

EVALUATION DEPARTMENT



REPORT 1/2018



From Donors to Partners? Evaluation of Norwegian Support to Strengthen Civil Society in Developing Countries through Norwegian Civil Society Organisations

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This report is the product of its authors,
and responsibility for the accuracy of data included
in this report rests with the authors alone. The findings,
interpretations, and conclusions presented
in this report do not necessarily reflect the views
of the Norad Evaluation Department.

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Foreword

Civil society support accounts for a substantial portion of Norwegian aid. This evaluation looks at support provided through the civil society grant administered by the Norwegian agency for development Cooperation (Norad). The grant aims at strengthening civil society in developing countries through Norwegian organisations and their local partners.

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide Norad and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with information that can be used to improve future aid in this area. We think the report fulfils its intention. Both the content and the timing of the evaluation is highly relevant for the ongoing work to revise Norad's principles for support to civil society. We encourage Norad to consider the findings and recommendations of this report in this work.

The report calls among others for a better coordination of the support provided through the civil society grant and other Norwegian instruments and support modalities. Furthermore the report suggests a need to improve the sustainability of the civil society support

including efforts to empower and create more ownership among the Southern partners. The report also challenges Norwegian organisation to rethink and define the added value of their involvement beyond supporting improved reporting and meeting donor requirements.

Oslo, January 2018



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This evaluation report has been prepared by a team drawn from the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Norway working in association with Nordic Consulting Group (NCG) (Norway) and Ternström Consulting (Sweden). The team consisted of Elling N. Tjønneland (team leader) and Svein-Erik Helle from CMI; Stein-Erik Kruse from NCG; Ingela Ternström and Bjørn Ternström from Ternström Consulting; and independent consultants Yeraswork Admassie (Ethiopia), Kanta Singh (Nepal) and Elizabeth Bamwine (Uganda). Quality assurance was provided by Espen Villanger from CMI.

The team has benefited from the support and assistance of a number of people. Staff and programme managers at Norwegian civil society organisation and at Norad have provided much assistance to the team during the evaluation. We are also grateful to the numerous staff of the local partners of the Norwegian organisations.

The team would like to take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge and thank the numerous individuals interviewed. They graciously gave their valuable time to facilitate the team's country visits and to provide information, analysis, interpretations and explanations. The views of all of these stakeholders were crucial in helping the team to formulate its assessments and recommendations.

The team has attempted to address all the evaluation questions in the Terms of Reference. Needless to say, any flaws and omissions are entirely ours. The team is also responsible for the views and recommendations expressed in this report.

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

This report presents the findings, conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations of an evaluation of the Norwegian civil society grant administered by Norad. This grant provides support to strengthening civil society in developing countries through Norwegian civil society organisations and local partners. The purpose of this evaluation commissioned by Norad's evaluation department is to provide Norad and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with information that can be used to improve future efforts to strengthening civil society in developing countries.

The objectives of the evaluation are to assess and document effects of Norwegian aid through Norwegian civil society organisations and their local partners. This includes the effects of using Norwegian civil society organisations as intermediaries.

Furthermore, the evaluation provides an overview of Norwegian support to strengthen civil society through Norwegian civil society organisations and their local partners

and outlines the different approaches for partnership collaboration as applied by the Norwegian civil society organisations.

The evaluation period ran from 2006 to the present. Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda were selected as country case studies. As such, findings and conclusions from this evaluation are based on three countries and a relatively small number of partnerships.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Mapping support and approaches to partnership

The volume of support from the Norad administered civil society grant has increased from about NOK 1 billion in 2006 to NOK 1.9 billion in 2015. The volume has remained relatively constant as a share of the Norwegian development budget at 4-5%. The grant scheme provides long-term development support aimed at strengthening civil society in developing countries. The main objective is to contribute to a stronger civil society with the ability and capacity to promote

democratisation, realisation of human rights and poverty reduction.

Virtually all allocations from the civil society grant is channelled through Norwegian civil society organisations. There is hardly any direct transfer to civil society organisations in the south. The evaluation found that throughout the evaluation period, a much bigger amount is channelled through Norwegian civil society organisations from other Norad departments and sections, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norwegian embassies than from the Norad administered civil society grant. In some developing countries, Norwegian support also includes direct support to local organisations and support for civil society strengthening from other sources than the civil society grant, including through Norwegian Embassies.

