

# Local Leadership

Case study Uganda, March 2022



## Content

Introduction.....	2
Purpose and focus of the study.....	2
Methodology .....	3
Uganda – shrinking civic space and coming back from COVID-19 .....	3
Partnership – equitability and co-creation.....	4
The CISU mandate’s effects on partnerships .....	5
Recommendations.....	6
Participation of target groups .....	7
Recommendations.....	7
Capacity building .....	8
CISUs capacity building.....	8
Recommendations.....	9
Networks and platforms.....	9
Recommendations.....	10
Flexibility.....	10
Recommendations.....	11
Conclusions.....	11
Way forward .....	12

## Introduction

The importance of local ownership in development processes has for decades been an important theme. This review has its point of departure in three global trends:

The current focus on the *localisation* agenda derives originally from the humanitarian sector. Particularly the Grand Bargain from 2016, underlined the importance of localisation and put national actors in humanitarian interventions on the agenda. The humanitarian sector concluded that participation and involvement of target groups and national partners was too small, and that aid systems and structures did not promote and support participation. Some of the largest donors and organisations signed a declaration towards more support to be given to national actors in cases of humanitarian crises and a minimum of 25 % of funding going directly to local actors.

In 2016, at the Global Summit on Community Philanthropy, the first discussions on challenging the current international aid and philanthropical system took place. This has grown into a worldwide movement with the ambition to shift power closer to the ground. The hashtag *#shiftthepower* was started by Global Fund Community Foundation in South Africa in 2019. Since then, the movement has grown. The movement calls for “*new behaviours, mindsets and work approaches that shift power and resources, and promote more equitable and people-led development<sup>1</sup>*”. This debate is essential for CISU, being a part of the international aid system.

In its information note to the application process for the new strategic partners, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs aim to strengthening *local leadership* through five core elements. Though the MFA primarily use *local ownership* in e.g. its strategy ‘The World We Share’, CISU finds the five elements to be well covering to understand this issue. Being CISU’s main partner, the MFA’s approach is important in exploring local leadership through CISU grants and partnerships. In the following we will use the term local leadership as overarching term.

## Purpose and focus of the study

CISU has an ambition to strengthen civil society around the world by fostering and providing a framework for mutually beneficial and equal partnerships. This includes participation and inclusion of partners and target groups in all parts of the project cycle, local ownership, and that most of the funding is spent in the Global South.

CISU has integrated a human rights-based approach in its work and funding guidelines since its establishment. This means that people should be involved in decisions that affect their lives and focusing interventions on empowering people to demand their rights and holding duty-bearers to account. It also means that implementing organisations should include target groups and be accountable towards these throughout the project cycle.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/4196-shiftthepower-exciting-possibilities-and-challenges-for-resourcing>

On this backdrop, CISU examined a range of partnerships and grants in Uganda guided by the following dimensions:

- Partnerships – equitability and co-creation
- Target groups inclusion and involvement
- Capacity building of local partners and target groups
- Partner’s access to relevant platforms and networks, and coordination and collaboration with other organisations and stakeholders
- Financial resources and flexibility.

The purpose was to study and understand the conditions for strengthening local leadership through the above mentioned five dimensions in CISU grants and collaborations, and to acquire information to inform how CISU can strengthen its support to local leadership through funding, capacity building, knowledge sharing, and advocacy. The completed Terms of Reference (ToR) can be found in annex 1.

The recommendations presented in this report are presented as ideas and observations to prompt for serious discussions about local leadership and are not necessarily realistic or desirable for implementation. How CISU is envisioning to work with these recommendations is elaborated in the chapter *Way forward*.

## Methodology

The information in this report is based on interviews with eight Ugandan organisations partnering with Danish organisations and implementing CISU projects. These organisations represent a wide range of organisations, spanning from a farmer’s cooperative to a movement working with LGBTQ+ rights. The organisations include big professional organisations with multiple field offices down to small community-based organisations. The interviews were semi-structured and included a scoring exercise (see annex 2). The interviews were based on the five dimensions presented above.

In addition to this, focus group interviews were held with representatives from 18 different target groups under the CISU funded projects. The focus group interviews were semi-structured and focused on the most important changes the projects had brought about and how target groups were included in project development and implementation.

