



Roles of Danish development organisations in the North

By publishing this paper, CISU wishes to raise awareness among Danish¹ development organisations of their potential roles in the North² in the context of a changing world. We believe that interventions in the North can be at least as important in fighting poverty globally as interventions in the South, and that Danish organisations *due to their partnerships in the South* are in a unique position to take advantage of this, including by:

- Engaging in information work that focuses on the structural causes of poverty and on global interconnections.
- Conducting advocacy that links interventions in the South and the North.
- Offering global perspectives on conditions in Denmark, thus enriching debates and civil society generally in the country.

Why should Danish organisations develop their roles in the North?

As development partners involved in the South, Danish organisations contribute technically and professionally to particular projects. They raise funds, support organisational development and help achieve tangible results in their countries of cooperation. They and their partners are developed and inspired by working together, thus becoming stronger organisations.

At the same time, the world is changing, becoming ever more interconnected. It is increasingly obvious that problems of poverty tend to be linked to the wider global context, and thus cannot be resolved exclusively in the countries affected. Food shortages and unemployment are not just the result of inadequate cultivation methods or corruption. Climate change, refugee flows and global market mechanisms may be equally important factors.

The UN's Post-2015 Development Agenda no longer views development as something to be financed by the North and attained in the South, but as a shared global responsibility, where all countries need to address issues such as sustainability, consumption, health and equality. This is a departure from the notion that the world's problems are concentrated in the poor part of the world and need to be overcome only there.³

Below we set out three potential areas where organisations might (continue to) develop their roles in the North, namely in *engaging information*, *advocacy in the North* and *participation in civil society* more generally. These three potential roles go hand in hand with CISU's understanding of *reciprocity* in a partnership, where both partners contribute and learn from one another⁴.

1 This paper specifically refers to civil society organisations based in Denmark. Many of its reflections, however, also apply to organisations in other donor countries.

2 We use the concepts of 'North' and 'South' to distinguish between partners, one of which will normally be placed geographically in the South (though this is

not always the case), whereas the Danish organisation is located in the North.
3 This is also in line with Danida's Civil Society Policy, one of whose aims is to "promote engagement and understanding of global and development perspectives in the Danish population" (p. 34).

4 See more about partnerships in CISU's Position Paper No. 4 (www.cisu.dk/positionsrapport).



This activity is funded by the European Union



CISU CIVILSAMFUND I UDVIKLING



■ Engaging communication⁵ focusing on structural causes of poverty

What is engaging communication?

Both in Denmark and internationally, organisations are increasingly striving to tell nuanced stories from poor countries, which show people with drive and initiative, highlight progress achieved globally towards overcoming poverty, and indicate where and how more action is needed⁶. The reasoning behind this approach is to show that poor people are not just passive victims, and that development cooperation does in fact work, both Danish aid and global efforts.

At the same time, there is a trend towards shedding light on the growing consequences of globalisation and on more structural causes of poverty. For example, working conditions for children and young people mining for gemstones in Tanzania may worsen due to growing global demand for jewels in an unregulated market. Such problems can be mitigated, however, if the trade in precious stones is regulated or certified with regard to local working conditions. This also applies to seamstresses in Bangladesh or coffee peasants in Nicaragua. To describe such interconnections is to give an account of the structural causes. Another global cause of hunger, poverty and regional conflicts (and hence also of growing refugee flows) is man-made climate change and its consequences, such as failed harvests and struggle over scarce resources. In this sense, campaigns in Denmark or Europe about, consumption, transport or food habits may

foster an understanding that development springs from shared global responsibility for global problems rather than being something happening “down there” that “doesn’t really have anything to do with me”. Accordingly, the purpose of engaging communication is not just to inform Danes and Europeans about conditions in developing countries, but just as much to get people in the North to take a stand and to change their views and actions in response to global problems which they themselves contribute to creating. In this manner, communication about a project, a partner or a particular country is not just an appendix to the ‘real’ development work, but an equal and important aspect of it, which may help create significant change in the longer term.

How can Danish organisations contribute?

