

Comments from Global Focus to the information note regarding the Strategic partnerships between Danish civil society organisations & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

February 2017

First and foremost, we would like to welcome the information note as put forward by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the invitation to take part in the consultation process both in writing and at the meeting on Thursday February 9th. Overall, we find the note a comprehensive and solid proposal that has come a long way in terms of balancing the interests and aspirations of the range of relevant actors.

In line with our response to the newly adopted Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action, we welcome that the proposed partnership modalities build on the SDG framework and that they will follow the new strategy in the application of SDGs 16 and 17 as crosscutting for all engagement. Furthermore, we welcome the way the principle of 'leaving no one behind' is incorporated in the framework for the new partnerships.

We have the following comments:

Danish Civil society as a strategic partner beyond 'capacity building of Southern partners'

We find it positive that the note refers to the 'Policy for Danish Support to Civil Society' from 2014 including the support for the roles and activities laid out in this regard. While acknowledging this important aspect of civil society support, we do however regard the lot CIV as described as a missed opportunity to fully align the Danish civil society support with the SDGs. While an empowered civil society is an end goal in itself, we find that the information note fails to acknowledge the broader role civil society plays as a vital contributor to societal change, democracy and sustainable development processes at the local and global level. This broader approach to the value of civil society includes the roles of analysts and advocates on policies and governance providing bottom-up rights-, value- and evidence-based analysis, initiative takers and contributors to multi-stakeholder partnerships, incubators of new and innovative approaches responding to the needs of citizens and communities as well as dialogue partners informed by local and global presence and cooperation. Just to name a few.

The new strategic partnerships, especially the CIV lot, provide a golden opportunity to bring on board and roll out the new and core SDG principles in the cooperation between the Danish government and the broad range of targeted actors under these strategic partnership agreements, applying the strengthened focus of partnerships and multi-stakeholder approaches. The strategic partnerships should allow for partnerships that take into account the geographically differentiated contexts we work in, including fragile states and regions, emerging economies, etc., and be the basis for real strategic cooperation and dialogue on the objectives of the new Danish development strategy and the various thematic priorities laid out in this. The role as strategic dialogue partners also includes the important role civil society organisations can play in their interactions with other sectors, such as enterprises and investors, pushing for a more sustainable, accountable and inclusive economy that can contribute to the fulfilment of the SDGs.

- We therefore recommend to adjust the formulation of the lot CIV to include the following objectives:
 - To strengthen civil society in the global south so that it has the independence, space, diversity and capacity to work for the implementation of the SDGs in individual countries and at the global level
 - To strengthen innovative and strategic partnerships and network building amongst and beyond civil society to ensure strong follow up and review mechanisms that hold actors accountable for implementing the SDGs at the local, regional and global level

Bridging the humanitarian-development divide

We fully support the aspiration to create partnerships that allow for and support more coherent response approaches to conflict, fragility and displacement, bridging long and short-term engagements. In this regard, it is however not consistently clear how this humanitarian-development nexus is operationalised, including how engagements in this area should be approached in the application stage. The proposed descriptions of the CIV and HUM lots specify a range of relevant activities lying within this humanitarian-development nexus. If the division between humanitarian action and development work should be bridged, it is essential not only to ensure relevant coherence and coordination with long-term development in humanitarian actions but also to prevent and mitigate potential conflicts and climate related disasters that can lead to humanitarian crises and social instability by promoting long-term development, resilience and preparedness in vulnerable communities and regions.

- In this regard, we propose to explicitly include more nexus activities, such as resilience and preparedness, under the CIV lot and to ‘mirror’ the proposed HUM activity of “*ensuring coherence with development work*” under the CIV lot (replacing ‘development’ with ‘humanitarian’).
- Following this, the application format should include a section for descriptions and reflections on the applicants’ approach to working across the nexus, presenting concrete examples/cases. The inclusion of a nexus assessment criteria would also be relevant.

We welcome that the forthcoming guidelines will “*entail flexibility in the use of humanitarian vs. development funds in protracted crisis situations*”. This flexibility could be extended to cases where humanitarian situations arise (natural disaster, election violence, sudden influx of refugees etc.) in countries not characterized as protracted crises.

Looking at the current division of activities between the lots, it is however not clear under which lot and where in the application format the work across the nexus should be reflected and how the applicants’ abilities and experience to work with this approach will be assessed.

- We find that if engagements in and across the humanitarian-development nexus are to be adequately supported and secure convergence (without its own or a combined lot), funding for engagements in the development-humanitarian nexus in the future partnership modalities should target both traditional development organisations and traditional humanitarian organisations working in relevant contexts, considering the phasing in of lot engagements below 15M for organisations that apply for more than one lot.

- Beyond calling for clarification regarding the above questions, we propose to establish an ad hoc working group, consisting of relevant Danish actors working with bridging the development-humanitarian divide, to elaborate and clarify how the new strategic partnerships can support the nexus work of Danish civil society organisations.

Geographic alignment

While we acknowledge the intention to geographically align the partnerships with the priority countries of Denmark as a bilateral donor, the increased geographic focus of the partnerships will pose a significant challenge to many organisations regarding the phasing out of existing commitments and the sustainability of ongoing work in these locations.

- We propose to revisit the alignment criteria, changing the assessment of geographic strategic alignment to be based on 50 percent of the proposed country programme budget (as opposed to the proposed 2/3).

Furthermore, we find it too narrow and a lack of appreciation of the role of CSOs, that activities in emerging economies are solely prioritised under the LAB lot. Though we agree the large majority of CIV lot engagements should be in the poor developing countries, it is important that Danish CSOs (and not only labour organisations and industry associations) can engage in this category of countries, to support the environmental and social integrity of private sector led development activities, as well as target the remaining (and significant) 'pockets' of poverty and substantial environment and climate related challenges in these countries.

