

Management Response and Follow-Up note

Evaluation of Danish Support to Civil Society: Phase II. A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to Demonstrate Results

This note summarises the conclusions from the evaluation report '*Evaluation of Danish Support to Civil Society: Phase II. A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to Demonstrate Results*' and also includes the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA's) management response and follow-up actions (in *italics*) to the recommendations in the evaluation. The management response was coordinated by the Department for Humanitarian Action, Migration and Civil Society. The evaluation itself was commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Department in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but conducted by an independent evaluation team of international consultants from INTRAC (UK) and TANA (DK).

Executive Summary

An evaluation to collate lessons learned from the operationalisation of Danida's then Civil Society Strategy was published in April 2013. The Evaluation report made a number of recommendations that were subsequently incorporated into a new Policy for Danish Support to Civil Society in 2014. In December 2013, the Evaluation Department of Danida (EVAL) commissioned a second phase of the evaluation through to December 2016. However, detailed work could not be started until the Civil Society Policy was finalised in June 2014.

The initial Terms of Reference (ToR) for the second phase anticipated a real-time approach to the evaluation of Danida support to civil society through Danish CSOs with framework agreements with Danida currently in place, and in the country programmes in three focal countries with different operating contexts – fragile (South Sudan), stable (Tanzania) and in transition (Ghana). The primary objective was to facilitate, document and share learning through short evaluation inputs on how the effectiveness of Danish support to civil society could be better monitored, evaluated and reported on in line with the 2014 Civil Society Policy.

Following changes in EVAL, adjusted (ToR) for the second phase were agreed in May 2015, which restricted the focus of the evaluation principally to the work of Danish CSOs with framework agreements, although initial inception visits had been made to the three countries and partner surveys were subsequently conducted in each country. The adjusted ToR placed an emphasis on the evaluation providing 'a more systematic and robust basis for assessing and documenting the results of civil society support in 2020 by providing a draft evaluation framework indicating the dimensions of change and main lines of enquiry relevant to monitoring the effectiveness of Danish support to civil society through the change pathways of the Civil Society Policy, and a range of evidence-based materials in the form of good practice case studies, learning syntheses and tools relevant to monitoring and reporting on the change pathways.'

In line with a real-time approach, the evaluation has identified and shared good practice and learning from inside and outside the Danish context on how to track the contribution of the change pathways to the Civil Society Policy goals i.e. partnership, capacity development and advocacy, through a number of written outputs and learning workshops with Danish CSOs. The real-time approach to the second phase, however, has had to adjust to a number of changes in the context including the development of a new Danish strategy as a guiding framework for development cooperation; changes in personnel in Danida Evaluation and Civil Society departments; cuts in funding to Danish CSOs; and the introduction of a new strategic partnership modality for Danish CSOs – all of which have contributed to some instability in the context and ambiguity regarding the focus of the evaluation.

Danish CSOs and the change pathways

Danish CSOs have made good progress in recent years in improving their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks and the quality of their results reporting. There is a substantial body of good M&E practice which Danish CSOs can continue to build on to improve the evidence base that demonstrates their results, and to facilitate the summarisation of the achievements of Danish support to civil society. Improving the quality of monitoring and reporting on progress towards the change pathways i.e. partnership, capacity development and advocacy, would contribute significantly to results reporting at individual CSO and portfolio level since the pathways are integral to Danish CSO strategies and programmes, and to the achievement of the Denmark's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action.

Danish CSOs should, therefore, continue to innovate and share learning in order to improve their monitoring and reporting of how the change pathways contribute to development outcomes. The evaluation highlighted the following areas for future learning and improvement:

- Partnership: Ensure partnership objectives and indicators are included in results frameworks where appropriate; monitor and track changes in the partnership relationship; share learning on innovation in partnership from the issues identified in the evaluation; and explore how their added value in the relationship contributes to end results.
- Advocacy: Describe and report on advocacy changes in results frameworks in terms of the stages of the policy cycle; specify the contribution Danish CSOs and/or their partners to advocacy achievements; and demonstrate how change at the level of organisations, communities or target groups contributes to wider systemic change.
- Capacity development: Adopt a systematic approach to capacity development and the evaluation of its outcomes, outputs and activities; document feedback of different stakeholders about changes achieved; trace impact of individual capacity change on organisations ; explore systemic impact by monitoring the evolution of network capacity; and through multi-stakeholder learning on broader social change.