More than 60 Norwegian civil society organisation receive funding from the Norad civil society grant in the three country cases – Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda. The Norwegian embassies in Ethiopia and Uganda also support joint donor funds for civil society strengthening. In Ethiopia, there

is also significant funding from the Embassy and others to some of the main Norwegian organisations that receive funding from the civil society grant.

The Norwegian organisations selected for the case studies manage their programmes differently. Some work through their international associations, some will have their own country offices and others manage their support directly from Norway. All the Norwegian organisations work with local partners and seek to achieve results with them.

The partnership policies vary significantly, also in their views of the role of local partners. Some select local partners that can implement programmes and tend to have an instrumental approach to partnerships. Others may have an intrinsic approach – targeting like-minded organisation and emphasizing strengthening civil society as an aim in itself. The programme theory of Norwegian CSOs rarely moves beyond individual partner organisations and rarely address higher-level results relating to strengthening of civil society in the country.

In conclusion, the evaluation finds that the volume of support provided for Norwegian support to civil society strengthening is large. The Norad civil society grant is an important

source of funding, but it is also just one of several funding sources. There is a multitude of Norwegian civil society organisations to help achieve the goals. The Norwegian CSOs' implementation of the civil society support is guided by a wide variety of policies and approaches.

Relevance

Local partners interviewed are very positive about the relevance of the partnership with Norwegian organisations. There are few examples from our cases of Norwegian organisations exerting unwelcome pressure to include activities or project sites not prioritised by local partners.

The Norwegian-funded partnerships are generally found to be relevant in relation to providing services to direct beneficiaries. They will often also align with government/national priorities. The focus on national advocacy is more limited in the partnerships studied, but we found several efforts to mobilise locally and build on these efforts to influence changes at the national level, e.g. in relation to the rights of people with disabilities.

Norwegian organisations have responded in different ways to an increasingly restricted space for civil society in Uganda and Ethiopia. There has been a general shift towards funding partners and programmes engaged in service

delivery for beneficiaries and – in the case of Ethiopia – towards increased cooperation with government institutions. The evaluation notes that this may lead to an emphasis on Norwegian organisations developing capacity to satisfy needs rather than tackling the more sensitive task of developing capacity to realise rights. However, the evaluation also finds that Norwegian organisations have helped facilitate increased space for local civil society organisations to operate under difficult conditions. This has also included efforts to promote rights-based approaches.

Relevance in relation to Norwegian development aid objectives and thematic priorities is generally considered high.

In conclusion, the evaluation finds that the Norwegian civil society support is broadly relevant in relation to local needs, priorities and possibilities. It is also in line with thematic priorities in Norwegian development cooperation and the broad grant scheme rules guiding Norad's civil society allocations.

The value added of Norwegian organisations

Norwegian civil society organisations are relatively confident of the added value of their support beyond financial transfers. The evaluation found that few organisations

have a systematic approach to and plan for value addition. Nor are the Norwegian organisations good at presenting and documenting what that “added value” is. A dominant “value added” identified by most Norwegian organisations is support for their partners’ capacity to provide reports and comply with donor requirements.

The interviews with the Southern partners also gave a clear message. Most interviewees spoke highly of their relations with their Norwegian partners. They viewed them more as partners than donors. Norwegian civil society organisations were perceived as friendly, flexible and predictable with long-term commitment.

All the Norwegian organisations provide support for organisational development and strengthening of local partners. For some, this is primarily linked to programme implementation while others emphasise support for organisational strengthening, which might in turn gradually be phased out and substituted for increased support for programme management and implementation.

Most Norwegian organisations also provide professional programme support to local partners. For some, this is linked to thematic advice and technical competence in programme

development and implementation. This is mainly provided through country offices with strong thematic competence or through international CSOs with large country programmes. Other Norwegian organisations may confine their support to programme management or strategic development.

In conclusion, the evaluation finds that Norwegian organisations add value to their partners, but such support is in most cases not systematically planned for and reported on. There is significant variation between the organisations, but in most cases, it is difficult to measure how much value is added.

Results

The overall finding is that projects progress well – activities are implemented and outputs delivered as planned and short-term objectives are largely achieved. Individuals and communities benefit from direct and indirect support in areas such as health, education, micro-credit or agriculture.

Most of the larger Norwegian organisations articulate a rights-based approach to their development work. They combine support for service delivery with support to capacity building and advocacy work, and argue that the three approaches are complementary

and necessary. However, the extent to which the focus on advocacy issues and processes is concretised varies from country to country and from organisation to organisation.

