

Summary report

for country visits to:

BOLIVIA – NEPAL - TANZANIA

”PATC assignments in the south–

A context-dependent approach to the strengthening of civil society – in light of the ambitions of the updated civil-society strategy (CSS)”

Contents:

INTRODUCTION:	2
Background and objectives	2
Briefly about the methodology	3
Cross-cutting observations and ‘action points’ from the three country studies	5
Objective 1: Taking stock of current analyses of civil society and their relevance to the preparation of support for civil society:	5
Objective 2: Mapping out the Danish embassies’ practices as regards the civil-society strategy .	6
Objective 3: Identifying the challenges of new aid modalities in line with the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action	8
Country-specific action points	9
Bolivia:	9
Nepal	9
Tanzania	11
Concluding remark	12

INTRODUCTION:

In the course of 2009, the Project Advice and Training Centre (PATC, *Projektrådgivningen*) has carried out three assignments in the South under the generic heading of : *"ASSIGNMENTS IN THE SOUTH: A context-dependent approach to the strengthening of civil society – in light of the ambitions of the updated civil-society strategy (CSS)."*

The concept of "assignments in the South" is an innovation built on the centre's long-standing practice of undertaking short learning visits to local partners to Danish CSOs. While the short learning visits concentrate exclusively on dialogue with specific partners and projects, these assignments offer a chance to look beyond specific interventions, focusing on general issues of the "Strategy for Danish Support to Civil Society in Developing Countries" (henceforth "the civil-society strategy", CSS), as well as on closer dialogue with the Danish embassies and with civil society networks in the South. Consequently, in the case of assignments, stays abroad typically last 5-6 weeks, whereas short learning visits usually take just 10-14 days.

In combination, the three assignments carried out in the South amount to a pilot experience aimed at assessing the potential and appropriateness of this type of work.

Background and objectives

Starting from the reality of Danish civil-society organisations (CSOs) and their partners, the overall objective of the pilot experience has been to contribute to identifying ways of designing support for civil society in view of the context at hand and the capacity available in the civil society of each country.

Three objectives have been chosen for the three comparative country studies:

Objective 1:

Taking stock of current analyses of civil society and their relevance to the practical support mechanisms for civil society in the country.

Objective 2:

Mapping out the Danish embassies' practices as regards the implementation of the civil-society strategy.

Objective 3:

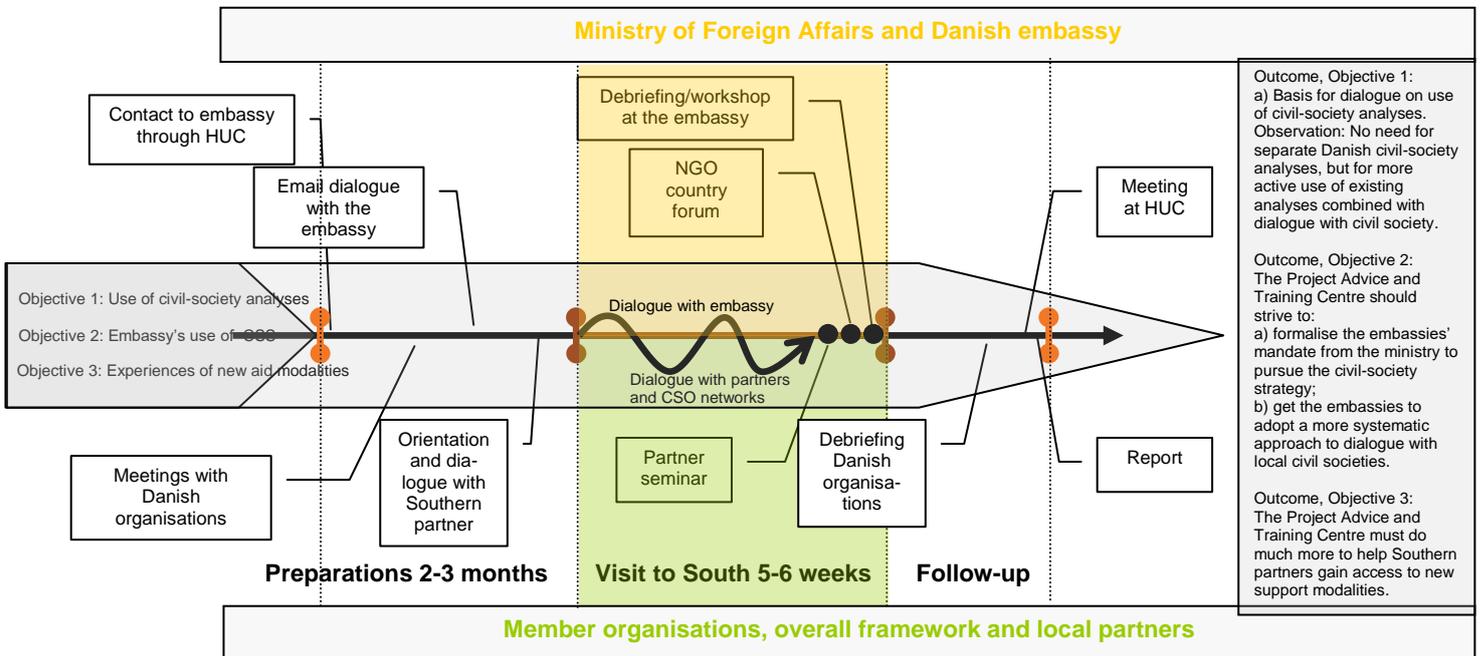
Identifying the challenges of new aid modalities in line with the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action.