Meetings were also held with Civil Collective and the Uganda National NGO Forum to contribute to the discussions on local leadership.

It is not the purpose of CISU to meddle with partnerships but rather to ensure necessary structures for creating an enabling environment for partnerships. Thus, CISUs focus on local leadership is primarily to look at its structures and setups and also engaging in dialogues with Danish and international organisations on the future for partnerships.

## Uganda – shrinking civic space and coming back from COVID-19

Civic space in Uganda is shrinking as the ruling party is tightening his grip on critics and human rights defenders in an attempt to silence opposition to his rule. Ugandan authorities continue to raid offices and suspended the operations of 54 organisations in August 2021. Consequently, organisations have started self-

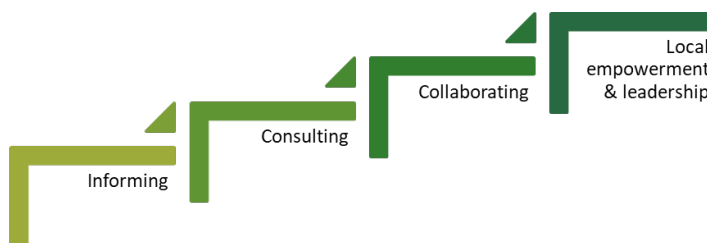
censoring to avoid falling out with government. Furthermore, it is increasingly difficult to do advocacy. Thus, organisations now mainly capacitate citizens to demand their rights to authorities as the organisations themselves cannot engage authorities for advocacy purposes. Another strategy is to work closely with local authorities in service delivery, which then makes the authorities less critical towards the advocacy work of the organisations.

COVID-19 has taken an immense toll on Ugandan society. Among other things, schools have been completely shut down for two years and only reopened in January 2022. Similarly, there has been two lockdowns and a two-year curfew. The school closure, lockdowns, and curfew have had a severe negative impact on development in the country and have influenced all CISU projects in the country to different degrees.

## Partnership – equitability and co-creation

This study confirms the value of the partnership between Danish and Ugandan organisations. The Ugandan organisations were asked to what extent they experience participation in their partnership with their Danish partner, based on the ladder of participation (on the right). All partners stated that **their partnership is collaborative**

and that they co-decide with their Danish partner. The majority also commented that the ideal of local leadership where all decisions are made by the Ugandan organisation, is not desirable. The reason being that they appreciate the partnerships they have – the opportunities for using each other’s competencies and reflections, and to essentially make decisions together<sup>2</sup>. If the power imbalance shifted from North to South, the same situation would arise, where one partner is stronger than the other. Instead of seeking and working towards complete local decision-making, CISU should continue its focus on supporting partnerships to become strong and based on equitability.



All Ugandan partners state that their partnership is collaborative and that they co-decide with their Danish partner

100 % state that their organisational strategies are considered when developing new proposals with their Danish partner

The Ugandan/Danish partnerships are generally strong when it comes to making decisions that consider especially strategies and focus areas of the Ugandan organisations. Though all of the visited Ugandan organisations state that their organisational strategies are considered when collaborating with their Danish partners through CISU, all agree that their Danish counterparts are more reluctant to support the organisations’ administrative costs, unforeseen expenses, and generally, organisational support costs (see more in section about *flexibility*).

<sup>2</sup> With CISUs current structures and procedures, hundred percent local-decision-making would not be possible anyway.

Two of the Ugandan organisations mention that it is a general challenge that international partners (also for some of the Danish partners) primarily focus on activities rather than considering the organisation implementing the activities. Project development tends to focus so much on concrete activities that discussions about the organisation and its ability and resources to implement the new project, falls into the background. One mentions that they experience that the larger Danish organisations (not any of the Danish counterparts of this study) with well-developed strategic priorities sometimes are not aligned with the needs on the ground. Thus, support is not directed at the most urgent needs. Another organisation mentions that collaborating with bigger INGOs (not CISU member organisations or grantees of this study) is a challenge, as they mostly just ask them to implement concrete activities and do not consider them as a strategic partner and an integral part of their programmes. There are however benefits to be identified as a strategic partner to a larger organisation, as this means longer-term collaborations with a stronger financial input. Another Ugandan organisation mentions that INGOs are more focused on trends in funding and thus not necessarily the needs of the communities. This affect project proposals negatively.

