports and other documentary material, supplemented by interviews with CSO and partner staff. Five areas for possible future learning emerged from the case studies:

## 1.2 Starting from scratch or building from the past?

Neither of the two projects reviewed was a completely fresh initiative. Each followed on from or was complementary to previous work on the same issues. In each case the Danish CSO had a pre-established relationship with the implementing partner. This raises an interesting issue of whether it is easier to experiment with new approaches with existing partners or to start afresh. The Niger experience of experimenting with a new model of partnership was positive although partners commented on how difficult it was to change traditional ways of working. In the Cambodia project there was some reluctance from the partner to embrace the concept of a Consortium including the involvement of social activist groups in managing a Social Action Fund.

The trust gained over time in a well-established partnership might be an asset to innovation; alternatively long-standing familiarity with the ways of working of international partners might act as a brake on innovation. It would be interesting to monitor the different challenges faced in introducing innovative approaches in new and well-established partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> Policy for Danish Support to Civil Society p 18

### **1.3 Managing innovation by including it in the results framework.**

The results framework of neither project includes objectives or indicators specifically related to ‘re-balancing partnership’ although the concept is central to both. The Cambodia project seeks to “challenge ‘traditional’ donor-partner paradigms which pervade development cooperation” through the operation of the Consortium and Social Action Fund. The Niger project refers to new forms of collaboration, in particular, to “test a redefinition of roles” that would involve the Danish CSO withdrawing from local decision-making and focusing on its role in value-addition.

While the Niger partners report positively on the evolving partnership model, the Cambodia project indicates a degree of misunderstanding about the focus of innovation in the project. The implementing partner understood the focus of innovation to be the use of social media with a social movement while the Danish CSO also sought to innovate in relation to models of partnership.

If innovation does not feature in the project’s results framework and no metrics are identified to monitor and measure progress in this area, there is a risk it will not feature prominently in project management, learning and reporting. The Niger project reported to some degree on progress with the governance model in its status reports and mid-term internal review. The inclusion of innovation partnership models in the results framework of the Cambodia project may have helped to ensure that both the Danish CSO and implementing partner shared the same expectations of the project; ensured that the partnership model was pro-actively managed; and that it featured as a part of ongoing reflection, learning and results reporting. It would be interesting to experiment with and learn from different kinds of metrics to monitor how new forms of partnership evolve.

### **1.4 Breaking with traditional patterns of partnership is difficult**

Both projects show, in different ways, that departing from familiar ways of working can be difficult. In the case of Cambodia, the relationships between Danish CSO, local implementing partner and target groups were not much changed as a result of ambiguity of expectations. The Niger experience has been more transformative. The internal mid-term review, for example, reports a clear reversal in the roles of the Danish CSO and partner in project governance. It also provides a good illustration of the challenges faced by partners when the partnership is conducted in a more democratic way. While all interviewees expressed satisfaction with the progress of the Board as a decision-making body, and excitement about the potential of this model, a number of unexpected challenges were noted.

#### **A steep learning curve**

Progress in the Niger project was difficult at first and partners referred to a steep learning curve as the model of governance was different from their previous experience of, for example, Steering Committees. It took time to set the boundaries, establish the division of labour and clarify the role of the Board as it moved from an administrative to more of a policy focus, and for partners to move from acting like ‘service providers’ to acting like ‘partners’. The project has involved a shift in attitudes and the acquisition of new skills. As an advocacy project, partner Board representatives were the policy/decision-makers while the local staff of the international

CSO were more technically-oriented. (It is important to note that CSO project staff provide technical support to the Board but do not have decision-making authority.) It has taken time for the elected partner representatives on the Board to adopt new roles, assume new responsibilities, propose ideas and make decisions.

### **Need to clarify and provide support for new roles**

In both projects there was not enough investment in clarifying the role of the Board/Consortium concept so that everyone was clear about their responsibilities, and supported in fulfilling them. The concept of a 'rebalanced partnership' was a new idea for everyone. A key issue in Cambodia was that the Danish CSO and local partner did not fully share the same expectations of the Consortium arrangement. The way the Social Action Fund operated was principally shaped by the perspectives of the Cambodian implementing partner.

A key lesson is to use the inception phase to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of and committed to innovation in partnership and their role in the governance structure; and to identify how members can be supported to exert their roles.

### **Delegating financial responsibility is a challenge**

Perhaps the most difficult area to change partnership dynamics, given donor concern over fiduciary responsibility, is financial management. Traditionally, northern CSOs enter into a programme agreement with partners with a budget aligned to planned activities. Funding transfers are made subject to satisfactory progress and reports. Both projects sought to break with this model through delegated powers to a Board (Niger) and a Consortium (Cambodia).

In the Cambodia project, the partner rather than the Consortium, retained responsibility for the management of the Social Action Fund, subject to the financial oversight of the Danish CSO. In the Niger project the Board has considerable autonomy and financial control and, for example, has been able to make decisions and allocate resources for unplanned activities. Project staff need to request Board approval to fund an activity that is not planned.

In the earlier stages of the project, the partners felt some frustration with global CSO financial systems - for example, with regard to carrying forward funds that were not used in the previous period - but have since negotiated greater flexibility which they value. Nonetheless, the Danish CSO retains oversight of project finances so that funds used remain within the overall envelope and are sufficiently aligned with the original project objectives and strategy. Too rigid financial management systems may, in some circumstances, constrain the scope for innovation. It may be that global CSOs have less flexibility to authorise variations on global systems and norms.

An interesting issue to research and monitor would be how fund management can be delegated to participatory forms of project governance while retaining standards of fiduciary responsibility that meet donor expectations.

