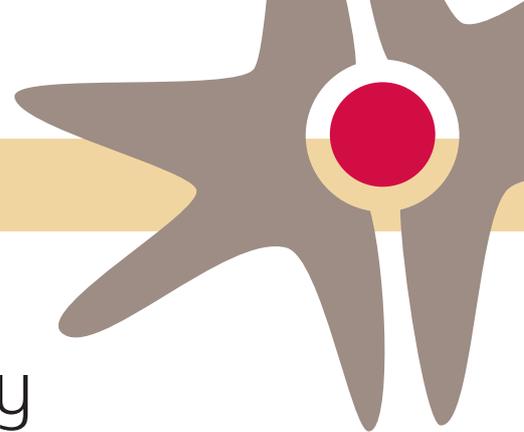


# POSITION PAPER

## Partnership and strengthening of civil society



### THE PATC WILL PROMOTE:

**The Project Advice and Training Centre wishes to promote partnerships between active or potential civil society organisations in the North and the South, in which:**

- The foundation is long-term cooperation rather than short-term project activities.
- The concept of 'partnership' is not used as a smoke-screen to conceal unequal relations and differing agendas.
- Both partners' roles, expectations, rights and obligations are clearly defined.
- The partners have a common understanding of the course that they wish their partnership to chart.
- Ownership of projects and interventions taking place in the South is primarily assumed by the target group and partner in the South.
- The partners support each other in exploring other relevant partnerships and networks.

### PARTNERSHIP: WHY?

#### **From short-term project thinking to long-term partnership**

The Project Advice and Training Centre works within the framework of the Civil Society Strategy<sup>1</sup>, whose objective is to support the creation of strong civil society organisations and networks in the South. The means to this end is to build partnerships between organisations based in the North and the South, which have thus far tended to revolve around the implementation of development projects. The Project Advice and Training Centre believes that the partnerships in themselves should be reinforced, since this helps avoid losing sight of the ultimate goal of building strong civil society organisations amidst the implementation of time-bound projects.

#### **Idealised partnership concept must not gloss over inequality and challenges**

The concept of 'partnership' has traditionally been used to denominate most forms of North-South cooperation between organisations, often derived from a rose-tinted notion of an equal relationship, where both contribute professionally as well as financially to a project or some other joint undertaking.

This is often at odds with a reality characterised by unequal financial situations, skewed power relations and different agendas. The bulk of funding is usually channelled through the partner from the North. This does not make for a level playing field, no matter how respectful and equality-minded the partners might be to one another. Accordingly, the Project Advice and Training Centre sees a need to introduce some light and shade into how we use the term 'partnership' so as to capture the multiplicity of relations which can be encompassed by North-South cooperation. At the same time, such clarification may help form a more realistic idea of what the partners can and want to achieve together.

<sup>1</sup> Short for: "Strategy for Danish Support to Civil Society in Developing Countries", Danida, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008.



## Partnership commitments and mutual contributions

Two organisations engaging in a partnership are mutually committed to one another. This makes it important for partners to define together what the foundation and objective of the partnership is, and how they wish the partnership to develop. There will typically be differences in what the partners are able to contribute and in what motivates them to enter into the partnership. Both factors can create asymmetrical relationships and communication problems if matters have not been talked through from the outset. Conscious efforts to match each other's expectations in the beginning as well as in the course of a partnership can thus help prevent conflict.

### From 'added value' to 'mutual contributions'

The civil Society Strategy uses the concept of 'added value' to describe what the Danish organisation brings – apart from the channelling of money – to its cooperation with a local partner, such as professional inputs, networking opportunities, people-to-people contacts, etc. However, the Project Advice and Training Centre wishes to highlight that value flows in a two-way exchange. For example, it is often a precondition for Danish organisations' effective participation in national or international advocacy to have access to firsthand knowledge and documentation of conditions in developing countries, and this is something they can gain naturally through a partnership. Consequently, in relation to partnerships, we prefer the term 'mutual contributions' rather than 'added value'.

## DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF PARTNERSHIPS

The Project Advice and Training Centre understands partnership as *"cooperation between two or more civil society organisations, which – on a shared negotiated foundation – enable each other both to carry out specific relevant activities and to develop their respective competencies and strengths as civil society actors"*.