Danish organisations involved in development work are uniquely placed to tell personalised stories about people, communities and living conditions in other parts of the world. Such narratives illustrate what other people wrestle with in their lives, what they work on and dream of, and what affects their chances of improving their own lot.

Through project visits, workshops and other joint activities, the Danish organisation meets its partners and the local population in a developing country, typically over a prolonged period. Partnerships nurture personal relationships and give rise to closer insights into the nuances of what shapes people’s lives, and what they can do – or cannot do – to bring about change. This allows for sharing stories about developing countries that go beyond the usual tales of hunger, poverty and corrupt regimes.

Accordingly, Danish organisations’ first-hand, nuanced and personalised stories from developing countries are a forceful and engaging voice, which enhances Danish people’s understanding of development aid and strengthens their commitment to influencing global contexts. These are narratives that convey first-hand local experiences of globalisation, shedding light on how actions in the North have repercussions in the South.⁷

In addition, Danish organisations are uniquely geared towards entering into a direct dialogue both with their own members and with a very wide cross-section of the Danish population, since the organisations span the whole country, have close contacts in their immediate surroundings, and reach many people through, for instance, social media and professional networks. In this manner, their messages often get much closer to people than, for example, a national campaign.

5 “Engaging communication” encompasses the concept of “Development Education and Awareness Raising”

6 The Danish campaign “Verdens Bedste Nyheder” (The World’s Best News) is a good example of this (www.verdensbedstenyheder.dk).

7 See much more about nuanced and engaging communication at cisu.dk/Reframing or download course material here: cisu.dk/reframingmaterials



■ Linking local and international advocacy

Linking interventions in the South and the North

Another possible role of Danish organisations in the North is to conduct advocacy that underpins their efforts in the South. Advocacy means to work on influencing political processes and decision-makers locally, nationally and internationally.⁸ It ensures that more fundamental causes of poverty and rights violations are addressed, so that the development initiated is underpinned by, for example, new attitudes, policies or laws.

Advocacy carried out in the South can in some cases be reinforced by other interventions in Denmark and internationally. For instance, cooperation between a Danish organisation and one or several partners in a developing country may revolve around women's rights, fisheries policies or sale of goods in local or national markets. Such issues are also heavily affected by international policies. Thus the Danish organisation may, once it has gained some experience over time, seek to influence political processes and decisions in Danish and European contexts, often in alliances with other organisations or with partners from the projects concerned.

Alerting the public to restrictive political conditions

In other cases, it may be necessary to draw greater international attention to political conditions in a particular country. In many countries, civil society is coming under growing pressure, with ever-shrinking possibilities and room for political manoeuvre. Strict registration laws, imprisonment of politically active leaders and bans on receiving foreign donations serve to narrow civil society organisations' scope for acting freely. In response, Danish organisations can help highlight difficulties faced by their partners and hence, by drawing international attention, put pressure on the governments concerned to alleviate the situation.

Importance of networks and alliances

Advocacy has its greatest impact when conducted in partnerships. Firstly, cooperation in the South is indeed what enables the Danish organisation – alongside its partner – to present credible arguments on global issues or on restrictive conditions in a particular country. Secondly, networking and alliances between several organisations and partnerships in the North as well as the South can draw much more attention to a particular cause, thus boosting the effect of their advocacy. Even tiny organisations can be important partners in a network, as they can deliver first-hand accounts and examples from their day-to-day work to substantiate a given argument.

■ Strengthening Danish civil society

Enriching domestic debates

Finally, Danish development organisations have an important role to play within civil society in Denmark. Through projects and partnerships, many Danes gain first-hand personal experience of development issues and different living conditions. Their world view is challenged, and they acquire nuanced knowledge of other cultures, which can also be useful in Denmark. Many of them spend countless unpaid hours on this, but report how they are rewarded by uplifting encounters with human values that thrive despite severe poverty, and how it inspires them to see other ways of going about things. From trips to Africa, for instance, they often bring home lessons about the importance of human relationships as well as different and positive ways of handling crisis and challenge. Such experiences contribute to enriching domestic debates on,

say, eldercare, youth gangs and conflict resolution, in addition to contesting prevailing concepts of happiness and paradigms of growth.