### **Provide support and opportunity to learn and adapt to new roles**

The sustainability of the both models of project governance was dependent on Southern civil society actors developing the capacity to work together and assume some level of executive authority for the project rather than rely on project staff with the expertise and language of the donors. The Cambodia project was committed to an action-learning approach where learning

was to be discussed, documented and disseminated during the implementation of the project. This would enable stakeholders to reflect and learn from experience in order to drive innovation. However, too much of an activist approach can be a disincentive to learning and the learning reported on tended to focus on, for example, technical issues associated with working with social media rather than on the dynamics of the Consortium/ Social Action Fund.

It is clear from both experiences that the need to develop the capacity of stakeholders in the project governance should be anticipated from the outset. This could take different forms. If the governance body has responsibility for some project finances then support on financial management and decision-making may be necessary. A system of ongoing support through a mentoring scheme or opportunities for real-time learning is likely to be appropriate so that lessons learned can feed back into the management of the project.

### **1.5 Reaching beyond partners to target groups.**

The issue of how to involve broader target groups in project governance emerged in both Niger and Cambodia. In Niger, partners discussed whether the Board should be expanded to involve other stakeholders beyond those that with a financial stake in the project. In particular, they identified that traditional pastoralist leaders should be more closely involved to increase the legitimacy of the project. The Cambodia project originally anticipated that participants from local social movements would be involved in the operation of the Consortium and Social Action Fund. This was resisted by the local partner who thought that formalising their role and developing their capacity might change their organisational character, and distort the dynamic of the social movement introducing tensions and rivalries. The modus operandi of the project de facto reverted to a more traditional partnership in which the Northern CSO grant funds its Southern Partner to support local CBOs.

It would be a useful focus for future learning on innovation to research how civil society groups of unequal resources and experiences, including informal civic action groups and individuals, might be jointly empowered to take responsibility for project governance.

### **Innovation in governance, innovation in programme?**

It would be interesting to further research whether innovation in project governance is linked in any way to greater innovation in programming. In the Cambodia case, it seemed as though the implementing partner extended its planned activities in the use of social media with activists through the project rather than introduced new activities or ways of working. Stakeholders in Niger stressed that what they really liked about the governance model was the flexibility it afforded. The Board was able to decide to do something differently if the circumstances warranted it and request a change to the budget. This flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances was seen as crucial to the success of the project.

## 2 DanChurchAid – Social Movement in Cyber Age: A case study in innovation

### 2.1 Background<sup>2</sup>

#### **Danida Fund for Innovation in Civil Society Partnerships**

In October 2013 Danida invited 15 Danish CSOs with current framework agreements to submit proposals for innovative civil society partnership projects. The Call identified three dimensions of innovation –selection of partners, partnership dynamics and choice of methods. Priority was to be given to proposals with strong implications for future partnerships.

#### **Cambodia: a challenging context for civil society**

The project “Social Movement in Cyber Age” aimed to “contribute to a strong social movement for Justice and pro-poor development in Cambodia”. Cambodia presents a challenging environment for CSOs and civic groups adopting a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to development. While officially a multiparty democracy, the country is, in effect, a one-party state dominated by the [Cambodian People's Party](#) and Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has been in power since 1985. The 2013 national elections were disputed by the opposition as being not free and fair, and have been followed by many anti-government, protests and rallies. These have been accompanied by an increasingly repressive response by government including beatings, arbitrary arrests of activists, and killings. Traditional news media tend not to report these protests and the government crackdown on social movements due to the government monopoly on information and censorship rules.

#### **Cambodia: civil society activism and government suppression.**

“Activities and discourse which challenge conservative values, existing power structures, physical and economic exploitation, corruption and impunity are actively suppressed and fragmented”.

Source: Social Movement in Cyber Age Application Feb 2014 p.2

The project, therefore, was developed in a the context of increasing conflict and tension between civil society groups and government, and a shrinking space for civil society organisations, activists and opposition parties.

#### **Working with social media with the social movement**

The project targeted social movements such as youth groups, land activists, labour unions and civil society networks that have become very active in recent years in the defence of human rights.

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<sup>2</sup> This case study draws upon the funding application and subsequent status reports. The final project report will not be available till December 2105. Documentary material was supplemented by interviews with DCA staff in Cambodia, the former project manager and the local partner LICADHO.

### **The Social Movement: New actors of social change**

“They have become actors of change, introducing new strategies and increasing the voice of the marginalised people, especially on sensitive issues such as land, labour and forestry where more traditional civil society organisations have stepped back.”

Source: Social Movement in Cyber Age Application Feb 2014 p.2

The aim was to provide activist groups with access to and training in social media and other forms of digital activism in order to circumvent government censorship and attempts to suppress the social movement. Only a limited number of activists and individuals currently use the technology available because of barriers to entry such as cost and technical knowledge and requirements. Building on earlier training for grassroots member organisations on videography and video production, the project sought to enhance the civic action and advocacy efforts of these groups through access to new ICT equipment, expertise and funding.

### **A new approach to partnership**

In addition, DCA sought to challenge a traditional model of partnership and implement the project in a new way. DCA was to retain overall project management, reporting, documentation and sharing of learning. However, A Consortium was to be set up consisting of DCA, it's long-term partner LICADHO, and citizen groups and Cambodian NGOs working on human rights and/or media. The project anticipated that the Consortium would be responsible for the Social Action Fund although its Terms of Reference would not be agreed until the Inception Phase.

### **Using a Social Action Fund through a Consortium**

“This approach is a concerted effort to challenge ‘traditional’ donor-partner paradigms which pervade development cooperation. It is hoped that this approach will serve as a model for future cooperation with partners”

Social Movement in Cyber Age: Application, Feb 2004 p19

The establishment of a Consortium comprised of ‘traditional’ CSOs and social activists groups or individuals to oversee the use of a Social Action Fund to provide timely, flexible support to civic action groups was seen as an attempt to experiment with a different model of partnership that actively involved the new actors for social change.