Both Danish CSOs and Danida will have to pay special attention to the operational and technical challenges that hinder the M&E of the change pathways in fragile contexts as assistance is further concentrated in fragile contexts. The evaluation highlights the need for an ongoing context and/or conflict analysis; regular review of theory/ies of change to assess risk and adapt M&E frameworks; the use of disaggregated indicators; strong investment in the skills and capacities of national staff and partners in M&E; and the need to explore new ways of collecting and triangulating data where access is difficult including ensuring that data gathering is quick, safe and practical.

Demonstrating change across the portfolio

There is a growing imperative to demonstrate and communicate the rationale and effectiveness of Danish support to national CSOs as an integral part of Danish development cooperation. Development cooperation budgets have come under pressure in recent years and a number of western governments have reviewed, or are in the process of reviewing, their support to civil society and, in some cases, have significantly reduced the funds available to domestic CSOs.

A key decision for Danida in this context is whether it wants to demonstrate and communicate at portfolio level the results of, and learning associated with, its support to civil society – and at what level of its civil society portfolio it want to summarise. Danish CSOs are accustomed to reporting annually on the progress towards their strategy objectives, and the evaluation has noted that the quality of their results frameworks and reporting has improved in recent years. In these circumstances, Danida will need to decide at the outset of the new partnership scheme whether portfolio reporting is to be a future option so that the ‘building blocks’ of an evidence base can be put in place from the outset.

The key building blocks of a coherent overview and summary reporting of Danish support to national CSOs are a shared theory of change, M&E matrix and approach to summarising results and distilling learning. It will be important to clarify at the outset the relationship between accountability and learning in an overall M&E framework, in particular the relationship between CSO reporting and resource allocation, and to ensure that incentives are in place to encourage openness to learning in reporting.

The evaluation developed a revised theory of change as a first step towards a shared rationale or logic of why civil society support, and in particular strategic partnerships with Danish CSOs, is an important, effective element of Danish development cooperation. The theory of change seeks to more clearly sequence how the key change pathways contribute to the long-term goals; to identify the relationships between the pathways and the key actors; and to clarify the assumptions upon which the pathways are based.

The theory of change is supplemented by an M&E matrix to assist Danish CSOs and Danida, in partnership, to monitor, report, summarise and communicate the changes achieved by civil society support. The M&E matrix includes the short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes anticipated in the revised theory of change; suggests some portfolio indicators as a means of measuring these changes; and a series of learning questions to focus learning to improve performance.

The evaluation recommends that Danida consult with Danish CSOs to review the evaluation theory of change and M&E matrix to see whether or how they might be amended to form the basis of a shared framework for learning and accountability. The matrix could be used to identify a shared learning agenda (including for future Danida evaluations and reviews) and develop a systematic, evidence-based body of knowledge – whether or not this is used for the purposes of portfolio reporting.

The evaluation suggests that, in order to establish ‘a more systematic and robust basis for assessing and documenting the results of civil society support in 2020’, it should be possible to use the M&E matrix to explore, without committing significant additional resources, how Danida and Danish CSOs can collaborate on summarising results and learning to demonstrate and communicate the effectiveness of their partnerships and to build up over time a strong body of evidence on results.

Danida should consider producing a regular e.g. annual or bi-annual report at output and outcome level on its support to Danish CSOs. The report might consist, for example, of aggregated outputs where appropriate; a summary analysis of key achievements and learning using a case study approach; distilled learning from research, reviews and evaluations; and a forward looking learning agenda. This report could be assembled by Danida itself or by a third party to guarantee its independence.