All the Norwegian organisations studied have contributed to strengthening civil society in Uganda, Ethiopia and Nepal - in one way or another. Local partners have been strengthened, more grassroots organisations have been formed, and individuals have been empowered.

The evaluation found less evidence on the results in relation to civil society strengthening and political change. There is much less attention to such higher level outcomes in reports from Norwegian CSO and their partners. There are also deficiencies in most partnerships in terms of how they are contributing to a vibrant, national civil society capable of affecting and altering outcomes on politically sensitive topics. Most direct project activities are well planned and formulated, while the broader aims and objectives are not so well operationalized.

The evaluation found no systematic differences between the international network, bilateral and country office approach in their effectiveness in strengthening civil society. Strong country presence and regular capacity building is no guarantee for impact on civil society.

Large Norwegian CSOs with a major presence in the country and/or working through an international federation or organisation may more easily achieve bigger results for beneficiaries by being able to reach more people in the communities. These approaches may not necessarily have similar advantages in building the capacity of individual organisations, or civil society networks. Norwegian CSOs without a presence in the country may also be able to play an important role and add value for local partners when the partnership is based on common values, interests and commitment. However, when partner programmes involve implementation of major projects on the ground requiring strong professional competence and skills Norwegian CSOs with a presence in the country may be better positioned to add value to programmes compared to Norwegian CSOs without such presence.

In conclusion, the evaluation finds that Norwegian organisations can document that the support to local partners have led to tangible improvements for the target populations as measured by quantifiable output indicators. There is also evidence that the Norwegian support has strengthened the Southern partners' internal capacities and involvement in mainly local-level advocacy. Overall, the evaluation concludes that the Norwegian CSOs has contributed to facilitating vocal debates on development

issues in all three countries. It has helped to increase the voice of civil society, perhaps more strongly at local and district levels. This has however, in the case of Uganda and Ethiopia not led to improved operating conditions for civil society actors.

Sustainability

All partnerships have critical sustainability issues particularly when it comes to funding. Organisational capacity is in most cases more sustainable. Most Southern partners have systems and procedures, skills and experience to continue without a Norwegian partner. The evaluation shows that significant efforts have been invested in capacity strengthening of Southern partners, often with good results.

However, large parts of civil society in the three countries are maintained by foreign donors and will not be able to sustain their services without such support. The evaluation finds that most partners will not be able to sustain programmes and projects financially when external support ends – despite variation between countries. It should also be noted that many partnerships between Norwegian organisations and their partners are not perceived as "projects with an end", but rather as a permanent relationship the content of which may evolve over time, but where the relationship itself will remain.

LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The team identifies a series of lessons learnt and presents several recommendations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad.

Missing strategic framework

There is no strategic framework for Norwegian civil society support at country level – nor any overall assessment of needs and opportunities as a basis for making strategic choices and securing optimal impact. The civil society portfolio in each country is highly fragmented between the respective Norwegian civil society organisations and between the organisations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Embassies and Norad. The whole is the sum of all the independent and often isolated parts.

Weak coordination and high level of fragmentation are part of a broader systemic feature in the Norwegian development aid sector – more than a problem for individual Norwegian CSOs. The strength of the Norwegian approach to civil society strengthening through Norwegian CSOs is the flourishing of a multitude of approaches, ability to experiment and take risks, and to support a wide variety of partnerships. The weakness is that the full potential of Norwegian support is not realised.

Donorship and partnership

Southern partners view their relationship with Norwegian civil society organisations more as “partnership” than “donorship”. However, Norwegian organisations remain donors with more power and other more indirect and subtle mechanisms for influencing partners. There is a persistent challenge to promote ownership on the one hand and measure and document that CSOs contribute to measurable results on thematic priorities for Norwegian development cooperation on the other.

Innovation for new partnerships

The partnerships and partnership models have mostly remained unchanged. Several partnerships have lasted for many years and even decades. Despite noble partnership principles, asymmetries of power between a donor and recipient remain. This calls for more innovative ways of using the partnership model to strengthen civil society. This may include more funds being managed by civil society organisations in developing countries; less reliance on Norwegian support for reporting and more use of local skills and resources to manage relations with Norwegian organisations; and a partnership focusing more on professional and technical added value or sharing of experiences in programme development and management.