### **Two key areas of innovation**

This short case study, therefore, will explore two key areas of innovation:

- Working with social movements. The focus on citizen groups and activities as partners and, to a lesser extent, their use of ICT for digital activism; and
- Rebalancing partnership. The rebalancing of the dynamics of a traditional form of partnership by managing a Social Action Fund through a Consortium involving new civic actors.

## 2.2 Challenging traditional paradigms with social movements

“More informal and transitory forms of organisation and expression challenge not only Governments, but also development partners and traditional forms of collaboration with civil society actors. INGOs and local civil society actors need to learn, listen and participate in such social networks.....”

Policy for Danish Support to Civil Society June 2014 p11

### **New emerging actors for change in Cambodia**

The Danish Civil Society Policy recognises that new, emerging civic actors play an increasingly important part in supporting human rights and democracy. At the same support to such actors presents a number of challenges in a results-based agenda when donors often emphasise the need to demonstrate results and to minimise risks. An important element of innovation in “Social Movement in Cyber Age” was to test out a model of working with and supporting such civil society networks and activists that, in recent years, have become ‘actors for change’ in Cambodia in defending human rights in sensitive areas such as land, labour and forestry.

The genesis of the project was the emergence of social media as an outlet that can challenge the government stranglehold on information. Social media was being increasingly used by civil society to challenge the government’s monopoly on information, and to raise the profile of human rights issues in Cambodia and abroad. For example, over 800,000 Cambodians, especially younger people, are Facebook users which the projects quotes as contributing to the 2013 post-election mass demonstrations which were barely covered by traditional media sources.

The project also had a strong gender focus. The use of smart phones can offer women new opportunities – regardless literacy or age – to communicate and create networks outside their villages. The presence of women on the frontline of civic activism has also been shown to reduce the likelihood of violence.

### **“Citizen journalists”: a force for change**

The project had three specific objectives:

- To train frontline activists on the use of ICTs for digital activism
- To support Citizen groups and activities in peaceful civic action and advocacy through the Social Action Fund;
- To amplify these activist voices through audio-visual advocacy, policy statements and international delegations to reach a domestic and international audience.

The compelling idea was to form a cadre of ‘citizen journalists’ able to inform citizens on social justice issues and help hold the government to account. Citizen journalists would be able to communicate events quickly and reach a wider audience in Cambodia and abroad through the use of smart phones, mobile messaging applications and social media platforms. This ‘cadre’ of trained individuals would become de facto media and outreach representatives for their communities or groups affected by human rights issues. They would immediately start producing

information and images pertaining to human rights abuses and will be able to engage in social media for their own advocacy.

“Danish partners worldwide will increasingly relate to new types of civil society actors, who may represent opportunities for a new, more democratic and open society. Such incipient ‘drivers for change’ will need support and accompaniment to grow and evolve to respond effectively to local and national challenges.”

Policy for Danish Support to Civil Society June 2014 p19

The project was committed to implementing results-based monitoring mechanisms to track the project’s progress in achieving its objectives. Outcome indicators will be measured on a regularly basis, this will include monitoring campaign strategies to ensure effectiveness, using a media monitor to track media citations as well as the reach of the videos produced under the action (i.e. on partner websites, YouTube, Face book, and usage by media and international organisations).

### **Consortium: a new model for resource allocation?**

“Denmark will .... support partnerships between Danish CSOs and CSOs in the global South emphasising the gradual transfer of responsibility to partners in the global South ....”

Policy for Danish Support to Civil Society June 2014 p18

Social Movement in Cyber Age also sought to rebalance the traditional North/South CSO partnership model by setting up a Consortium of NGOs and citizen groups<sup>3</sup> that would play a central role in the project by deciding how the Social Action Fund would work, and being involved in approving support to civic action groups from the fund. The Consortium would also:

- Facilitate the sharing of learning among target groups;
- Provide moral and technical support to target groups especially those facing human rights abuse; and
- Monitor, evaluate and share learning from the civic actions supported by the Social Action Fund.

It was hoped that the working of the Consortium would help to reduce the gap between INGOs, other international actors and citizen groups in Cambodia.

“In a rapidly changing world and shifting power balances, partnerships need to be innovative and flexible, for example, in order to support social movements responding to ad hoc political agendas or manifestations of injustice. It remains a challenge how to do this .....

Policy for Danish Support to Civil Society June 2014 p19

The project began in July 2104 and an inception workshop with partners and target groups was held in August 2014 to introduce and discuss the expectations for the project. The intention was

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<sup>3</sup> DCA, LICADHO, LICADHO Canada, and 8 citizen groups and NGOs (including CYN, IDEA, CCFC, CFSWF, EC, STI, and monks).

to work out how the Consortium and Social Fund would operate during the workshop. However, DCA agreed with the recommendation of LICADHO and LICADHO Canada to postpone the discussion and wait for the results of a study by a local NGO on four locally managed funds for human rights activism before formalising the modalities of the Consortium and Social Action Fund.

The workshop does not seem to have taken the opportunity to address the focus of the project on breaking with the traditional pattern of a donor/partner relationship. Capacity development in the workshop focused on the use of social media in social activism rather than new forms of partnership. Further capacity development of consortium members in the first six months included mentoring, legal advice, storytelling, group projects, and dissemination strategies.

The modalities of the Consortium and the Social Action Fund (SAF)<sup>4</sup> were not finalized until February 23, 2015, seven months after the project started. However, the Consortium did not operate on a formal basis. Three meetings of Consortium members were held in the first year of the project (though not to allocate resources from the Social Action Fund). These operated informally on a needs basis; there was no formal voting or written records of the meetings. The operational model of the project de facto reverted to a traditional delegation of project responsibilities from the INGO to the Southern NGO partner, LICADHO.