Danish CSOs should continue to plan and report in their own formats to provide evidence of change although they might incorporate relevant elements of the M&E matrix into their own planning and reporting systems. Alternatively, information from reports can be subsequently ‘mapped’ against the portfolio indicators of the M&E matrix by Danida or by CSOs.

Summary reporting could aggregate outputs across the portfolio to a small number of predefined indicators agreed with Danish CSOs. This would enable Danida to demonstrate the ‘reach’ of its support i.e. the scale and diversity of activities, which can be useful for public communications.

The systematic use of case study material would also be an integral part of the portfolio reporting. Danish CSOs could be asked to produce ‘purposeful’ case studies according to pre-

agreed criteria e.g. on key learning questions from the M&E matrix. This would facilitate subsequent analysis and summarisation of the case studies, which could be done by Danida or a third party. The focus of the case studies could be decided jointly and in response to issues emerging from the learning agenda.

Danida research, reviews and evaluations relevant to civil society could also be linked to priority learning questions from the M&E matrix and their findings incorporated in summary reporting.

There is considerable scope to use the M&E matrix to facilitate shared learning between Danida and its strategic partners – for example through annual sense-making workshop(s); or through ongoing Danish CSO working groups on priorities linked to the learning questions of the M&E matrix.

It will be important for Danida to verify results reported by CSOs in narrative form e.g. by testing a small random sample of claims or claims of strategic interest periodically through methodologies such as contribution analysis and/or process tracing. These could be written up into short case studies using a common structure to add to the body of evidence and learning.

Danida should draw upon the learning of the evaluation to consult further with Danish CSO strategic partners on how they can, within resource constraints, jointly demonstrate and communicate the effectiveness of Danish support to civil society as an integral part of Danish development cooperation.

Danida's overall comments to the evaluation

The MFA welcomes the evaluation and is pleased to learn that Danish CSOs have made good progress in improving their monitoring and evaluation frameworks and the quality of their results reporting. The evaluation has further helped the MFA and its partners reflect on the way results are being assessed and documented. These reflections have been stimulated throughout the process by a number of state-of-the-art learning products, which have been widely shared and discussed in workshops and on on-line platforms. The evaluation has in that respect already contributed with valuable learning tools and a stronger sense of the need to document results in the Danish CSO community. The Danish civil society platform Global Focus has been highly involved in this process, which creates a valuable platform for taking relevant recommendations forward through a participatory process with the Danish CSOs.

As the MFA considers how best to follow-up on the many detailed recommendations, it should be stressed that a number of significant recent policy changes have taken place in parallel to the evaluation. These changes render some of the recommendations less relevant, but they also create windows of opportunities for accelerating progress on others. As a case in point, the launch of the 2017 Danish Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action has triggered a major redesign of the MFA's long-term partnerships with civil society organisations. A major thrust of the redesign is a stronger focus on Danish CSOs' strategic alignment with Danish priorities, including the nexus between humanitarian action and long-term development. The redesign has also meant a phasing-out of the Resource Allocation Model (RAM), which has been replaced by an open

application round for strategic partnerships involving both development and humanitarian funding, which is expected to come to its conclusion in the summer 2017. Finally, while the evaluation contains a long list of relevant recommendations, the MFA must also consider and balance resource implications with their potential value-added in terms of fulfilling the strategic objectives with the civil society and humanitarian support.

Recommendations

The evaluation puts forward a sizable number of detailed recommendations some of which (2-6) are aimed at Danish CSOs while others (1, 7-17) are directed towards the MFA. This management response concerns mostly the latter.

1. Danida should consult with Danish CSOs to review the evaluation theory of change and M&E matrix to see how they might be amended to form the basis of a shared framework for learning and accountability (p. 41).