Three countries have been selected according to three criteria:

- there should be an Asian, African and Latin American country;
- all countries must be engaged in programme cooperation with Danida;
- one country must be in a fragile situation.

The practical implementation has taken shape through dialogue and consultation at three levels:

- the Danish embassy (and other embassies, if relevant);
- local partners of Danish organisations;
- civil-society networks, organisations involved in capacity-building and/or research in the field of civil society.



Briefly about the methodology

The assignments in the South are an extension of the Project Advice and Training Centre's tradition of undertaking short visits focused on learning and exchange of views between North and South.

The broker role

Usually, the learning and exchange take place primarily with the Danish CSOs and their local partners. However, this assignment also addresses aspects of the overall framework for civil-society support, and hence on the cooperation and dialogue with the embassies, as well as on the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A significant precondition for this approach has been the fact that the Project Advice and Training Centre has *not* been hired to issue recommendations regarding practices of the ministry or embassies. Our preferred role has been that of "the broker", who enters into a dialogue with the parties concerned. To the extent that we have suggested any 'actions', these are primarily concerned with factors under the influence of the Project Advice and Training Centre and its constituency of Danish organisations and their Southern partners.

The process

The model below illustrates the ideal process which we have sought to implement during each of the three trips. Preparations have involved the

Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Office for Humanitarian Assistance, Development Policy and Civil Society (HUC) and the local Danish embassy, on the one hand, and the constituency of Danish and developing-country CSOs, on the other.

Interaction between field visits and meetings at embassies:

Each stay of 5-6 weeks in the South was designed as a process of interaction between dialogue with the embassy, local partners and relevant CSO networks in the three countries.

Timetable:

The three country studies were carried out in January-February '09 (Bolivia), April-May '09 (Nepal) and August-September '09 (Tanzania).

Cross-cutting observations and ‘action points’ from the three country studies

Against the background of the three country studies, the following cross-cutting observations and action points have been identified.

Objective 1: Taking stock of current analyses of civil society and their relevance to the preparation of support for civil society:

1. Observation: analyses of civil society

General overall analyses of civil society (along the lines of the CIVICUS CSI studies) are of varying quality, often out-dated, and generally of limited use in adjusting civil-society aid modalities. However, there are usually a series of less comprehensive civil-society analyses (carried out by CSOs, institutional donors or donor networks), which may substantiate a context-based approach to supporting civil society. Accordingly, to realise the potential for such aid modalities, it makes more sense to seek better dialogue about civil society’s situation on the basis of available studies (albeit possibly updating them) than to encourage individual embassies to carry out their own research.

Action point:

In its dealings with the NGO Forum and the HUC Office of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Project Advice and Training Centre should argue that the key challenge faced by the embassies is to help enhance the space for dialogue, whereas it might not be necessary to conduct new analyses.