To foster the partnership approach implied by this definition, the Project Advice and Training Centre sees several points which should be considered as part of a conscious effort to develop a partnership:

- A. Joint clarification of the **type** of partnership in which the partners are engaging.
- B. Attention to the **strengths and challenges** implied by the type of partnership concerned.
- C. Joint clarification of how the partnership ought to **develop**.

### A. TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP

Below is a presentation of a series of typical relationships which characterise the kind of cooperation engaged in by most member organisations of the Project Advice and Training Centre, each of which can be useful and constructive in its own way. More types can undoubtedly be identified, just as some partnerships may combine elements from a variety of these. Likewise, the same organisation may form different types of partnership with different partners. Conversely, it is not a partnership at all if the Danish organisation is responsible for implementation of activities in the South or functions solely as a fundraiser for a counterpart from the South. By reflecting on the type of partnership in which one is involved, attention can be drawn to some of the challenges which need to be addressed.

#### Value-based partnership

This is based on a shared foundation of values, e.g. of a religious, political or personal nature. It is the community of values which is the starting point for cooperation rather than the prospect of projects and grants, which are seen as appendices to the partnership. The time horizon is long-term, and there is no plan for terminating the relationship. Some examples are country-to-country friendship associations and religious organisations.

#### Value-based project partnership

This is also based on shared values, with the difference that large project grants have come to command a rather dominant share of attention. Accordingly, the

partnership must strike a balance between a value-based and a donor-to-recipient type of partnership. The time horizon is long-term, but projects on the ground have become its framework for the time being. Some examples are friendship associations and religiously-based partnerships with a large project grant that poses challenges to their former decisions-making setup.

### **Professional partnership**

This type of cooperation springs from a particular professional field, such as renewable energy, health, education, conflict resolution or human rights. It will have an element of donor-to-recipient relationship, since projects feature prominently in the justification of the partnership. The time horizon is often delimited, starting off with intense initial project cooperation followed by a gradual phase-out, typically over some 8-15 years. Some examples are partnerships between agricultural, labour or environmental organisations. This type may later develop into an alliance partnership (see below).

### **Partnership under the auspices of an international organisation**

Here the Danish organisation (and sometimes its local partner as well) forms part of an international network. The partnership remains based on a direct relationship between an organisation from the North and another from the South, but they benefit from the capacity and knowledge contributed by an international network. There is also an element of donor-to-recipient relationship. As in the case of the professional partnership, the time horizon is often delimited with intense initial

project cooperation followed by a gradual phase-out. An example is an internationally-affiliated child-sponsorship organisation with local partners from inside or outside the network.

### **Alliance partnership**

This kind of cooperation focuses on the exchange of experiences and information. Such partners do not usually follow each other's day-to-day work with projects, but are instead gathered around a particular professional or political agenda. The flow of information is more important than that of money between the partners. The time horizon is long-term, or as long as there is a community of interest or shared political goals. An example is a partnership between fishermen's organisations aimed at collecting knowledge for a global advocacy campaign.

## **B. TYPICAL STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES**

The experiences of the Project Advice and Training Centre's member organisations show that each type of partnership tends to come with some characteristic strengths and challenges, which can be taken into account when choosing a partnership.