The MFA considers that the overall theory of change introduced in the 2014 civil society policy remains valid and consistent with the new strategic framework. The MFA further understands that the proposed revision mostly concerns minor details and clarifications in the intervention logic. The MFA does on that basis not agree that a revision of the overall theory of change will create significant value added. The MFA does, however, consider the proposed M&E matrix useful as a basis for developing a shared framework for learning and accountability at portfolio level. The MFA therefore proposes to further develop the M&E matrix in dialogue with the future partners, once identified, and partners providing pooled funding. The joint M&E matrix should define a number of common learning questions that will guide the MFA's ongoing dialogue with its various partners.

Danish CSOs and the change pathways

2. Danish CSOs should continue to innovate and share learning in order to improve their monitoring and reporting of how the change pathways contribute to development outcomes in the following areas:

3. Partnership

- Monitor and track how the partnership relationship changes with regards to partnership objectives in their results frameworks (p. 23).
- Include objectives and indicators in their results frameworks that reflect their approach to adding value in partnerships and explore how to connect this to end results (p. 22).
- Share learning on innovation in partnership as identified in the evaluation (p. 24).

4. Advocacy

- Include a consistent interpretation of the stages of the policy cycle in their results framework, using appropriate indicators (p. 25).

- Specify the contribution Danish CSOs and/or their partners have played in advocacy achievements (p. 26).
- Demonstrate how change at the level of organisations, communities or target groups contribute to wider systemic change (p. 26).

5. Capacity development

- Adopt a systematic approach to capacity development and to the evaluation of capacity development outcomes, outputs and activities (p. 27).
- Gather and document feedback from different stakeholders on their perceptions of changes achieved through capacity development interventions (p.27).
- Trace the broader, medium-term impact of individual capacity change on organisations (p. 28).
- Trace the impact of organisational development through the joint use of appropriate tools to encourage ownership of the process and results (p. 29).
- Trace systemic impact via the use of specialist networking tools; monitoring at a sectoral level; and through multi-stakeholder learning on broader social change (p. 30).

Partnership, advocacy and capacity development will remain essential parts of Danish support to CSOs. The MFA therefore agrees that CSOs should continue to innovate and share learning in these areas. The follow-up to the recommendations 2-6 will thus be subject to a separate dialogue with the CSO community involving Global Focus, the future strategic partners, once identified, and the pooled funding mechanisms. The objective of this dialogue will be to arrive at a common understanding of these terms relevant to the future strategic partnerships straddling both development and humanitarian funding. The MFA finds in that respect partnerships particularly important. The concept of partnerships in the broad sense, including the private sector, academia, think tanks, international alliances etc., has a prominent place in the new Strategy and is core to Danish civil society's work in both the humanitarian and development area and the nexus in between. The MFA expects its future strategic partners to focus on building strong partnerships, the added value that they bring to partnerships as well as testing new forms of partnerships. The MFA expects, and will monitor, how the Danish partners add value to the partnerships and thereby contribute to saving lives in humanitarian situations, improving livelihoods in fragile contexts and/or sustainable development outcomes through partners. Further in line with Denmark's commitment to The Grand Bargain to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises, The MFA is committed to supporting capacity development of national and local actors on both the humanitarian and development side. The MFA will consequently encourage CSOs to work in a way that reinforces rather than replaces national and local capacities. The MFA similarly will call on CSOs to strengthen their analysis of the proportion of funding that is transferred to local partners, and the proportion used for capacity development of local partners. Finally, the MFA will hold CSOs accountable to increasing involvement of beneficiaries in the design and response as well as in monitoring and evaluation and to provide feedback opportunities in line with the Human Rights Based Approach to Development and the Core Humanitarian Standard.