All results matter

Most of the organisations have adopted rights-based programming and use some sort of results-based management approach and tools for monitoring and reporting. There is a tension between rights-based strategies with intangible goals such as empowerment and results-based management focusing on tangible measurable results. The risk of “crowding out” intangible results has been discussed in the report - to what extent it is becoming harder for Norwegian organisations and their partners to support transformational approaches (including civil society strengthening) when they are increasingly expected to report on results and in the process opting for quantifiable, easy-to-measure results.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, conclusions and lesson learnt, the report ends with a series of recommendations:

1: The Norad civil society grant should maintain the aim of “strengthening civil society”, but there is a need to distinguish between purposes related to delivery of services in education, climate resilience and other thematic priorities in Norwegian development assistance, and purposes related to civil society strengthening and democratisation.

2: The Norwegian support must rebalance traditional North/South partnerships. There is a need to empower and create more ownership among Southern partners. This can be achieved through a shift towards increased direct transfers to civil society organisations and networks in developing countries – where sufficient capacity exists. In addition, the civil society grant should stimulate to more innovative partnerships by Norwegian organisations that goes beyond funding of specific programmes and projects. Norwegian organisations could provide more long-term core-funding and capacity development support to partners, based on these organisations’ own strategic plans.

3: Norad should encourage and support Norwegian organisations, including a stronger emphasis on identifying their potential value added. This includes:

a) Ensure that operational plans for their value addition are prepared – both what value they expect to contribute to partners and how. The value addition must go beyond supporting improved reporting and meeting donor requirements;

b) Developing methods and tools for better assessing and documenting results from advocacy and civil society strengthening at local, organisational and national level;

c) Including objectives and indicators in results frameworks that reflect their approach to adding value in partnerships and explore how to connect this to end results; and

d) Adopting a systematic approach to capacity development and to the evaluation of capacity development outcomes, outputs and activities.

4: Any major increase in the effectiveness of Norwegian support to civil society strengthening requires a better coordination of different Norwegian aid instruments and support modalities. This may best be addressed at the country level with a better coordination between support provided by Norad's civil society department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Embassies. This presupposes a shift to a more strategic use of Norad's civil society grant.



Meeting with beneficiaries and local partners in Amaru, Northern Uganda.
PHOTO: STEIN-ERIK KRUSE

1. Introduction and background

The purpose of this evaluation commissioned by Norad's evaluation department is to:

- › Provide Norad and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with information that can be used to improve future efforts to strengthening civil society in developing countries, and to:
- › Have a major focus on identifying the views/perspective of the local partners/civil society organisations in developing countries.

The objectives of the evaluation are to assess and document effects of Norwegian civil society organisations and their local partners in strengthening civil society in developing countries including the effects of using Norwegian civil society organisations as intermediaries. Furthermore, the evaluation provides an overview of Norwegian support to strengthen civil society in developing countries and outlines the different approaches for partnership collaboration applied by the Norwegian civil society organisations and their local partners. The evaluation identifies lessons learnt that can be used to improve

future efforts to strengthening civil society in developing countries.

Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda were selected as country case studies. The evaluation period ran from 2006 to the present.

The questions guiding the evaluation are summarised in Box 1.1.

1.1 IMPLEMENTATION

The evaluation team's data collection progressed through distinct phases. The first inception phase was conducted in May/June 2017 and included initial discussions with the Norad evaluation department, Norad's civil society departments, and Norwegian civil society organisations (CSOs). The inception report (80 pages) outlined the team's interpretation of the Terms of Reference (ToR) and approach to the evaluation, the methodology to be used and provided a detailed work plan. This included a survey of relevant evaluation studies and an initial mapping of the Norwegian support. Norad forwarded the draft inception report to Norad's civil society department,

BOX 1.1 // EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- › Map Norwegian support for civil society strengthening, partnership approaches and Theory of Change.
- › Is Norwegian support consistent with local needs, priorities and possibilities including the needs, priorities and possibilities of local partners?
- › What are the effects at output/outcome level, for instance through tangible improvements for the target population and in the capacity and competence of the local partner organisations (e.g. strengthened human resource capacities and competence in leadership, planning, project management, financial management, reporting, resource mobilization, ability to mobilise target groups and represent local communities)?
- › How sustainable is the Norwegian assistance?
- › What are the lessons learnt that could be used to improve planning, organisation and implementation of future support to strengthen civil society in developing countries?