2. Observation: the CIVICUS CSI studies

However, the analyses prepared for the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) – and similar civil-society-driven studies – do have the potential to foster cooperation and dialogue within national civil-society circles.

Action point:

Within the realm of CIVICUS, the Project Advice and Training Centre should monitor the completion of CSI studies in relevant developing countries, ensuring that its Danish members are informed to enable them to involve their local partners in the processes, including in the follow-up.

3. Observation: analyses within the embassies

The Danish embassies make only limited use of civil-society analyses in the preparation of their general cooperation with CSOs. In the case of some sector programmes, “mapping” or similar studies of civil society have served to substantiate the inclusion of civil society. Nevertheless, these analyses tend to be confined to the needs of an isolated civil-society component rather than mainstreaming civil society aspects into all levels of the sector programme.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre and its Danish member organisations present in individual countries of programme cooperation

should seek to ensure that embassies are informed about relevant and current analyses of civil society, and possibly to have these discussed at the annual embassy meetings with civil society. The Project Advice and Training Centre should look into the chances of continuously receiving – whether it be on behalf of itself or NGO Forum – information about planned sector-programme reviews with a view to assessing the relevance of involving Danish or local CSOs.

Objective 2: Mapping out the Danish embassies' practices as regards the civil-society strategy

The observations have been based on the roles mentioned in the latest version of CSS in sections 5.1.1–5.1.4.

4. Observation: general use of the civil-society strategy

The CSS has been examined to a greater or lesser degree by the embassies, though it is given relatively low priority. This does not reflect a negative view of CSOs, but rather a lack of formal prioritisation of the CSS in the ministry in general. Thus, the embassies express the view that greater attention to the CSS will require the ministry to convey more signals to this effect, for instance by giving it a more prominent position in annual reporting and/or by mainstreaming it into the Aid Management Guidelines at sector programme level.

Action point:

In its dealings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Project Advice and Training Centre should seek to promote formal recognition of the importance of the CSS in day-to-day work. This should take place in cooperation with NGO Forum.

5. Observation: Local Grant Authority (LGA)

The trend towards greater use of block grant-like modalities in the context of sector programmes and general budget support has tended to enhance the strategic importance of the flexible framework that is the LGA. However, due to the heavy workload at the embassies, the LGA is increasingly being used with an emphasis on limiting transaction costs rather than on promoting strategic goals of particular relevance to the country concerned. At the same time, the eligibility criteria for grants are typically *not* transparent in the case of CSOs. These factors mean that the use of LGA varies widely both in terms of procedures and clarity of purpose.

In practice, there is a trend towards using the LGA for larger yet fewer grants, whereas there is limited incentive to employ this resource strategically, since this would increase the workload.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should – in cooperation with the NGO Forum – point out to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the LGA, due

to structural factors, is in danger of failing to be utilised optimally. The Project Advice and Training Centre should follow developments regarding the use of the LGA in selected countries, informing its Danish constituency and their partners in the South about trends in individual countries of programme cooperation.

6. Observation: sector programmes

There is generally scope for greater civil-society involvement in the sector programmes. The 'component approach', by which civil society is included in an isolated component, can frequently be replaced by incorporation of civil-society contributions into several levels.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre can draw the embassy's attention to their penchant for 'component thinking', and perhaps present the embassies with good examples of civil-society involvement in planning, implementation and monitoring of sector programmes.

7. Observation: dialogue meetings between the embassy and civil society

The updated CSS continues to propose the use of country forums ("at least one annual round of discussions", according to section 5.1.4) as part of each embassy's dialogue with civil society about the overall framework conditions for civil-society work. Dialogue meetings are carried out in all three countries, but are typically attended only by expatriate Danish CSO personnel. It is under discussion whether the embassies should enter into closer cooperation with CSOs to arrange these forums, but there is still some uncertainty as to the purposes and participants most likely to make it worthwhile. In all three countries it was argued that all partners (the embassy, Danish CSOs and local partners) need to establish country-specific discussions about the objective and output of such a dialogue, including whether the dialogue meetings are the most suitable format.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should urge the realisation of a dialogue, encouraging the Danish organisations (including some of those which have a framework cooperation agreement with the ministry) and their partners to contribute towards the aforementioned clarification. The Project Advice and Training Centre's follow-up should encompass direct discussions with the embassies about the process ahead.