	TYPICAL STRENGTHS	TYPICAL CHALLENGES
<b>VALUE-BASED PARTNERSHIP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential for sharing a vision and hence for establishing a long-term partnership.</li> <li>• Imbued with a community spirit that goes beyond the actual activities.</li> <li>• Often built on very close personal bonds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tendency to stick to the old routines.</li> <li>• Conflicts can be difficult to handle, since the relationship is built on close personal bonds.</li> <li>• Difficult to catch sight of other relevant partners.</li> <li>• Idealised notions of shared values among equals often cloud the fact that the organisation from the North has greater influence on the organisation from the South than vice-versa.</li> </ul>
<b>VALUE-BASED PROJECT PARTNERSHIP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The partners know each other well.</li> <li>• Often produces a highly relevant project initiative with a close relationship to the target group.</li> <li>• There is a wish for a long-term partner relationship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project implementation tasks impose unaccustomed demands regarding division of responsibilities and decision-making powers which can challenge the pre-existing mode of cooperation.</li> <li>• Adherence to the same values can lead one partner to overestimate the administrative capacity of the other.</li> </ul>
<b>PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutual professional knowledge-sharing.</li> <li>• Project work is often underpinned by vast professional capacity among the partners.</li> <li>• Project experience can lead to the formation of an alliance partnership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of common understanding of the time horizon for the partnership.</li> <li>• Propensity for the partner from the North to deliver professional and technical solutions and concepts at the expense of local ownership.</li> </ul>
<b>PARTNERSHIP UNDER THE AUSPICES OF AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local efforts are often able to draw on international capacity.</li> <li>• Potential for local results to feed into international/global advocacy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The field office of the organisation from the North, rather than locally based partners, may end up assuming an unintentionally central position in the implementation of activities.</li> </ul>
<b>ALLIANCE PARTNERSHIP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The professional or political standpoint is the shared foundation.</li> <li>• Potential for expanding each other's network.</li> <li>• Limited dependence on external funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous dialogue can be hard to ensure without specific project cooperation.</li> <li>• Partners may become distant professionally and politically over time without realising it.</li> </ul>

### C. PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT – RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

After reflecting on the type of partnership, it is important that partners discuss the extent of rights and obligations to one another. All partnerships contain elements of wielding power and authority, typically related to control over resources and key decision in the cooperation. Who, for instance, has the right to define and redefine project strategies, adjust budgets, or select and dismiss employees? Must the partners share organisational reports and accounts? And do such obligations work both ways?

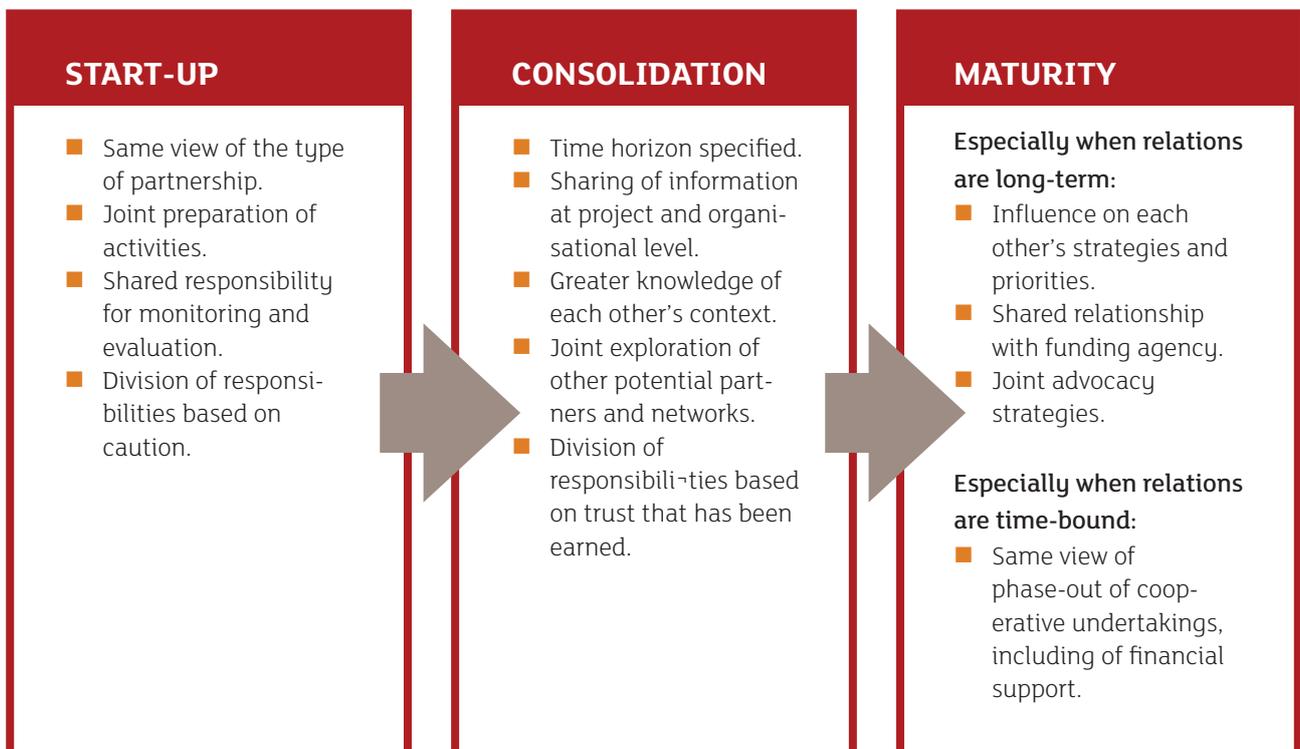
Partnership development will typically take place gradually, moving from start-up through consolidation to maturity. For example, during the start-up phase, it is important to build mutual trust step by step. Consequently, the definition of rights and obligations will not be such a key concern at this stage. As the partnership advances, it will often be necessary to define rights and obligations along the way in various areas of cooperation.