The benefits of working with smaller Danish organisations is that they have more open strategic priorities. Thus, they are more flexible to work with and can close some of the development gaps. On the other hand, smaller organisations tend to be very focused on activities and to a lesser extent include capacity building and organisational support (cf. capacity building section).



Seven out of eight Ugandan organisations state that they take lead in developing new initiatives. They describe that they are the first writers and then the project application goes back and forth to the Danish partner and that they meet to discuss the design, etc. The one Ugandan organisation stating that they take the lead to some degree, are partners with a programme organisation where programme development is much more complex, as there are many partners and countries involved.

All Ugandan organisations stated that their partnership goes beyond the intervention they are implementing together – that they are in a *strategic partnership* – but to different degrees. One example is that the Danish partner gives direct support and feedback to funding proposals and strategic documents that are not a direct part of their partnership. Another example is that methods developed in Uganda is used by the Danish organisation in other countries.

With newer partnerships, the relations are still building, and they are working on mutual capacity strengthening and finding ways to support each other.

One way of indicating the strategic aspect of having a partnership beyond one specific intervention is by having an MoU that describes the partnership more broadly. Though CISU did not get information from all eight organisations, it seems that many of the partnerships are working with MoUs to support each other more long-term and with more than project funding.

### The CISU mandate's effects on partnerships

CISUs mandate has always been to support the Danish member organisations and users. CISU has worked with a Theory of Change where it is expected that through support to the Danish organisations, inputs will trickle down to local partners. Accordingly, CISU has historically not involved local partners much in its activities and initiatives. In recent years, discussions, and initiatives to include the partners more, has started.

Based on the findings in Uganda, it became evident, that by focusing only on Danish organisations, CISU places a lot of responsibility upon the Danish organisation in informing their local partners about everything that is going on in relation to the pooled funds as well as capacity building initiatives.

There are often misunderstandings and misconceptions about CISU, guidelines and requirements. Most often, the Ugandan partners received the Civil Society Fund (CSF) guidelines from the Danish partner but had only once in a while received the administrative guidelines.<sup>3</sup> Without a more developed English website<sup>4</sup> or English entry-point, the Ugandan organisations have no opportunity to check up on CISU documents. The local partner has limited chances to know if there is anything important, they need to know. In that sense, CISU creates relations of dependence and a power imbalance between Danish organisations and their counterparts, as CISU indirectly expects the Danish organisation to continuously inform their partners. This is not fair to expect and cannot be expected, especially considering the fact that many of the Danish organisations are small and volunteer based. Another example is that the advice from the advisors to the Danish organisations are also sometimes communicated in a way that makes the local partners misunderstand CISU's points and advice. There are too many steps of communications to the local partner, which increases the risk of misunderstandings.

In addition, all the Ugandan partners were very interested in learning about other organisations and interventions being implemented through CISU in Uganda. Though CISU has a World Map in English, it is difficult to access as there is not English entry point. At the moment, the only information on the English website is shortly about CISU, how to contact CISU, and information about CISU's Code of Conduct, how to report irregularities and complaints.

Considering the importance of the local leadership agenda and access to information, it might be time for CISU to discuss revising its mandate to include partners where possible and where it brings about more value to the partnership. This should be done within CISUs current mandate. This can be done by thinking of them increasingly as *partners* as opposed to distinguishing between the Danish organisation and their partners in CISUs communication and capacity services. More suggestions are listed below.

## Recommendations

- CISU should look into strengthening the dialogue with Danish and international partners on how to create strong and equitable partnerships. This can e.g., be through dialogue workshops and the development and exploration of meaningful tools<sup>5</sup>.
- CISU should increasingly view the Danish organisations and their partners as a whole – as *partners* – in its communication related to the grants as well as some capacity building initiatives, moving away from differentiating between the Danish organisation and their partners.
- If CISU decides to turn status reports into status dialogue meetings, to the extent possible, the local partners should be a part of the conversations.
- CISU should look at how to underline the importance of the global partners being a part of the reporting process and CISU should include the partners in CISUs response to the final reports.

