

## **Hearing on 'Perspectives on a reformed Civil Society Fund' – inputs from Ghana Venskab**

Ghana Venskab has taken a great interest in the process of reforming the Civil Society Fund and GV staff, volunteers and partner representatives have been present at the various user meetings in Aarhus, Copenhagen and online in February 2024. We appreciate that an additional opportunity for contributions has been created after the user-meetings, as we are invited to give our inputs to the paper called 'Perspectives on a reformed Civil Society Fund' before the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2024.

At the same time, we are confused about the reform process and unsure how to respond at this stage. According to the paper, the suggested support modalities are based on “analyses, experiences and ongoing conversations”, but it is not very clear to us what this refers to. We think that a reform of the Civil Society Fund should be based on solid evidence, in the form of performance analysis of the existing modalities or similar, as well as calculations on how it will affect the allocation of resources. Otherwise, we might end up with a solution that does not solve the identified problem.

For that reason, we recommend that the process is paused to allow time to gather evidence and think through the options in consultation with all users of the Civil Society Fund. A rushed process will not necessarily achieve the best results or achieve the support of users of the CSP. It will also make it difficult to involve our partners in a meaningful way, which is contrary to the realization of local leadership. Furthermore, we think that it is important that a reform of the CSP is aligned with the CISU strategy. Considering that the existing strategy is valid until the end of 2025, the timing is not ideal.

Despite our concerns about the reform process, we appreciate the thinking behind the paper - 'Perspectives on a reformed Civil Society Fund' - and the stated purpose of reforming the CSF to improve the conditions for working in strong partnerships and strengthen the role of the partners in the Global South. We are in support of a shift in the CSP towards more long-term strategic interventions, as well more flexibility and thereby agency and leadership of local partners.

As we see it, the Consortium setup under the Flexible Strategy Support resembles the Programme modality of the current CSF, except perhaps with a more explicit emphasis on alignment with partner strategies. We have worked with the program modality since 2015 and it has benefited our work and our partnerships in numerous ways. Among other, it has enabled us to progress in terms of strengthening local leadership. This has also been confirmed by the two reviews of GV conducted by external consultants as part of the CISU application process. This also makes us wonder, whether is in fact necessary to redesign the CSP modalities, or if many of the desired changes can be achieved with less cost and effort by adjusting the existing modalities.

Notwithstanding the thinking behind paper, we are aware that there has been discussions in the board going in a different direction. According to the minutes from board meetings in the second half of 2023, the board has expressed a wish to reduce the amount allocated the program modality to allocate the funds to other modalities. In that way, the CSP reform process seems to move in two very different directions and that gives rise to confusion and concern. Confusion and concern is not the best point of departure for the design and implementation of a major reform of the CSP or the future collaboration between CISU, CSP users and their partners. To conclude, we hope that CISU will consider pausing the reform to allow time to make a modality that works for all stakeholders and is approved by the CISU General Assembly.