#### Important points:

- Partnerships do not necessarily have to evolve towards ever closer cooperation, but can also work towards a phase-out. What matters is that the partners have the same expectations of the destination and the time it will take to get there.
- Organisations are composed of individuals who are often replaced. On the one hand, this complicates the ambition of long-term developmental partnerships. On the other, it adds even greater urgency to the clear definition of agreements and expectations at an organisational level.

#### Example of how rights and obligations change over time

The model below illustrates a potential partnership development from the initial exploratory phase to either a close partnership or a clear exit strategy.



## PARTNERSHIP TOOLS

The Project Advice and Training Centre recommends that the following three processes and tools be considered:

- 1) Clarifying expectations:** The partners together should discuss and clarify the following:
  - a. Type of partnership. The categories described in this paper can be used to home in on typical strengths and challenges in light of the context.
  - b. Development of partnership. What course do the partners wish to chart together?
- 2) Partnership agreement:** The clarification of expectations may lead to the signing of a partnership agreement that goes beyond specific project undertakings. A partnership agreement may set out overall expectations of the cooperation, a shared vision and a time horizon, as well as a distribution of rights and obligations.
- 3) Project cooperation agreement in connection with a grant:** If the partners have been awarded a grant, a project cooperation agreement must be drawn up. In contrast to the partnership agreement, this instrument focuses specifically on allocating responsibilities, rights and obligations in the implementation of the project at hand.

See examples of both types of agreements and good ideas for the process at [www.prnngo.dk](http://www.prnngo.dk).

## PARTNERSHIPS AND APPLICATIONS TO THE PROJECT FUND<sup>2</sup>

### Assessment of the partnership

The partnership's nature and potential development will be assessed for all applications to the Project Fund. If more than DKK 1 million is requested, applicants must specifically answer how the proposed project will affect the partnership going forward. The more money is applied for, the stricter will be the demands regarding a description of the partnership and its future. This also holds true when another application from the same partners has been previously approved.

### Assessment of mutual contributions

The partners' mutual contributions will differ depending on the type of partnership. This will be taken into account in the processing of the application. Contributions will be assessed for how they strengthen the work of both partners in their respective home countries – North as well as South.

### Partnership activity

In addition to standard project applications, the Project Fund invites requests for the funding of partnership activities. Here the objective is to boost both partners' capacity, as well as their cooperation and shared knowledge of the context. This also allows for the exploration of other networking and partnership opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> See the guidelines entitled: *“The Project Fund – a support facility for Danish popular organisations' cooperation with civil society in developing countries”*, the Project Advice and Training Centre 2011.

## THE PATC POSITION PAPERS

The Steering Committee of the Project Advisory and Training centre, PATC, has adopted a number of position papers that describe our view of how various key concepts in the development work must be understood and interpreted in practice. The position papers are prepared on the basis of our practices and experiences from member organizations, development projects and

activities, our consultancy and training activities as well as our administration of the Project Fund.

The papers are not static documents but will at appropriate intervals be revised in the light of experience gained. Simultaneously, several position papers being prepared on other topics.

See the latest version and other position papers on [www.prnngo.dk](http://www.prnngo.dk)



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