---

<sup>3</sup> The administrative guidelines are also maybe only once sent to partners, which means that the changes made by CISU fairly often, are missed by the local partners.

<sup>4</sup> Currently, CISU's English website only has an introduction to who CISU is, contact information, and information about its Code of Conduct and how to report irregularities and corruption.

<sup>5</sup> Inspiration could e.g. be taken from the Power Awareness Tool.

- CISU should consider how to improve international organisations' access to information from CISU. A first step could be to expand the English website with the most relevant documents. When CISU develops a new website, considerations on how to include international partners and share information, should be a high priority.
- CISU should make an introductory course for global partners on 'the grant has been approved' to minimise the potential for misunderstandings and knowledge gaps regarding the implementation of the intervention. Other initiatives such as including the partner in emails when they have received the grant with information on what documents to refer to when implementing their grant, would be advisable.

## Participation of target groups

Involvement and participation from communities and potential target groups in the development, implementation and evaluation of interventions is essential to addressing needs, sustainability, empowerment, dignity, etc.

When scoring and discussing how communities and potential target groups are involved in the design and development of CISU projects, there is room for improvement. Four organisations score themselves the highest and two give themselves the score three out of four. One organisation mentions that they bring a list of suggested activities to the communities who then provide feedback which feeds directly into the proposal. Thus, they do not start with the communities, and they realise that there is still room for improvement.

Another Ugandan organisation describes that target groups and communities are involved in all levels of project development and are an integral part of the implementation of the projects. They provide the organisation with continuous feedback and needs, which is systematically noted down and presented to their Danish partners occasionally. In this way, the Danish partners are never surprised when they contact them regarding new initiatives.

When it comes to receiving feedback from the target groups throughout implementation, all Ugandan organisations score themselves the highest. From visiting the target groups of many interventions, this seems to be in accordance with our experience and interviews with the target groups.



## Recommendations

- It is important that CISU continues to underline the importance of including target groups in all aspects of project implementation. E.g. when it comes to requirements at application- and reporting stages, but also emphasising this in all relevant trainings/courses and advisory meetings.
- For future CISU visits, it could be a good idea to be more concrete in the communication to partners regarding how many people from the projects CISU would like to visit, if it is possible to meet them without the presence of the partner, and whether there is need for an external interpreter.



## Capacity building



All Ugandan organisations include elements of technical capacity building in CISU projects. It is a priority to equip staff and target groups with the relevant technical skills to achieve the envisioned results. This includes technical issues such as farming, etc. Training of trainers continue to be a preferred methodology for capacity building alongside direct capacity building of beneficiaries.

Most organisations stated that they discuss issues of institutional capacity with their Danish partner. However, institutional capacity

building continues to be a gap. This is both caused by many organisations not prioritising institutional capacity building in their projects. But also caused by the fact that, many organisations are not aware that it is possible to include institutional capacity building in CISU grants. Institutional capacity building includes advocacy and lobbying skills, development of strategic plans, leadership skills, knowledge on Core Humanitarian Standards and technologies for development, safeguarding, and strengthening of financial structures.



An interesting perspective is that one organisation rather prioritised building the capacity of individuals, because individuals make movements stronger. This could more generally be the case for informal civil society groups, where the work does not depend on strong organizational structures, but rather passionate and capable individuals. *“Maybe the organisation will not be there, but if the people are strong, the movement will continue”.*

There is a strong interest in experience sharing with other organisations implementing CISU projects and working with Danish partners under the auspices of CISU. This is to share experiences in project implementation and within thematic areas. There is a perception that there is less competition between organisations having CISU grants and thus it is easier to share ideas and challenges. The organisations are hungry for learning and sharing experiences. Thus, there is a massive untapped potential where CISU could/should play a role. The issue of study tours also came up, where especially the smaller organisations expressed a desire to learn new methods through study tours to like-minded organisations.