Nurturing reflection and change

Accordingly, both project personnel and volunteers spending short or long periods abroad face the noble task of conveying their personal experiences of poverty and global inequality. Upon their return, they engage other people in debates and processes of change through their networks, organisation, workplace or private relationships. Perhaps they – either with their own organisation alone or with others in a network – can help launch a campaign, a lobbying intervention or some advocacy based on experiences in the South.

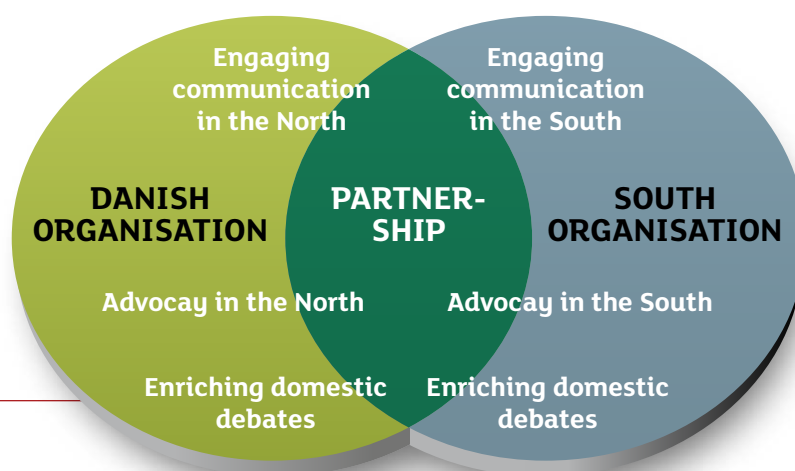
⁸ See more about advocacy in CISU's Position Paper No. 2 (www.cisu.dk/positionsapirer).

Greater attention to roles in the North, but everyone should not do the same

Many organisations are already actively developing their roles in the North, while others may have unrealised potential. However, it must be stressed that there is no standard recipe for the 'right' role of organisations in the North. Danish organisations are just as varied as their partners, and it makes sense for them to fulfil different aspects of the roles in the North described here – plus many others. Large organisations are probably better placed to conceive of nationwide activities compared to small and locally-rooted organisations, which may instead have unique opportunities to reach people up close in a manner that makes an impression.

Fighting poverty through partnerships

The graphic illustrates how the Danish organization can have roles in the North that are just as important as their partners interventions in the South. An important point is, that it is due to the partnership, that the Danish organization can fulfill these roles in a qualified way.



As an organisation, it is important to be aware of one's strengths, but also of unrealised potentials and of changes in the landscape that may shape and develop the organisation. A first step could be a brief analysis of the organisation's current work and roles in the North, as well as a dialogue between its governing body, volunteers and personnel on the subject. This might even show up surprising opportunities for new partnerships, recruitment of more volunteers or stronger relations with partner organisations.

Options at CISU

CISU offers several options to work on one's roles in the North.

- There is **training** in advocacy as well as in communication and information.
- **Advisory meetings** are available regarding one's specific options as an organisation.
- It is possible to apply to the **CISUs Development Education Fund** to obtain support for specific information activities.

- Development projects can be applied for to the **Civil Society Fund**, which allows for up to 3% of the amount granted to be spent on information activities.

In addition, when applying to the **Civil Society Fund** for over DKK 2 million, the Danish organisation is expected to describe how it intends, in one way or another, to bring project experiences into play in a Danish or an international context, in keeping with the points made in this paper.

POSITION PAPERS BY CISU – CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPMENT

CISU's Board has agreed on a series of thematic position papers, which set out our view of how to understand and interpret, in practice, various key concepts in development work.

The thematic position papers are drawn up against the background of our practice and experience from member organisations' development projects and activities, our advisory services and courses, and our administration of the Civil Society Fund.

The papers are prepared on the basis of consultations, and their final wording is approved by CISU's Board.

The papers are not intended to be carved in stone, but will, with appropriate intervals, be revised in view of experiences gained. At the same time, more position papers will be drawn up on other subjects.

See the latest version and other position papers at www.cisu.dk

