GUIDENANCE NOTE ON LOCAL LEADERSHIP AS A STRATEGIC ELEMENT

The guidance note is meant as a guiding document for organisations applying for and implementing a programme under the Civil Society Fund (CSF). It is a based on a similar text developed by Danida to guide applicants for Strategic Partnership Agreement (2021).

Why is a local leadership strategy relevant?

The recent focus on localisation and Shifting the Power has put emphasis on how Danish CSOs continuously work to strengthen local leadership. As it is stated in Danida's How-To Note on Danish Support for Civil Society *"Partnerships should be mutually binding and in line with the localization agenda and should therefore support local leadership. This means focusing on different dimensions of local leadership, including ownership for southern partners, coordination, capacity development and financial transfers to local partners." (How-To Note pp. 5)*

This is very much in line with both Civil Society Fund (CSF) guidelines and Danida's approach and purpose of supporting civil society. In Danida's Development strategy "The World We Share: Denmark's Strategy for Development Cooperation" it reads:

> Strong, locally based civil societies can make demands, promote change, and think innovatively. They create tomorrow's leaders and develop communities of practice. Their rights-based work is crucial for promoting gender equality as well as the rights of women and girls, for ensuring inclusion of marginalised groups, and for ensuring involvement of young people. They provide a voice for vulnerable, persecuted, and exposed groups and contribute to preventing conflicts and strengthening resilience in regions of origin. We will therefore work to build and strengthen locally based civil society actors – particularly through the Danish partners – and ensure a robust defence of civic space in developing countries ("The World We Share: Denmark's Strategy for Development Cooperation", 2021 pp. 41)

A strong and independent civil society is a main pillar of democratic societies and a goal in the strategy for Danish development cooperation. Supporting civil society in the Global South is thus a fundamental expected outcome for grants in the CSF, and especially for programme organisations, who often build their programme on well-established partnerships. A programme grantee is therefore expected to contribute to the strengthening of independence, space, diversity, and capacity of civil society in the Global South.

Promoting a strong independent civil society – many levels

Programme organisations are expected to engage in partnerships with locally rooted and representative civil society actors in the Global South. This can be done at many levels, which can include:[1]

- Strengthening capacity and enabling partners in the Global South to effectively combat poverty, vulnerability, inequality, build community resilience, crisis preparedness and ability to adapt to climate change. Build legitimacy, constituency and internal democracy, and accountability primarily in organisations and social movements.

- Engaging in advocacy efforts, which involve and empower relevant local civil society actors and local partners, informed by evidence, and based on knowledge of the processes and stakeholders. Such efforts include holding duty bearers accountable for implementing the SDGs.

- Promoting an enabling environment for civil society in the Global South primarily including i) basic legal guarantees such as the right to assembly, association, and registration, ii) appropriate measures for CSOs' financial viability and sustainability, and iii) appropriate spaces for participation in local, national, and international decision-making processes.

- Supporting new and emerging civil society actors where relevant. Civil society is a dynamic concept with more fluid, informal and community-oriented activism emerging in the Global South. This includes non-formalised actors, such as community-based networks, local committees, activists and social movements, women, and youth groups. To ensure relevance and effectiveness, programme partners are encouraged to also support informally organised civil society actors and social movements as drivers for change when relevant and timely.

- Partnerships are dynamic and though many partnerships are strong after many years of investment, qualitative development is expected, including exit strategies from long running partnerships and strategies for entering new partnerships.

- Programme organisations are encouraged to apply a multistakeholder approach and engage with a broad range of partners, including new emerging civil society actors, private sector actors, finance institutions, universities, governments, think tanks, and multilateral agencies to strengthen collective impact.

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[1] See Danida "Information Note: Strategic Partnerships with Danish Civil Society Organisations", 2021 pp. 19

Strengthening local leadership in CSF programmes

Local leadership is not a new feature for most organisations who have worked with programme grants through the CSF. Organisations who apply for a programme (whether it is for the first time or apply for a continuation and new phase of a programme) have experiences with strengthening local leadership within their partnerships. This note is therefore – most likely – not introducing new elements, but it highlights the five core elements that will be used when assessing and engaging with programme organisations on local leadership:

- Equality in partnerships
- Financial and resource support to local partners
- Capacity strengthening of local partners
- Inclusion of partners in decision-making and feedback from target groups
- Prioritisation of local partners' engagement in relevant networks and fora

CSF programme guidelines focuses on strengthening local leadership including the transfer of funds, ownership, and decision-making power to local partners.

Numerous reviews and surveys have shown that local partners continuously wish to see themselves as equal partners in a two-way relationship with their Danish partners based on mutual added values. This does not mean – in all aspects – transferring all decision-making power to local partners, but rather to continuously pursue ways where decisions equally and mutually are agreed upon.

Programme organisations are expected to set objectives for strengthening local leadership of local partners within the partnership period in line with five core elements (see below) and will be assessed according to these during the application process. It will, moreover, be a theme for discussion at the Annual Consultations throughout the programme period.

As programme organisations have very different organisational set-ups as well as modalities for their work, the partnership approaches will be different. It is acknowledged that different approaches and contexts will merit different programme designs. Programme organisations may apply a mixed approach with various partners, and context should determine what is the most effective and sustainable approach to reaching the overall objective.

Five core elements strengthening local leadership

The five elements[2] below are inspired by Danida's guidelines for Danish Strategic Partner Organisations (SPA). To operationalise these elements, they have been adjusted to the CSF. Focus in a programme application will not be on whether these elements are represented (it is assumed that they are), but on how the programme continuously will strengthen these elements as part of the programme. Therefore, the questions in the right column are guiding questions which can support the formulation of a strategy to strengthen local leadership as part of a programme.

Elements of local leadership	Guiding questions relevant for a CSF programme
01 Partnerships Programme organisations are expected to engage in equitable partnerships with local partners based on locally identified needs and mutual added values.	- How will partners influence and decision making be strengthened in overall programme policies? - How will partners be involved in programming un-allocated resources?
02 Financial resources and support Programme organisations are expected to transfer as high a proportion of the grant as possible to local partners and encourage local ownership and flexibility.	- What are the key arguments for the chosen proportion of the budget being transferred to partners? - Are there areas of the budget which will gradually be transferred to partners during the programme?
03 Capacity Programme organisations are expected to actively support local partners' organisational capacities and their ability to design, manage and deliver effective people-centred projects and programmes with targeted and relevant capacity strengthening and sharing.	- Has the programme included elements to strengthen partners capacity building? - If yes, which elements of people centred (participatory) programming will be applied?
04 Participation and leadership Programme organisations are expected to support and promote local partners' participation and leadership in projects and programmes as well as ensuring representation and inclusion of target groups in the design, implementation, and adjustment of the programme.	- How will the coordination of the programme involve partners? - How will you ensure receiving ongoing feedback from target groups during implementation? How will you use this feedback to adjust your programme accordingly?
05 Coordination, policy, and advocacy Programme organisations are expected to promote greater presence, influence, and leadership of local partners in coordination mechanisms and policy fora.	- How are partners being enabled to participate in relevant coordination and policy fora in the programme?

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[2] The framework for the five core elements for strengthening local leadership is developed based on definitions from the seven dimensions for localization, START Network, Charter for Change, The Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO) and the workshop on localisation and local partnerships held April 21, 2021, for all applicants for SPA 2022-2025.