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian embassies in Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda and Norwegian CSOs and invited them to provide comments.

The next data collection period ran from early/mid-August to early September. It included data collection on partnership approaches and results from reviewing documents and from interviews with Norwegian CSOs and others. The final selection of case studies and tools for data collection were prepared ahead of the visits to the three countries.

The country visits were undertaken over three weeks in September through three separate teams. At the end of the fieldwork, each country team arranged a workshop to give local partners and others the opportunity to discuss and comment on the initial findings from the visit. All country teams met immediately after the country visits for a joint workshop and initial analysis of the country findings.

In mid-October Norad's Evaluation Department facilitated a seminar with Norwegian CSOs, Norad's civil society department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies (via skype/video-link) and others. This was an opportunity for the team to present and discuss emerging findings.

The draft report was submitted to the Evaluation Department in early November. It was distributed for comments to Norad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norwegian CSOs and to Norwegian embassies and local partners visited in Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda.

1.2 CONTEXT

This is an evaluation of the long-term development support aimed at strengthening civil society in developing countries. Funding is provided from the development aid budget's Chapter 160.70 ("the civil society grant") administered by Norad through its Civil Society Department. The allocations from the grant shall be in accordance with its 2009 guidelines for civil society support and the operational *Grant scheme rules for support to civil society and democratisation*. Revised guidelines for support is under preparation and is expected to be published in early 2018.¹

There has been much debate on this support to civil society and the support modalities behind it – in Norway, in global aid policy and effectiveness discussions, and in the South. In Norway, the government proposed major cuts in the civil society grant a couple of years ago (in Parliament, the majority decided to annul most of the proposed cuts). The Norwegian support to or through civil society organisations is significant and goes well beyond the civil society grant itself. Some 5 % (or NOK 1.9 billion in 2015) of the aid budget

1 The 2009 guidelines are available from <https://www.norad.no/om-bistand/publikasjon/2009/prinsipper-for-norads-stotte-til-sivilt-samfunn-i-sor/> (in Norwegian only). The grant scheme rules are available from <https://www.norad.no/globalassets/filer-2015/sivsa/2016/grant-scheme-rules-for-support-to-civil-society-and-democratisation.pdf>.

is allocated through the civil society grant with the total amount disbursed through civil society organisations exceeding 20 %.²

The objectives behind the allocations from the civil society grant has also expanded. Most significantly, a major portion of the grant is now (from 2016) reserved for a new Norwegian priority area – education. Furthermore, a growing demand for reporting on results and an approach favouring quantitative measurable indicators has placed further challenges for "civil society strengthening". An additional factor posing new challenges is the government's call for a sharp reduction in the number of contracts that militates against direct support to smaller initiatives, organisations and programmes.

Northern and international CSOs remain a primary conduit of support from most Western development aid agencies, but there is a growing interest in direct support to southern civil society. This has also led to efforts to identify best practices and guidelines for partnerships as well as for how to support civil society. This is illustrated by documents from the OECD Development Assistance

2 See more on this in Norad (2017), 2016 *Results report. Civil society*, Oslo: Norad (<https://www.norad.no/globalassets/publikasjoner/publikasjoner-2017/results-report-civil-society.pdf>).

Committee as well as from calls for civil society organisations in the South and from global civil society bodies.³

There is also a growing body of literature on what works in terms of providing external support to civil society. A series of evaluation studies has recently become available assessing the support modalities and the role of Northern CSOs as intermediaries in supporting civil society in developing countries. There is also an emerging academic literature on external support to civil society and democratisation. This literature is presented and reviewed in Annex 6.

Some of the key findings from this literature include:

- › Support to Northern CSOs and their partnerships and projects in developing countries has led to positive results, but the activities have generally been more effective in reducing poverty and vulnerability at a local level. There is less evidence of their contribution to broader, long-term outcomes;

³ See OECD (2012), *Partnering with Civil Society: 12 lessons from the DAC Peer Reviews*, Paris: OECD (<http://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/12%20Lessons%20Partnering%20with%20Civil%20Society.pdf>). See also CIVICUS/International Civil Society Centre's 2014 document on the Partnership principles for cooperation between local, national and international civil society organisations https://icscentre.org/downloads/14_02_27_PartnershipPrinciples.pdf.