There are a number of factors that may have contributed to Consortium not operating as envisaged. Key to these is the stance of the local partner LICADHO. While LICADHO was involved in the development of the project proposal, it was not comfortable with the concept of the Consortium and the role of DCA as a ‘donor’ in the Consortium. LICADHO questions whether the target groups and membership groups had the competencies to participate in the allocation of resources from the Social Action Fund citing, for example, the changes in the leadership of membership groups. It was also sensitive to the possible negative impact of directly involving target groups in decisions regarding the Fund, fearing that this could potentially give rise to tensions and have a divisive effect rather than encourage greater cooperation and solidarity among the movement. More generally it was not convinced that a formal Consortium arrangement was the best way to provide timely, small scale support in response to changing current events.

Some of these concerns could be seen to be substantiated by the learning from a review of four other human rights oriented social funds in Cambodia indicating that managing the disbursement of resources/ funds from a Social Fund presents special challenges.

It should also be pointed out that members of the Consortium were also eligible to be funded by the Social Action Fund. This raises a potential conflict of interest which may have been a contributory factor to not activating the Consortium in the management of the Social Action Fund.

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<sup>4</sup> See Annex A

“The introduction of external financial resources into movement activities inevitably impacts on relationships of power, decision-making and accountability within movements.”

“Social Movements: Evolution, Debates, Definitions and Resources” IDA, UK p33

“Money changes people. The management of money changes people.”

Project interviewee

The decision not to formally operationalise the Consortium model undermined the intent to make a “*concerted effort to challenge ‘traditional’ donor-partner paradigms*” by involving very different types of civil society groups in the collective management of the Social Action Fund.

### **A Social Action Fund: Supporting civic action groups**

An interesting aspect of innovation in the project was the role of a Social Action Fund to provide support to the social movement. US\$72,000 (around 16% of the project budget) was earmarked for the Fund to be jointly implemented by the Consortium in supporting:

- Joint campaigns particularly in relation to unanticipated events such as the arrest of activists
- Local activities, exchanges and networking meetings
- External training/peer training and
- Travel for participation in trainings and/or conferences abroad.

Although there were no formal arrangements for the operation of the Fund during the first six months of the project, it was decided nonetheless to begin disbursing support from the Fund from the beginning of the project. It was agreed that LICADHO would discuss any request for support over \$500 with at least two partners (in person, by phone, email or other method) and notify DCA/Licado Canada of any contributions made. Applicants to the Fund had to submit a proposed budget for the activity and supporting documents, including receipts so that LICADHO could monitor and account for activities supported.

The study on locally managed human rights funds was produced early in 2015 and identified some key points to shape the organisation of a Social Action Fund:

- Human rights situations and community initiatives are often spontaneous e.g. arrests, and can occur at weekends or public holidays.
- It is impractical, therefore, for a committee to be able to respond to spontaneous emergencies or requests when needed;
- External agencies providing local communities’ immediate access to resources, except in case of emergency, can have a negative effect on the power dynamics of local communities.

- The final decision on local communities' requests for support should be made by a third party to ensure an impartial process.

Following the study, the modalities of the Consortium and the Social Action Fund were finalised in February 2015, seven months after the project started. The key features followed the pattern already established:

- Support of U\$500 or more required a decision by a majority vote (with at least one vote by DCA staff) and by a group of representatives from DCA, LICADHO, and at least two relevant partners of LICADHO. Requests for support would be vetted beforehand by LICADHO with at least two of its partners.
- Support of less than U\$500 is approved by LICADHO and its two relevant partners, since it would usually be a response to a spontaneous need e.g. arrests, medical emergencies, urgent appeals. The decision is documented and co-signed by the three decision-makers.

The intention was to provide support to communities mostly in form of needed goods/services. Small amounts of cash, \$50-\$100 could be provided to trusted communities e.g. to buy food for participants in civic action. Requests for support nonetheless had to be made in writing with a budget attached which suggest they may have been submitted by local CSOs working with target groups.

The project status reports suggest that the Social Action Fund supported a wide range of activities including community meetings, peaceful gatherings and prison visits and highlights the prominent role of women among the activist benefitting from the support from the Fund. However, this support seems to be associated with a small number of key activities that took place in 2014/15 (no support was allocated in 2016):

- The organisation of a five-day march on five national roads in celebration of International Human Rights Day;
- Public protests in support of a campaign to "Free the 19" activists arrested during the project period;
- Campaigns organised by LICADHO and community activists against a proposed Law on NGO and Association (LANGO);
- A community retreat to provide counselling for and inspiration to communities/activists, especially women, after their release from harsh prison conditions;
- Training to LICADHO staff and communities groups and activists on Active Non-Violence.

What is not known is the extent to which the Fund was used to support planned activities of the implementing partner or to respond to unanticipated events; whether the fund was used to

support the activities of known partners of the implementing NGO or to reach out to emerging groups. Monitoring of the use of the funds was comparatively limited since LICADHO reported every six months to DanChurchAid on the use of the funds.

## **2.3 Areas for future learning**

The experience of *Social Movement in Cyber Age* suggests four areas that might be worthy of further learning with regard to innovation.

### **Managing innovation: Include in results frameworks.**

While the project is funded by a specially created fund for this purpose, innovation in partnership does not feature in the project's objectives. The overall objective of the project was to support a social movement for justice and pro-poor development. The specific objectives focused mostly on the access to and use of social media by the social movement in support of human rights and democracy. This was the implementing partner's understanding of innovation. It is not clear to what extent the implementing partner was aware of the commitment to innovate in relation to models of partnership, and innovation in partnership was not adequately covered in the inception phase to ensure that all stakeholders were aware of and committed to this aspect of the project.

Managing innovation is a pro-active exercise. If innovation does not feature in the project's results framework and no metrics are identified to monitor and measure progress in this area, it will most likely not feature prominently in project management, learning and reporting. The inclusion of innovation in the project objectives would have helped keep this aspect of the project in the forefront of stakeholders' minds; may have helped to ensure that innovation was pro-actively managed; and that it featured as a part of ongoing reflection, learning and results reporting in the project.