Addressing global challenges

Related to this we find that the partnership modalities do not sufficiently support the increasingly important role that global, thematic approaches play in development cooperation, including the work of civil society organisations. The new Danish Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action rightly operates with a specific geographical category addressing the issue of global public goods. Many Danish organisations have good experiences with engagements in strategic and effective global partnerships that specifically address the global challenges as described in the new strategy. The application format should reflect the need for a thorough description of these global approaches.

- In line with this, we propose that for the CIV lot global programmes should be prioritised in line with the laid out country categories up to a threshold of 17% of the total partnership budget (i.e. the difference between the 50 percent geographic focus and the 2/3 geographic alignment assessment).

This will maintain the strategic alignment of at least 50 percent of the partnership being targeted lot-specific priority countries/regions while allowing bigger possibility to engage in global programmes without affecting the assessment negatively.

Agility for sudden onset crisis

We welcome that the flexible funds under the HUM lot is maintained as a modality. As highlighted in the latest evaluation of the Danish humanitarian strategy, the flexible funds have been extremely relevant and efficient in the implementation of the humanitarian partnership

agreements, responding to the unplanned nature of acute humanitarian emergencies. The flexible humanitarian funds represent an agile and light administrative setup for both the Danish MoFA and the partners to demonstrate and publicly communicate their quick response capacity to a range of sudden onset crises and to the more forgotten crises. It is a channel for both MoFA and the organisations to react very quickly and show relevance, adaptability and accountability to global humanitarian needs.

- On this background, we propose to increase the proposed (10-15 percent) allocation for flexible funds to at least the current level.

Innovation

We welcome the proposed prioritisation of innovation under all lots. The allocation of up to 10 percent for innovative approaches is highly relevant to today's challenges and opportunities in global development and humanitarian work. We would however welcome a more in-depth description of what exactly constitutes innovation in this regard, and how it is assessed, how it should be reported on, etc.

Leveraging the effect of Danish resources

Furthermore, we find that the proposed partnerships do not sufficiently support the leveraging role Danida funding can play for the mobilisation of CSO funding from other institutional donors – including from the EU. Global Focus member surveys show that flexible Danish funding modalities continue to play a crucial role in obtaining EU funding for both humanitarian and especially for development projects, and the same applies for other donors. Allowing for greater flexibility for co-financing, including for joint funding applications with international CSO partners, Danish support can be geared 5 to 10 times towards funding from other donors, and thereby provide and increase cost-effective presence, experience, capacity, and influence of Danish actors globally.

- Concretely, we therefore propose that strategic partners should have the autonomy to reallocate funds (including from agreed thematic and geographic areas of priority) towards co-financing cooperation with other donors, provided that the engagement reasonably addresses Danish priorities as laid out in the new strategy.

Engaging with the Danish public

As a matter of concern, the draft information note has changed the formulations regarding information in Denmark. Previously, all framework organisations could spend up to 2 percent of the framework budget. Under the new proposed modalities, the new strategic partners shall use at least 1 percent and may use up to 3 percent of the budget for information purposes at the discretion of the MFA. In this case, other strategic partners may be permitted to spend less than 2 percent as this percentage is maximum for the total budget under CIV. Although it is welcomed that organisations can spend up to 3 percent, we find it worrying that it will happen at the expense of the information activities of other strategic partners. It could be seen as part of the shrinking space of civil society organisations as it might, in some scenarios, be used to control/discipline these organisations.

- Therefore, it is suggested that strategic partners may use 2 percent of their budget for information purposes in Denmark, while in special cases allowing organisations to spend up to 3 percent without it negatively affecting the work of other organisations.

Onward process and adjusting current cooperation

The note and the assessment criteria generally provide a solid basis for an objective assessment of the received applications. We do however find that the process of securing a thematic and geographic coverage of the full range of partnerships, as described on page 8 in the information note, must be unfolded further. It is not clear how this 'puzzle' will be done objectively, with respect to the assessment scoring, and what weight thematic and geographic additionality will be given in this exercise.

We suggest that the final information note clarifies that, like under current modalities, engaging in a strategic partnership with the MoFA does not exclude the engagement in other Danida supported cooperation such as information activities, direct cooperation with Danish embassies, etc.

Regarding co-financing, it should furthermore be clarified that the full 20 percent of co-financing provided by the strategic partners (both the 15 percent and the 5 percent raised in Denmark) can be counted towards the partnership as long as it is spent in a DAC eligible country.

We welcome the clarification provided in the Q&A regarding sponsorships, and propose to delete the specific reference to sponsorships and keep focus on the actual programmatic approach.

Finally, we welcome the bridging setup as envisaged in section 6.3, including the possibility for unsuccessful applicants to receive minimum 75 percent of their current framework agreement grant in 2018, where they can apply for relevant programme funding via CISU. It should be included in the guidelines that the Ministry must qualify the reasons for the funding level in the bridging year, especially if it is reduced compared to the current funding level. A similar phasing out period should be considered for current humanitarian partners who should not obtain a partnership under lot HUM. While we acknowledge the importance of assessing current capacities of implementation and administration, we believe that many organisations have the capacity and relevance to grow beyond the 25%/20 M threshold if their areas of work are well aligned with the overall Danish strategy.

- We propose that the new strategic partnerships can be phased in (also surpassing the 25%/20M) with yearly increments. This would simultaneously allow for suitable outphasing of existing commitments in non-priority geographies.

The final information note should ideally include a description of the envisaged process for future rounds of application, and specifically how new and existing partnerships will be phased in/out and adjusted up/down.

Global Focus is a platform for 80 Danish civil society organisations working with international environment, development and humanitarian engagement. Ulandssekretariatet is a member of Global Focus, but is in this case not co-signing this position.