### CISUs capacity building

There was a mix of feedback regarding CISUs advisory services and the Ugandan organisations’ experiences with this. None of them had participated directly in the meetings with advisors. Two mention that advice from CISU is highly appreciated even though they do not participate in the meetings. They consider the feedback to be mostly technical, related to interpretation of the guidelines, and the likeliness of receiving funding, and they have not experienced the advice given as something that changes the substance of the projects. This should also not be the case. However, one Ugandan organisation had the experience that after the meeting with CISU, the Danish partner asked them to change some of the content of the project. None of the Ugandan organisations were aware that they could participate in the advisory meetings.

Many of the Ugandan organisations seem to know CISU fairly well but are often not aware that CISU does a lot of capacity building or that there are many CISU supported interventions within Uganda. In addition, several mentioned that they would really appreciate more direct capacity building support from CISU.

## Recommendations

- CISU should reach out to Training Centre for Development Cooperation (TCDC)/West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and other capacity building organisations, to explore and share any relevant opportunities for local partners. CISU can consider partnerships where organisations receiving CISU grants get a discount.
- There should be an increased focus on making Danish organisations aware of the possibility of doing institutional capacity building of their partners through CISU.
- CISU should to a higher extent invite partners to workshops and trainings. Furthermore, CISU should consider using partners as resource persons, as they have a lot of knowledge within their specific field of work.
- CISU should increase the promotion of partners being a part of advisory meetings when developing proposals and possible start monitoring to what extent they actually participate in advisory meetings.

## Networks and platforms

Most partnerships and projects have led to an improved relationships with authorities, either at local or national level. Most organisations coordinate with other stakeholders and organisations at district level to avoid duplications and to ensure projects are in alignment with and complement government plans. This continues to be of great importance. Some organisations were part of national networks and platforms, e.g. clusters and sector working groups.

Organisations being part of international networks emphasized how this was of great value as they use each other as resource persons, inspire each other and benchmark towards each other.

The partnerships rarely lead to new direct linkages to platforms and networks. Instead, it contributes to establishment of new contacts which indirectly leads to access to new platforms. Many organisations experienced more exposure through their activities in the project.

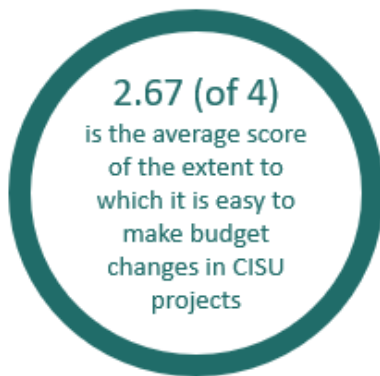
The partnership with Danish organisations has to a high extent led to new partnerships and access to resources for the Ugandan organizations. Six out of eight organisations have been introduced to other resources through the Danish organisations.



## Recommendations

- CISU should enable sharing of information of other organisations working with CISU grants. E.g. by sharing with the Danish organisation other projects in Uganda, or by encouraging the Danish organisation to share information with their partner about other organisations in the country implementing CISU projects.
- CISU could look into better connecting its grantees with the Danish embassies.
- There should be an English entry to the CISU World Map and all elements on the site for the world map should be in English.
- When the thematic networks are up and running, partners should be invited to some of the workshops to gain more knowledge and improve their network within their area of work.

## Flexibility



This is the area where CISU and Danish partners rank the lowest. There is a broad feeling that it is very difficult to make changes to budgets and projects (not for programmes). This is partly due to the Danish partner – because it does not have the time or resources to make requests for changes to CISU. There were also examples of Danish partners expressing that it is not possible to make changes.

It differs whether the Danish partner must be contacted before the Ugandan partner can make smaller adjustments to the budget within the budget lines. In some cases, they have to contact their Danish counterpart whereas others can do as they want except if they wish to

change between budget lines.

Moreover, the process of making changes is often experienced as somewhat bureaucratic because the Ugandan organisations first need to go to their Danish partner who then contacts CISU. None of the Ugandan organisations mentioned that their requests for change had been rejected by CISU, and even one organisation commends CISU from responding quickly to the request.