### **Action learning: Key role in innovation and social activism**

The project had an 'activist focus' targeting support to the activities of emerging new civic actors such as youth, monks, and land rights activists. DanChurchAid was committed to an action-learning approach where learning was to be discussed, documented and disseminated during the implementation of the project. This is particularly relevant given the project's focus on innovation and working with social movements.

The project organised two advocacy visits – to Denmark and to Malaysia – which were considered to be successful but it is less clear how the action-learning approach was managed on an ongoing basis to enable stakeholders to reflect and learn from experience in order to drive innovation. The learning recorded in the status reports tended to focus on, for example, technical issues associated with working with social media.

Real time learning is even more important in a project being implemented in a volatile context. It is realistic to anticipate that an activist ethos in a fast-moving context may make it difficult to take time to reflect and learn and may act as an inhibitor on innovation. However, it is

important that the project provides the space and the skills for action learning so that lessons learned - particularly from feedback from the target groups - can feed back into the management of the project.

### **Social movements: The importance of monitoring target groups.**

A social movement is not a homogenous entity. Social movements are comprised of multiple action or interest groups which, while they all share some overarching goals, also have their own priorities, visions and constituencies. Social movements can also be stratified with groups having different levels of access to influence and resources with resulting tensions and rivalries. This was implicitly acknowledged by the project when it was suggested that the operation of the Consortium and Social Action Fund might distort the dynamics of the social movement.

It is, therefore, important in supporting social movements to monitor who is involved and benefitting from the project. Did the project enable more marginalised actors to participate in the movement? Were there elite groups within the movement? Was the fund perceived as partisan? It is not clear how the project intended to monitor and feedback the perceptions of the target groups on the use of the funds. (This would be an interesting area for the final evaluation to cover.) The involvement of target groups in a Consortium might have provided a mechanism for this kind of monitoring and feedback

### **Rebalancing partnerships; changing power dynamics**

Although innovation in partnership was not included in its objectives, the project sought to “challenge ‘traditional’ donor-partner paradigms which pervade development cooperation” through the operation of the Consortium and Social Action Fund. In reality, there were limits to the extent to which the project succeeded in meeting this challenge. While some CSOs were consulted on the use of the Fund, target groups were not involved in joint allocation of resources through a Consortium as anticipated. The modus operandi de facto reverted to a more traditional partnership in which the Northern CSO grant funds its Southern Partner to support local CBOs. The net effect was that the project did not address the challenge of how civil society groups of unequal resources and experiences i.e. INGO, local NGO and informal civic action groups and individuals, might jointly decide how to allocate resources in support of a social movement.

“Tensions emerge in the inevitable complex power relations between movements and organisations, frequently underpinned by the presence of financial resources as well as questions of accountability and participation. There is concern in some contexts that the discussion of social movements has itself been narrowed down to NGO-based activism alone.....”

“Social Movements: Evolution, Debates, Definitions and Resources” IDA, UK p32

Some possible factors influencing the reluctance to embrace the concept of a Consortium have been discussed above. A key factor was that DanChurchAid and LICADHO did not fully share the same expectations of the Consortium arrangement, and the way the Social Action Fund operated was principally shaped by the perspectives of the Cambodian implementing partner.

Those closest to the project argue that the way the Social Action Fund operated was best suited to the Cambodian context i.e. by giving the local partner flexibility to manage the fund and offer support to civic groups, since human resources on the ground are required to administer it effectively. The alternative would have been to invest in developing the capacity of Consortium members to jointly manage the Fund. It was suggested that the local partner may have had concerns that formalising the role of target groups and developing their capacity in this way might have changed their organisational character.

This raises the question as to whether the concept of working in a Consortium as envisaged was an inappropriate expectation in the context of the Cambodian social movement. However, DanChurchAid Cambodia is planning another project with a Social Action Fund that will be managed to clear Terms of Reference by a working group involving three project partners, although it will not be restricted to ‘urgent’ or emergency requests.

## **2.4 Annex A: Modalities for the Consortium and the SAF.**

The *Consortium* is comprised of DCA, LICADHO, LICADHO Canada, and 8 citizen groups and NGOs<sup>5</sup> who are part of the project’s target groups. The Consortium is to: carry out peer-to-peer exchange of information and discussion, and share learning that encourage further innovative and community-oriented work under the project (e.g. Weekly sharing of information that inspire creative and critical thinking for ideas on the project’s outputs such as videos for advocacy, campaign slogans, methods for community-mobilizing etc.); provide moral and technical support as needed to the project’s target groups especially the local communities are facing hardship as a result of human rights abuse; and monitor and evaluate holistically the civic actions supported under the Social Action Fund (SAF) and share and document learning.

DCA and LICADHO agreed on the modalities of *the SAF* upon multiple discussion since last year (see details in the last section). As increasing number of donors sponsor land-related initiatives in Cambodia, the SAF will prioritize the support to community-initiatives involving labor unions, youths, LGBTs, monks, women, and cross-sector groups. The support to communities will not be provided in cash, but only in form of needed goods/services including medical. Small amounts of cash, \$50-\$100 may, however, be provided to trusted communities or youths in provinces to, for instance, purchase food for participants in civic action. Eligibility criteria for all types of support under the SAF look at whether: a requested support matches with the project’s goal/objectives; and proposed cost for the requested support is necessary and realistic (e.g. size of cost versus size of community’s initiative).

For support in the amount of \$500 or more, the final decision is made and documented by a majority vote (with at least one vote by DCA staff) and by a group of representatives from DCA, LICADHO, and at least two relevant partners of LICADHO. Before initiating the decision-making process, LICADHO vets a request internally as well as externally with at least two of its partners. For the vetting, LICADHO: checks facts (cases, community or individual profiles etc.) with its Phnom Penh and/or provincial monitors and lawyers; cross-examines the findings with

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<sup>5</sup> CCFC, CCIM, CFSWF, CLEC, CYN, IDEA, EC, and STT.

at least two of its partners; and get proposed costs verified by LICADHO's administration and finance staff.