6. Fragile contexts. Danish CSOs working in fragile contexts should:

- Monitor their programme context closely to identify drivers of change and make timely decisions to modify their assumptions and activities (p. 31).
- Use a theory of change in an agile way as the basis of an M&E framework and to monitor risks and assumptions and enable the programme to adapt (p. 31).
- Report at both output and outcome levels as appropriate, using indicators that enable disaggregation and are realistic i.e. reflect the practical difficulties of data gathering (p. 32).
- Ensure data gathering is quick, safe and practical, including the use of software applications for mobile data collection where appropriate (p. 33).
- Invest strongly in the M&E skills and capacities of national staff and local partners in fragile contexts and explore new ways of both collecting and triangulating data where access is difficult. (p33)

The redesign of the MFA's long-term partnerships with civil society organisations implies a stronger engagement in fragile contexts in the years to come and a focus on strengthening the nexus between humanitarian action and long-term development. The MFA therefore agrees with the recommendations pertaining to Danish CSOs working in fragile contexts. The current application round already has a strong focus on some the areas contained in the recommendation notably the need to analyse and monitor context closely and use a theory of change in an agile way as the basis of an M&E framework. When working in fragile contexts, the MFA will also in line with existing international commitments promote the use of joint context, risk and vulnerability analysis, joint needs assessments and joint planning and programming frameworks, driven by inclusive national priorities and collective outcomes, to address both short-term and long-term needs of vulnerable people. Full respect for principled humanitarian action must be ensured, especially in active conflict settings, where separate humanitarian planning and programming may be necessary. The MFA also agrees on the need to invest in the M&E skills of national staff and local partners working in fragile settings. Steps have also been taken to promote, within the future partnership scheme, the use of multi-year planning and programming to respond to protracted crises and coordinate and streamline data collection to ensure compatibility, quality and comparability and minimising intrusion into the lives of affected people. This includes the provision of a four-year partnership framework for future strategic partners. Finally, the MFA agrees that outcome level reporting is relevant in fragile contexts based on an understanding that engagements will have to be constantly revised and that outcomes therefore also may change along the way.

Sharing learning across the portfolio

The evaluation suggests that:

7. Danida clearly defines the relationship between CSO reporting and the resource allocation model (RAM) and explores what incentives might be necessary to encourage an openness to learning in annual reporting (p. 36).

While the RAM is no longer relevant, the MFA agrees that the reporting of future partners should in a systematic way relate to the various priorities promoted through the current application round to stimulate learning at portfolio level and hold partners accountable to their commitments. The exact nature of the reporting will be discussed further with the partners during autumn 2017.

8. Danida links research and evaluations relevant to civil society to the learning questions of the M&E matrix and funds short pieces of in-depth research to investigate findings that emerge in its sense-making activities with Danish CSOs (p. 43).

The MFA agrees with the recommendation and considers commissioning, once the strategic partnerships have taken off properly, in-depth research on key issues at portfolio level such as partnerships/localisation, advocacy through global alliances, humanitarian-development nexus and other priority issues from the Strategy that would emerge as the strategic partnerships unfold.

9. Danida facilitates opportunities for Danish CSOs to share and discuss learning through annual sense-making workshop(s); or through ongoing working groups on their own learning priorities linked to the learning questions of the M&E matrix (p. 42).

The MFA agrees with the recommendation and will enter into a dialogue with Global Focus and other platforms on co-organising workshops/seminars where different thematic or country specific issues can be discussed across partners, themes and countries.

10. Danida shares the revised theory of change and M&E matrix with reviews and evaluations of CSO umbrella organisations and relevant in-country programmes to assemble a more consistent analysis of the outcomes of its support to Southern civil society (p. 41).

The MFA considers that the M&E matrix should have relevance for the entire portfolio and will therefore also engage pooled funding organisations in the development of the matrix. The MFA therefore also agrees that the matrix should be shared with reviews and evaluations of CSO umbrella organisations in the interest of a more consistent analysis of outcomes across the entire portfolio.

Summarising Results across the portfolio

11. Danida decides at the outset of the new partnership scheme whether portfolio reporting e.g. in the form of an annual or bi-annual summary, will be a future option so that the 'building blocks' of an evidence base can be put in place from the outset (p. 44).