- › There has been a shift among donors and Northern CSOs from broader, long-term outcomes to a focus on short-term outcomes and service delivery;
- › This shift has followed a general decline in the operating environment for CSOs in many developing countries, as governments have increasingly adopted restrictive legislative frameworks and used other restrictive mechanisms to decrease space for CSOs;
- › Most support for civil society strengthening is provided through Northern NGOs. There is a growing exploration of new partnership modalities and examination of alternative ways of supporting civil society – especially through direct support and joint donor funds; and
- › Most studies of civil society strengthening has focused on individual CSOs in the south and not on the role of donor support in relation to civil society as a whole.

This evaluation will not address all dimensions in the role of Norwegian CSOs. We do not evaluate other support modalities, the cost efficiency of the model or of the value of these models for the Norwegian society. Our focus is the valued added of the use of Norwegian civil society organisations in relation to local partners and civil society strengthening. Still, we do hope that the findings, conclusions and lessons learnt from this evaluation will help

provide knowledge that that will be useful in the further development of new policies and approaches to strengthening of civil society.



Meeting with beneficiaries and local partners in Amaru, Northern Uganda.
PHOTO: STEINERIK KRUSE

2. How to evaluate Norwegian support for civil society strengthening? Approach and methodology

The Terms of Reference (ToR) lists two purposes, three objectives and five guiding evaluation questions (cf. Chapter 1). The main emphasis is on analysing the partnerships – the relationships between Norwegian CSOs and their partners in developing countries. In developing a design to respond to the evaluation questions our first step was to identify the partnership approaches as applied by the Norwegian civil society organisations and their partners and a general Theory of Change for the analysis of the interaction between Norwegian CSOs and Southern partners.

2.1 PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES

All the Norwegian CSOs reviewed by the evaluation team have policies guiding their approach to how they work with local partners. However, these policies vary quite significantly – not just in terms of how elaborate and comprehensive they are, but also in their views of the role of local partners. Some Norwegian CSOs, particularly some of the larger development NGOs, have elaborate policy documents in place coupled with tools and instruments to help select, assess and manage relations with partners. Others may seek a “natural” partner with common interests

or values and not necessarily with any elaborate policies in place from the start.

There are also important differences in what role they see for local partners. Some Norwegian CSOs go for partners that can implement programmes and tend to have an instrumental approach to partnerships. Others may have an intrinsic approach – targeting likeminded organisation and emphasizing strengthening civil society as an aim in itself. The evaluation team developed a simplified Theory of Change and used this as a tool to identify the different types of support (financial and non-financial), assumptions and causal links from Norwegian CSOs to effects at different levels. This Theory of Change was based on Norad’s principles for support to civil society. It is reproduced in Figure 2.1 (next page) with some examples of assumptions and risks.

Three approaches to partnership collaboration were identified based on the organisational setup of the partnerships. These approaches were used throughout the evaluation to categorise partnerships and Norwegian CSOs:

- › *The “bilateral” approach:* The Norwegian CSO provides direct support to one or several local partners from headquarters in Norway by means of electronic communication and annual/biannual “partner visits”.
- › *The country office approach:* The Norwegian CSO has established a regional and/or country office responsible for the regular interaction with the Southern partners – most often both the professional and administrative functions.
- › *The international network approach:* The Norwegian CSO provides support to country partners and projects through an international organisation, typically a federation, which manages direct relations with local partners.

To assess the contribution of Norwegian CSOs in these three partnership approaches we identified three sets of issues. They were used to assess the relation between the Norwegian CSO and the Southern partner beyond the transfer of financial support. The three types of issues, or added value beyond financial support, are:

- > *Professional/thematic competence* – to what extent Norwegian CSOs have strengthened partners and projects professionally including strategic advice and thematic/technical knowledge;
- > *Organisational and financial competence* – to what extent Norwegian CSOs have contributed to strengthen organisational and administrative/financial capacity, including governance and accountability functions; and
- > *Networking competence* – to what extent Norwegian CSOs have contributed to establish/strengthen national, regional and international networks.