When discussing budgets, all Ugandan organisations generally find it difficult to include institutional support. Both because there is a limit to how much they can apply for, and also because of a focus on activities from the Danish partners. As one organisation mentioned; *“How do funders expect us to survive with administration, stipends for volunteers, transport allowances, etc.?”*. Another organisation has a principle of cost share, which e.g. goes to their MEL system across the organisation. Their Danish partner has set their own percentage limits in the CISU budget, which prioritises the activities a lot more than administration and salary costs for the Ugandan organisation. Accordingly, they do not receive what they actually need to implement the project.

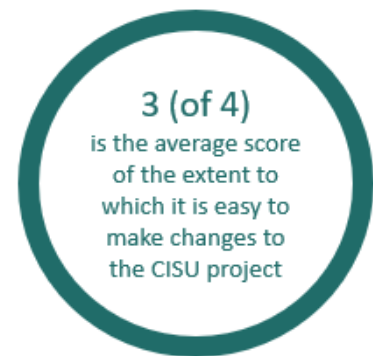
The experience with having limited options for prioritising project funding towards the development and general running of the Ugandan organisations, may stem from a number of things. One can the Danish organisations prioritising results within the target groups. Another could be that the Danish organisations might not be used to working with larger professionalised organisations that need contributions from all

projects. Lastly, CISU might not be good enough at pointing towards the opportunities within the Civil Society Fund.

On other challenges with budget flexibility one organisation mentioned that due to the budget structure, the understanding is that the budget margin is only at the disposal of the Danish organisation.

Another Ugandan organisation mentions the challenge of including lump sums for unforeseen costs often needed for security measures.

The Ugandan organisations rate flexibility in terms of making changes to the project, a bit higher than with the finances (3 out of 4). One organisation mentions that the understanding is that they are not to divert too much from the goals set up in the application approved.



## Recommendations

- CISU should promote sharing of information about the possibilities and importance of making changes to the projects and budgets.
- CISU should explore how to include a budget line for unallocated / flexible funds in project budgets.
- The use of the budget margin should be reformulated into; *You may allocate funds from the budget margin if unexpected expenditure arises in relation to the other budget lines, e.g., to cover an increase in prices, wages, exchange rates and interest costs in Denmark and for the local partner. The budget margin can also be used to advance the results of the intervention.*
- One organisation finds it challenging to have the budget in DKK. CISU could maybe consider including a 'total' column that can be used for the local currency (like in previous budget formats).

## Conclusions

Local leadership is in many ways present in the partnerships between the Ugandan and Danish organisations. The Ugandan organisations are in many ways the drivers of initiatives and see great value in partnering with Danish organisations. There is room for improvements, but generally, the partnerships are based on equality and the desire from the Ugandan organisations is not to sit with all decision-making and responsibilities. They want the equal and collaborative partnerships.

The strong partnerships are partly due to the funding mechanisms CISU have. However, CISU cannot pride itself in being strong on local leadership when very little of CISUs capacity building and communication is available to local partners.

Based on the findings, it seems that CISU grantees are better at promoting local leadership compared to bigger international organisations. This is largely because CISU grantees are more flexible in terms of project focus. They are more open in their organisational strategies and are thus more willing to consider and contribute to their local partners' strategies and the needs on the ground. This is rather more challenging with the large international organisations, as they are to a larger extent driven by their own organisational strategies.

CISU is in some ways a hindrance to equal partnerships and local leadership, as it contributes to a relation of dependence between partners and thus unequal power structures. CISU should increasingly consider the grantees as partners and not differentiate the Danish organisations from their partners in some of its communication and capacity building – this needs to be further explored. The Danish organisations depend on their partners, just as much as the partners depend on their Danish counterparts. This should not be understood as side-lining the Danish organisations but rather as focusing on their partnerships as a whole. In that way, CISU could also reduce cases of misunderstandings.

## Way forward

In CISU's new strategy 2022-2025, local leadership is an essential part of the strategy. Thus, CISU will follow up on the recommendations of this report through internal discussions at the CISU secretariat related to the Civil Society Fund guidelines (CSF) (under revision in 2022), capacity building, and communication. Ideas and proposals for how to strengthen local leadership will be presented to the Board and subsequently to the CSF grant management system for inputs. Moreover, CISU will include its member organisations and users and their partners in discussing ways forward for strengthening local leadership, equitable partnerships, and the role of the Danish organisations through thematic seminars and workshops.