For support in the amount that is less than \$500, the final decision will be made by LICADHO and its two relevant partners, since the support would usually be responding to spontaneous needs on the ground (e.g. community-meeting, campaigns, arrests, violence, medical emergencies, urgent appeals). The decision will be documented and co-signed by the three final decision-makers. LICADHO conducts the aforementioned vetting of a request for the support as needed.

The modalities of the SAF were finalized to ensure that it supports civic actions at grassroots level effectively and efficiently so that they meet the objectives of the innovative project. DCA and LICADHO assessed the analysis made by Peace Bridges Organization on: LICADHO's experience with at least four existing funding mechanisms for Cambodian human rights defenders that are held by local NGOs<sup>6</sup>; and power-dynamics within and -relations between local communities who are most of the time initiators and organizers of civic actions.

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<sup>6</sup> The Cambodian Center for Human Rights, the Housing Rights Task Force, the Cambodia Peace Network, and the People's Action for Change.

# 3 CARE Denmark: Insecure lands – New Alliances for the promotion of universal values

## 3.1 Introduction

'Insecure Lands: New Alliances for the promotion of Universal Values' was one of 12 projects to receive support under the Danida Fund for Innovation in Civil Society Partnerships in 2014.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, just over half way through the implementation period for this project, INTRAC conducted a short case study of the approach to partnership. A review of project documents and three semi-structured interviews with representatives from CARE Denmark and staff/board members from the project partners (AREN and Réseau Billital Maroobe - RBM) were carried out.<sup>8</sup>

## 3.2 Background to the project

Pastoralists from the Sahel are witnessing an escalation of illegal occupation and land grabbing of pastoral areas that is threatening their ability to move and thus survive. There are many economic interests associated with pastoral lands where a large part of Niger's wealth is buried, and many human rights organisations in Niger are reluctant to get involved in the issue.

The project has grown out of CARE Denmark's long-term engagement with pastoralists in Niger, including an evaluation of its PROGRES programme which is funded under CARE Denmark's framework agreement.

The Insecure Lands project is responding to a specific request from AREN, the largest pastoral civil society association in Niger representing 2500 local groups, for support to their advocacy work. They are seeking to take up the issue of land grabbing regionally and internationally in order to exert pressure on the government. The project therefore contributes to an overall objective of protecting pastoral land against illegal occupation and land grabbing. The three immediate objectives stated in the project proposal are:

- Illegal occupation of pastoral land is denounced by the local leaders of AREN
- Civil Society actors undertake evidence-based advocacy against illegal pastoral land grabbing in national and international spaces
- The judicial system, political lobbying and local agreements are used to try and claim back occupied land

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<sup>7</sup> See 'Danida Fund for Innovation in Civil Society Partnerships: A Learning Synthesis', INTRAC/Tana, no date.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews were conducted in French on: 3 Aug 2016 and 30 Nov 2016 (CARE Denmark – staff), 12 Aug 2016 (RBM- staff), 5 Sept 2016 (AREN – elected representative and staff). Quotes from the interviews used in this text are translated from the French by the INTRAC consultant who conducted the interviews. Documents consulted included original project design document, periodic Status Reports (2014, 2016), an Internal Mid-Term Review (June 2016), partner agreements, Board statutes and minutes.

The outputs and activities were to include:

- Work with pastoral leaders to facilitate and improve communication between them and their representatives in the municipal and departmental institutions of the Rural Code
- Support to local groups and municipal and land rights commissions to map pastoral lands under illegal occupation.
- Documentation of lessons learned from initiatives taken by ECOWAS and dissemination in the local language through the Land Observatory.
- Collection of data through a monitoring network; and sharing this data with regional monitoring bodies such as RBM.
- Development of a parallel report on land grabbing to contribute to the next UPR in 2016. Sharing of learning from Kenya and Tanzania in using the UPR process.
- Support to AREN to develop a strategy for engaging with extractive industries, e.g. Chinese mining companies.
- Support to local AREN groups to use the judicial system to intervene in cases of sales of pastoral lands and to mount legal challenges.

Support to AREN to develop an international day on pastoralism to encourage government to fund periodic monitoring of the institutions and implementation of the Rural Code.

The other formal partner in the project, Réseau Billital Maroobé (RBM), is a regional pastoral civil society network working across West Africa. In the context of this project its work on the borders of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso is particularly relevant. In addition, the formal project partners are working in collaboration with numerous state and non-state actors to achieve different project goals, including a coalition of more than 20 civil society organisations with its own management committee campaigning on the rights of pastoralists.

### **3.3 Dimensions of innovation**

The project deliberately set out to shift the balance of power in the partnership between CARE and the local partners. This was envisaged as happening through:

- The partners would be directly responsible for the management of the budget in this proportion for the first two years: AREN 71%; RBM 5%; CARE 24%. Each partner was responsible for particular activities and outputs, with specific budget lines allocated against broad lines of activities as well as management functions.
- The project would establish a management Board consisting of CARE Niger, CARE Denmark, AREN and RBM in which partners would have the majority of the votes. The Board would meet every three months and would follow the monitoring and evaluation cycle.

- The project was to be based on the partners' strategic plans and respond to specific requests from them.

Within this project CARE was deliberately committing itself to moving away from taking decisions locally towards playing a role of facilitator, broker and service provider for the southern partners based on value addition. CARE's role would include:

- A role supporting dialogue with DANIDA and compliance with requirements
- A tight financial monitoring/audit of partner expenditure
- Support to the coordination of different stakeholders
- Support to the monitoring and evaluation of the project
- Support to international advocacy
- Technical assistance

The value added that CARE claimed to be bringing to its pastoral partners in Niger included:

- A history of working on pastoralism in the region, including relevant experiences such as working with Masai groups in Kenya and Tanzania who have already used the UPR process
- Facilitating contact with actors such as the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and Danish Institute of Human Rights (DIHR) who could support AREN in the UPR process
- Access through CARE International to an international network who can lobby on behalf of pastoralists with their governments and inform them of the parallel report for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process
- Knowledge of the donor Danida and an ability to act as a bridge/interpret requirements, etc.