FIGURE 2.1 // THEORY OF CHANGE

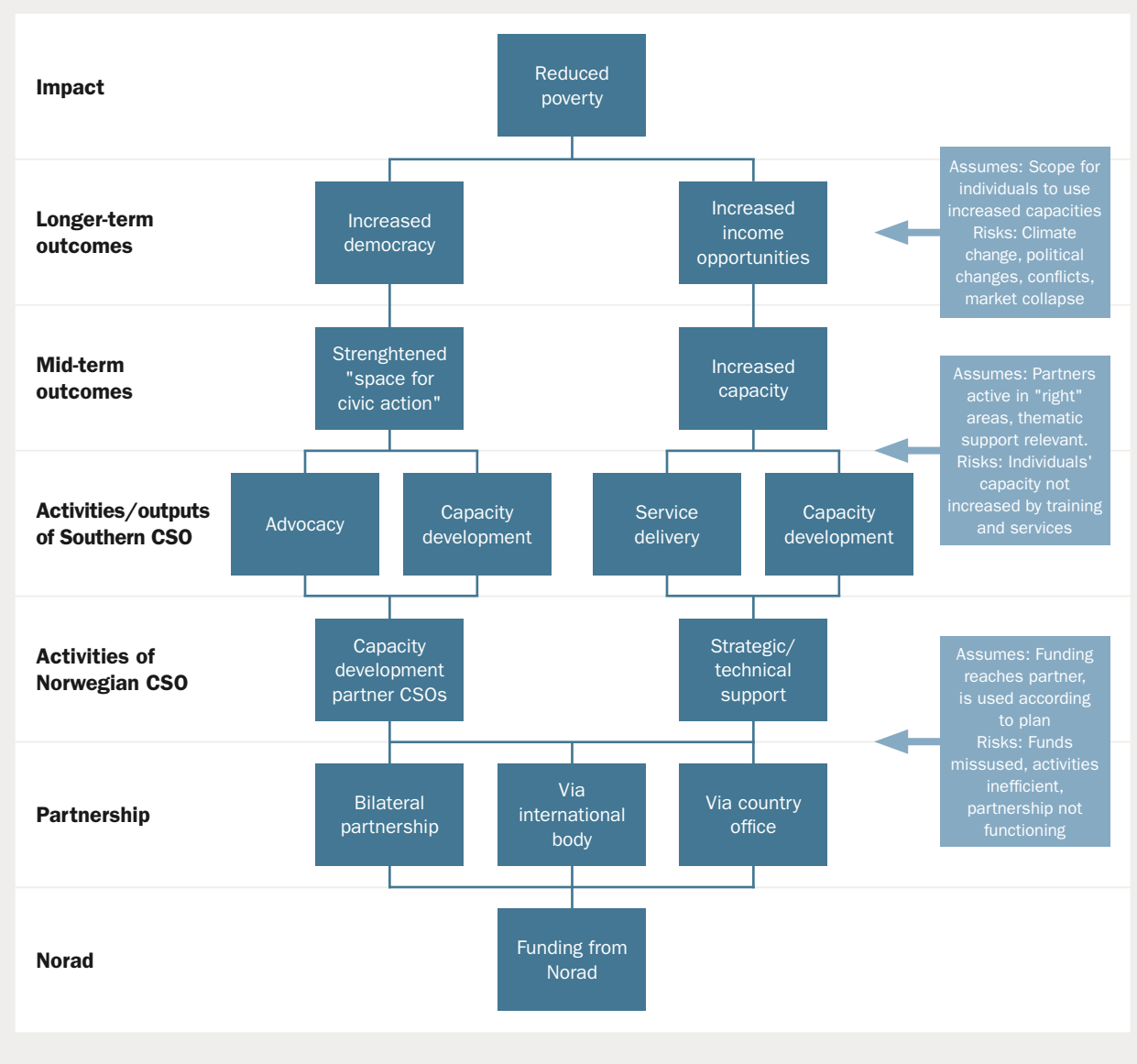


TABLE 2.1 // NORWEGIAN PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES AND ADDED VALUE IN CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT

Approach	Added value		
	Professional/thematic	Organisational and financial	Networking
Bilateral			
Country office			
International network			

The Norwegian approaches and criteria for assessing the added value of Norwegian CSOs are summarised in Table 2.1.

Findings from the assessment of Norwegian approaches and added value to civil society strengthening will be used to position the Norwegian CSOs based on to what extent they have an instrumental or intrinsic approach to partnership. Norwegian CSOs with an instrumental approach tend to see local partners as means to implement pre-set objectives while Norwegian CSOs with an intrinsic approach tend to see strong partners as ends in themselves.

The evaluation identified three main areas of effects for assessing results of the support from Norwegian CSOs. They are derived from Norad's grant scheme rules for long-term support to civil society strengthening. Results are expected in relation to contribution to a

stronger civil society with the ability and capacity to promote democratisation and realisation of human rights and poverty reduction. The criteria are summarised and operationalised in Box 2.1.