The future strategic partnerships will focus on maximising impact in order to deliver cost effective sustainable results for the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and/or immediate alleviation of human suffering. Strategic Partnerships will seek to maximize outcomes and impact by strengthening a strategic focus on how the MFA and the strategic partner can be mutually supportive in programme interventions in the field and

in relation to impacting international policy agendas, including through leveraging of the strategic partners' participation in international and regional alliances and networks. The MFA agrees on that basis to further explore opportunities for portfolio reporting in the new strategic partnership scheme with a view to strengthen the focus on results, keep partners accountable to the commitments made in the application round and stimulate learning across partners. Such reporting could also provide evidence for future evaluations of Danish CSO support at portfolio level (expected in 2020). The exact nature of such indicators and reporting (qualitative vs. quantitative – early vs. late coding - case studies vs. summarisation) will be discussed further with the partners once identified and eventually detailed in the proposed M&E matrix. Topics such as contribution to the implementation of the SDGs, the hum/dev nexus, youth, partnerships, shrinking space and promotion of gender equality could be traced through such portfolio reporting. The MFA, however, does not foresee to publish summaries of such reporting for accountability purposes, but will instead make use of existing corporate platforms for results reporting.

12. Danish CSOs continue to plan and report in their own formats, incorporating relevant elements of the M&E matrix if appropriate or, alternatively, information can be subsequently 'mapped' against the portfolio indicators (p. 46).

The MFA will consult with upcoming strategic partners on how best to balance planning and reporting in the organisations' own format and at the same time incorporating relevant elements of the adjusted M&E matrix, so that the MFA and future partners best can keep track on the implementation of commitments made in their applications.

13. Danida promotes the systematic use of purposive case study material, using pre-agreed criteria such as key learning questions from the M&E matrix, as an integral part of its annual portfolio reporting (p. 48).

The MFA agrees that case studies can add significant value from both a learning and accountability purpose. Taking into account lessons learned from previous experiences (Danish Organisations' Cross-cutting Monitoring of the Implementation of the Civil Society Strategy, 2009-11), the MFA will consult further with the future strategic partners to assess to what extent the proposed portfolio reporting will involve case studies - and in such case in what prescribed format. Ideally, such cases could also be used to communicate, in a real-time perspective, results of the future partnerships as they take shape. Finally, they could also inform the development of stories on results (resultathistorier) for publication on the MFA's corporate communication platforms.

14. Danida issues guidance to Danish CSOs on reporting to the M&E matrix; methodology and criteria for using a case study approach in results reporting; and on standard output indicators, to ensure that all CSOs collect information to consistent standards and definitions (p. 49).

Any relevant guidance on reporting etc. will be included in the revised administrative guidelines that are currently being developed.

15. Danida adopts a system to verify the results reported by CSOs in narrative form e.g. by testing a small random sample of claims and/or claims that are considered to be strategically important (p. 48).

During the four-year cycle of the strategic partnerships all partner organisations should be reviewed. The purpose is to revisit and re-assess the strategic partners' capacity and performance with a particular view to stimulate learning, support relevant organizational development, validate results and analyse and strengthen cost effectiveness. The MFA will revise the standard Terms of Reference for reviews so they align with the purpose of the partnerships scheme and the learning questions in the proposed M&E matrix.

16. Danida considers developing an online facility, or adapting its Open Aid website, to 'showcase' its support to civil society through stories of change, videos, results and analysis (p. 50).

The MFA will use existing platforms to communicate results about its support to civil society including the development of a number of stories (resultathistorier) for publication on the The MFA website. In addition, the MFA will engage with the CSO community and other stakeholders to explore other ways of communicating results to the public.

17. Danida reviews its data management systems with a view to tagging funds allocated in support of civil society more clearly (p. 51).

The MFA is reporting all support to CSOs according to international standards. For historical data and longer time-series, DAC's statistical system provides the identification of CSOs as 'Channel of delivery' of Official Development Assistance (ODA). In line with the Transparency commitment in Busan, the MFA furthermore publishes every single engagement in the Open-Data standard 'International Aid Transparency Initiative' (LATI) – visible in e.g. the portals OpenAid.dk and d-portal.org – detailed to the level of individual transactions. The future strategic partners are required to gradually phase in the use of LATI to ensure timely, transparent, harmonised and open high-quality data.