### **3.4 Innovation in partnership in practice**

#### **Governance structure (the Board)**

The principal mechanism put in place to provide partner-driven management of the project was a volunteer Board. The Board was designed as a decision-making body, composed of representatives from AREN and RBM (political/elected representatives), CARE Denmark and CARE Niger, and the state (Rural Code and Network of Chambers of Agriculture). The Board is responsible for decision-making and for setting the strategic direction of the project, including deciding on intervention sites and target groups, budget revisions, and validation of audit reports. Other roles include: approval of working plans and annual budgets; validation of technical, financial and monitoring reports; and representation of the project. The Board meets regularly and decisions are put to the vote.

Project staff responsible for implementing the Insecure Lands project from each partner are present in Board meetings but they are there to provide technical support and do not have decision-making power.

The representative of RBM interviewed for this case study stressed that the governance of this project was entirely new for them. They had never had such a Board before. They had experienced more classic steering committees and participatory approaches in other big programmes, but he found this Board to be something different: ‘it is the beneficiaries who make the decisions.’

All interviewees from CARE Denmark, AREN and RBM expressed satisfaction with the progress of the Board as a decision-making body, and excitement about the potential of this model. However, it has required some work to get to this point and it was difficult at first. The interviewees from AREN and RBM spoke about a real learning curve; it was not something that they were used to so the biggest challenge that came through in all the interviews was the required shift in mentality. Partners had to shift from acting like ‘service providers’ to acting like ‘partners.’ They had to learn to take decisions. This finding from the interviews is supported by the internal mid-term review report which outlines the initial challenges of weak capacity, a lack of taking ownership and high dependence on CARE at the start. One partner interviewee said that beneficiaries were used to being told what to do by project staff, they were used to ideas being ‘parachuted’ in; now they take the decisions and propose ideas. Another said that it took time to set the boundaries, establish the division of labour and clarify the role of the Board. At the start the Board had quite an administrative focus, but it has become more policy oriented, including addressing the importance of engaging traditional pastoralist leaders within the project.

A further challenge that was noted in interviews was the balance in power between paid staff and elected representatives (i.e. unpaid decision-makers) on the Board. Paid staff have skills and capacity, but are not necessarily driven by the issues or objectives of the organisations. It has taken time for the Board decision-makers to exert control over the staff, to take over responsibility for proposing ideas and making decisions, rather than staff having this control.

The CARE representative highlighted the absence of parity between CARE representation and local representation. Local CARE staff involved on the Board are technical assistants, not policy/decision-makers at the same level as the local partner representatives.

The structure of the Board was also mentioned. As a network/advocacy project involving a large coalition of civil society organisations and other state and non-state actors, the Board potentially needs more representation from across the broader collaborative, rather than power being concentrated with the partners that hold the budget.

From the interviews it would appear that there was not sufficient support at the start to really clarify the Board concept and to ensure that everyone was clear on how it was to function and their responsibilities. It was a new idea for everyone and a learning curve.

## **Financial management**

In the original programme document, one potential risk that was identified for this innovation project was the capacity of partners to manage funds in a transparent and diligent manner. It was anticipated, therefore, that CARE would retain a strong role in tracking expenditure and compliance with procedures. The original project document explained that the 24% of the budget managed by CARE was to be focused on technical assistance and monitoring, as well as audits and administration.

The overall framework for the financial arrangements of the project is set out in financial agreements between CARE Niger and the project partners as described in section 3 above. The agreement sets the boundaries of the grant, for example that it can only be used in line with the Insecure Lands project. It clarifies that the partners can make adjustments to the budget without consulting CARE Niger provided that they do not lead to an overspend, that any amendments are for less than 10% of any budget line and that CARE Niger is informed. Written approval from CARE Niger is required for more significant adjustments to the budget.

While the budget is primarily allocated to partners (AREN and RBM), from the reports and interviews it would appear that much of the financial management remains with CARE Niger, and that CARE provides considerable financial support, including related to budget revisions.

In practice, the Board has considerable control over the allocation of resources to finance activities. The budget lines in the original document were deliberately broad. The internal financial manager for the project partner has responsibility for the budget. However, if project staff want to fund an activity that is not planned, then a request needs to be made to the Board which will authorise revisions. Over the course of the project the Board has oriented resources towards unplanned activities that have emerged as important for the overall objectives of the project. This includes allocation of funds for additional studies and campaign activities.

One interviewee said that the greatest resistance to the model was coming from financial managers on CARE's side because they are constrained by new systems and reporting requirements that apply to the entire CARE financial management system. The partners produce 3-monthly financial reports and request the next instalment from CARE Niger. Payments are subject to satisfactory progress on the action plan and submissions of financial and narrative reports. Interviewees from AREN and RBM said that at times this 3-monthly disbursement system had been constraining; if they did not make a request every three months then they risked losing the money, so they are often having to ask for very small amounts. Dealing with these constraints has been part of the learning journey. The partners have now negotiated a system that allows them to carry forward funds that were not used in the previous period.

The interviewee from RBM spoke about the capacity of the Board to take responsibility for financial management. While he noted that technical staff might have the requisite skills, if such responsibility was transferred to the Board then extra support might be required to ensure that the Board had these skills. The interviewee said that maybe it is about taking one step at a time.

Evidence of an evolution in the capacity of the Board and partners to take responsibility for financial management came through in a follow-up interview in November 2016. The Board appears to be acting more autonomously with regard to budget allocations. A role for CARE

staff is to monitor the use of funding so that it remains within the overall envelope, is sufficiently aligned with the original project objectives and strategy, and that any major deviations are justified to CARE and Danida in a timely manner.