8. Observation: screening of applications to the Project Fund and for individual grants

The embassies spend a great deal of resources screening and commenting on CSO applications to the Project Fund and for individual grants. However, the objectives and procedures are generally unclear, and there is a lack of feedback to the embassies regarding the applications chosen for approval and the reasons given.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should address the HUC Office to discuss the formulation of objectives and modalities as guidelines for

embassy staff, and a procedure should be agreed for informing the embassies about approved Project Fund and individual grants.

Objective 3: Identifying the challenges of new aid modalities in line with the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action

9. Observation: direct funding

There is a clear trend towards more direct funding for the South (e.g. through basket funds). However, it varies widely how far this has advanced in each country. A key challenge is to find out if there are sufficiently capable and locally-rooted organisations to serve as intermediary agencies, or if the process necessitates the use of international NGOs as go-betweens.

Action point:

By means of communications with its member organisations, the Project Advice and Training Centre should seek to follow trends in individual countries and ensure knowledge-sharing within its constituency.

10. Observation: direct funding not a threat to North-South partnerships

The trend towards introducing more direct funding mechanisms does not pose a threat to North-South partnerships. Instead, it should be seen as a challenge for the Northern organisations, which will henceforth have to focus their capacity-building on their partners' ability to access this type of financing.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should gather examples of how a Northern organisation can assist its Southern partner in obtaining knowledge of and access to new funding mechanisms.

11. Observation: funding of service delivery requires new approach

Donors are generally inclined to divide their civil-society support into 'service delivery' and 'advocacy'. In recent years, the trend has been towards channelling direct funding one-sidedly into classic civil-society cooperation focused chiefly on capacity-building and advocacy.

This often entails that support for civil society's involvement in service delivery is built into sector programmes and subjected to funding mechanisms directed through the formal political system, e.g. by means of the PPP (Private-Public Partnership Programme) as part of the decentralisation of Danish aid delivery, as in the case of Tanzania.

Accordingly, local partners face new challenges in obtaining funds for services. In their imminent readjustment process, they will often need capacity-building and a change of mindset to gain access to funding of service delivery.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should follow developments in the funding of service delivery, possibly through systematisation of the

experiences of its Danish member organisations and of Danish organisations operating within a framework cooperation agreement with the ministry. This knowledge should feed into the centre's advisory and course activities.

Country-specific action points

Bolivia:

Dialogue meetings between the embassy and civil society

The embassy favours continued refinement of the approach to the annual dialogue meetings in cooperation with IBIS (Danish NGO) and representatives of the Project Advice and Training Centre.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre along with IBIS should follow up future dialogue meetings between the embassy and civil society.

Continued cooperation among the Project Advice and Training Centre's constituency of members and partners

The partner seminar confirmed the Bolivian partners' wish for carrying on the dialogue with the embassy as well as for a similar exchange with the Danish organisations.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre will facilitate (but not assume ownership of or responsibility for) continued networking, including a possible partnership activity to strengthen Danish-Bolivian knowledge-sharing.

Nepal

CSI study and general need for analyses of civil society

The CIVICUS CSI study was prepared for 2006. There has been no follow-up to its 'key recommendations', and nobody among those met during the stay in Nepal knew about this country study. In addition, other relevant civil-society analyses have been carried out, not least "Donor Best Practices Towards NGOs in Nepal" from 2007, which involved donors as well as civil-society representatives.

One option being considered is that the embassy starts up a process aimed at preparing a civil-society analysis, perhaps based upon existing studies and possibly in cooperation with other like-minded donors and civil society.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre follows up through the embassy and by means of continued dialogue with its Danish constituency.

Dialogue meetings between the embassy and civil society

There is a clear wish at the embassy as well as within civil society to hold the half-yearly dialogue meetings. However, they stress the need for a clearer definition of the purpose of these events (including who should attend) and for a format to ensure more dialogue and debate of issues of relevance to both parties.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should follow up through the embassy and by means of continued dialogue with its Danish constituency.