### **The role of CARE**

When asked about where the idea for the governance approach in Insecure Lands came from, one interviewee described the idea as coming from Danish partners, not from the Nigerien organisations themselves. At the same time, another interviewee said that the core content and strategic direction of the project was designed very closely with partners.

The original project document described the role of CARE Denmark as being to provide overall supervision, coordination, technical assistance, M&E, as well as advocacy at the Danish/European level and relationships with Danida. CARE Niger was responsible for coordination of the implementation of the project, including responsibility for the financial accounting. AREN and RBM would be responsible for the main project activities. From the interviews and monitoring reports it would appear that these roles were largely adhered to in practice.

The representative from CARE Denmark on the project in Niger described himself as a ‘coordinator’ whose role it was to bring the partners together. The partners interviewed mentioned the need for value of this technical assistance and support provided by CARE. They also noted that there was good push-back to make them take on responsibility. One interviewee explained that at the start they all asked the CARE Denmark representative what to do ‘and he said “no, it doesn’t work like that. It is up to you to decide”.’ So it would appear that CARE Denmark is implementing the approach of taking a step back and acting as facilitator providing valued contributions as a door opener, a watch-dog, a knowledge broker, a coach and a funder.<sup>9</sup>

The Insecure Lands project is closely connected to other CARE programme activities in Niger, notably the PROGRES programme. It is not therefore an isolated project whose innovative approach to governance and partnership can be assessed independently of other initiatives. CARE Denmark is one player in the overall portfolio of CARE initiatives in Niger, and is the only one that works on pastoralism. The main relationship between AREN, RBM and CARE is through CARE Niger, not CARE Denmark. Moreover, CARE Niger and CARE Denmark are tied into global CARE structures and systems. This might account for the challenges mentioned above around financial management.

The model does appear to be getting noticed. Those interviewed noted that CARE Niger is looking at this approach, and CARE US seemed particularly interested. The interviewees from AREN and RBM spoke about building on this model and pushing it within other projects, programmes and partners. The RBM representative said that they had taken ‘a step’ and that there might now be an ‘open door’ to take this forward.

### **Contribution to project achievements**

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<sup>9</sup> Internal mid-term review report (June 2016)

The internal mid-term report from June 2016 and regular Status Reports indicate that the project is making good strides towards achieving its objectives.

The representative from CARE Denmark described how the context is very difficult, with the situation for pastoralists constantly deteriorating. The project is fighting hard just to ensure that things do not deteriorate let alone making great leaps forward. However, the representatives from AREN stressed that this is a special project that is working with many different actors, including state actors, on land rights of pastoralists. It involves a large alliance of organisations and state institutions based on a common outcome mapping. The strategic role of the Board has given a voice to the beneficiaries; it has given them an opportunity to work openly with all the actors involved, to use the judicial system to challenge state policies and private companies, to involve many others and mobilise them not only nationally and regionally but internationally. They feel that the state and private investors are now listening and there is more awareness amongst the population and more transparency. The governance of the project has enabled more innovative activities as well as management.

Interviewees from AREN and RBM all stressed that what they really liked about the model was the flexibility it afforded. If they want to do something different, the Board can make the decision and make changes to the allocation of resources within the budget to accommodate it. Given all the intervening variables that affect land issues and the huge challenges ahead for pastoralists, having flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances has been crucial. Project status reports confirm adjustment and amendments that have been made to the original plans in response to the evolving situation.

The partners are actively seeking ways of mobilising alternative resources to continue their work, based on the learning from this project. Project reports note funding that the project partners and alliances have been successful in securing from alternative sources for additional, related activities. The growing strength of the Board, other governance arrangements for campaigns, and success in securing funding from other donors are given as indicators of sustainability.

### **3.5 Conclusions/Lessons**

All those interviewed saw this as an extremely important learning project. It has taken time to resolve weaknesses, because the concept was entirely new for most involved. It has required shifts in practice and the acquisition of new skills. However, these were seen as positive learning points and all interviewees said that they felt they were making progress, a finding that is also borne out in the internal mid-term review which states that there is now a clear reversal in the management roles between CARE and AREN.

The value of the approach was well summarised by a representative from AREN who said that in future if they had a choice of partner this is the sort of project that they would choose:

*It isn't like any other project.... It is very innovative.... This is what we've wanted to do since the start... I can say nothing but good things... It is the first time that we are responsible; that we are not just implementing partners.... I must stress this... Our vocation at AREN is not to be an implementer;*

*we are a movement of activists against all sorts of abuses. This project is the best in 20 years at AREN to respond to the concerns of AREN... Really it is the best.”*

This governance approach in this project focuses on the role of the decision-making Board, and notably elected representatives rather than paid project staff. The elected representatives are the ones who were considered by the interviewees to have the legitimacy to represent the local communities and to have a real stake in the issues (rather than staff members) and who are the ones who need to exert their decision-making authority. Greater integration of traditional pastoralist leaders was considered necessary by both AREN and RBM to increase further the success and legitimacy of the project.

The innovation in the partnership is therefore not so much about power residing with the partner, but about power residing within executive policy-makers of that partner. Success and sustainability is therefore dependent on the capacity of the elected Board members to exert their authority over the professional project workers who will likely have project management skills and capacities, and who will speak the language of international donors and INGOs and will often be deferred to on this basis. But they will also move on to new jobs and functions. As one interviewee said, the approach has made staff more ‘humble’, more ready to learn from their leaders.

A key lesson is therefore the need to identify support needs of the decision-makers who are to take responsibility for the project beyond the paid project staff. This includes initial support to understand the approach (in this case with using a dedicated project Board), and to take on strategic management responsibilities and roles. Ongoing mentoring was mentioned by interviewees as a further requirement. Specific support might be required for a Board of this nature to take greater responsibility for financial management.