New funding mechanisms

The set-up of central and local funds is fast making headway in Nepal. Nobody among the stakeholders met during the stay in Nepal were fully aware of their number, volume, mandate and organisational structure. Both the HUGOU sector programme and recipient CSOs characterised the basket funds as “a win-win situation”. There was a certain admission that access to the funds was primarily an option for larger and Kathmandu-based CSOs. Accordingly, it remains unanswered how the funds will reach out to small and community-based CSOs, including those in geographically remote areas. At the seminar with nationwide as well as locally-based Nepalese partner organisations, the attendants expressed a wish to learn more about the funds and how to gain access to them. There was a major desire for capacity-building in how to become eligible, ideally by exchanging experiences with former recipient CSOs, particularly as regards organisational and strategic development. However, when questioned further about it, they did not want to lose the support channelled through their Danish partners, who also provide crucial dialogue and other professional and personal exchange.

Action points:

The Project Advice and Training Centre, in cooperation with NGO Forum, should help ensure that its Danish member organisations are aware of and debate the new support modalities, including the need for capacity-building as a central element. The Project Advice and Training Centre will look into whether the Project Fund and its other core services should do more to match the new international funding context.

Vast potential for cooperation and networking among CSOs in the North as well as in the South

There is a vast and unexploited potential for more cooperation and exchange of experiences between CSOs at the country level. The desirability of a fixed set-up in terms of a loose networking structure and/or informal cooperation should be up to the parties involved. In Nepal, the stakeholders insisted that there is still a need for meetings to address issues of joint priority. They decided to form a Nepalese CSO network, and suggested that the Danish partners do likewise. The Danish CSOs have since established informal, email-based cooperation on the occasion of the debriefing held at the end of the stay in Nepal.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre in cooperation with the Danish CSOs should, to the extent necessary, follow up issues of shared interest (such as the agenda and participants in future dialogue meetings at the embassy).

Tanzania

Dialogue meetings between the embassy and civil society

The embassy wants a more 'demand-driven' approach to annual dialogue meetings. MS Action Aid Denmark is willing to play an active role.

Action Point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre follows up discussions between the embassy and MS Action Aid Denmark about a new approach.

New funding mechanisms

'Foundation for Civil Society' (FSC) is a key stakeholder in the Tanzanian context, and its record of receiving direct civil-society support is among the most longstanding of its kind in the world.

Action Point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should follow the FCS's development, ensuring that its Danish constituency is aware of the foundation's support facilities and is able to pass on this information to partners in Tanzania.

PPP¹ and other support facilities for service delivery

Funding of service delivery is being increasingly channelled outside direct civil-society support and into formal systems, such as the PPP.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should gather experiences of using the PPP, especially from church organisations. The findings should feed into the Project Advice and Training Centre's core services.

Possible Tanzania network

On the occasion of this assignment and the Moshi dialogue, an informal network of Danish organisations working in Tanzania has been formed. There is some wish for expanding this cooperation.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should arrange the convening of a Tanzania network aimed at discussing the prospects for future networking. The centre may start up and facilitate, but should not assume ownership of the process.

CSI study

Preparations for the CIVICUS CSI study were launched, but have since stalled.

Action point:

The Project Advice and Training Centre should follow up the continuing process and inform its Danish constituency. It might also be discussed whether the centre's Danish member organisations should act in some manner to move on the CSI process.

¹ PPP: Public-Private Partnership Programme. This is a funding mechanism related to the decentralisation of Danish development aid. It places resources at the disposal of private stakeholders (both commercial and civil-society-based).

Concluding remark

Internal and external learning

Compared to the shorter 'missions', the 'assignments' in the South have drawn attention to a series of new areas in which the Project Advice and Training Centre needs to strengthen the practices of its core services, including advisory and course activities (e.g. information about new support modalities, use of civil-society analyses, etc.). However, the Project Advice and Training Centre sees a particular challenge in its role of advocating for adjustments in the overall framework conditions for civil-society work as set out in "Danish Strategy for Support to Civil Society in Developing Countries".