BOX 2.1 // CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING RESULTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT

Service delivery	Has the support helped local partners to reach and deliver services to ultimate beneficiaries?
Advocacy	Has the support addressed policy development, policy implementation and policy monitoring in the country?
Civil society strengthening	Has the support addressed strengthening individual Southern CSOs, national/ regional /international networks and wider effects on civil society in the country?

2.2 SAMPLING

Based on a mapping of Norwegian support for civil strengthening and identification of all Norwegian CSOs receiving support from Norad's civil society grant a sample of Norwegian CSOs were identified for further study. This included a larger sample of 17 Norwegian CSO and a smaller sample of 13 for further examination through country visits. The selection criteria are listed in Box 2.2.

BOX 2.2 // CRITERIA FOR SAMPLING OF NORWEGIAN CSOs

Size	Organisations allocated over 10 million NOK combined for the three case countries between 2006 and 2015
Depth	Organisations that were active in at least one of the countries for more than 5 years and that that were active in at least one of the case countries in 2015
Width	Organisations that were active in at least two of the case countries

In addition, the team added three Norwegian CSOs that were perceived as large and important: Norwegian People's Aid, Norwegian Red Cross and Caritas Norway. This resulted in a sample of 17 Norwegian CSOs.

The criteria for selecting the 13 partnerships for country visits are described in box 2.3.

BOX 2.3 // CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF PARTNERSHIPS FOR COUNTRY VISITS

Length	Length of partnerships (more than 5 years old and be current or recently completed).
Similarities	Similarities of approaches across different contexts.
Representativeness	Representativeness of the Norwegian CSOs' local partners, sectors and approach.
Inclusion	Inclusion of main sectors and types of Southern CSOs, including focus on either capacity building of partners or activities.

The selected partnerships are presented in country summaries provided in Annex 1, 2 and 3.

2.3 MIXED METHODS AND TRIANGULATION

The team used a mix of methods to support triangulation and validity in the data collection. We did a literature survey, conducted semi-structured interviews with Norwegian CSOs and local partners, conducted a survey among Norwegian CSOs, focus groups discussion and key informant interviews. Significant amounts of data were collected. To elaborate on these data sources:

2.3.1 Document review

The team has reviewed a large amount of documents, including strategic/policy documents related to partnership and development work; main project documents between Norad and the CSOs in the sample; main project documents between the Norwegian CSO and the local partner(s); and relevant reviews and evaluations. For the selected partnerships, we collected and reviewed, when feasible and available, additional documents from the southern partner, e.g. reports from project activities and other project documents and financial reports.

We reviewed a large body of existing literature from evaluation studies and from academic research. We mined references in initially available reports to identify other relevant literature and documentation. This includes

all the main recent evaluation reports from bilateral aid agencies on civil society support through northern CSOs. Additionally, the team used Norwegian Aid Statistics to collect and analyse data related to mapping of Norwegian aid to civil society.

An annotated bibliography of the most relevant evaluation studies and academic literature is provided in Annex 5. The full reference to all documents specifically mentioned in the text are provided in footnotes in the relevant chapters and annexes.

2.3.2 Key stakeholder interviews

The core team conducted interviews with staff from all Norwegian CSOs included in the sample of partnerships reviewed. The majority of these were conducted face to face, when this was not possible Skype/telephone was used. We also met with other stakeholder and officials, including staff from Norad Civil Society Department.

In the three case countries, the respective country teams interviewed staff of selected local partners and beneficiaries. The team also conducted focus group interviews with ultimate beneficiaries when this was deemed relevant (especially in service delivery projects) and when logistics made this possible. In addition,

TABLE 2.2 // PERSONS INTERVIEWED – STATISTICAL SUMMARY

	Norway	Ethiopia	Nepal	Uganda	Total
Interviews:					
Female	30	10	31	24	93
Male	16	35	62	27	140
Total interviewees	46	45	93	51	233
Group discussions/meetings:					
Female		33	70		103
Male		21	39		60
Youth		20			20
Total met in groups	0	74	109	65	248
Total	46	119	202	116	481

the country teams interviewed staff of regional/ country offices of Norwegian CSOs, and offices of international organisations acting as an intermediary, Norwegian embassy staff, National/ local authorities where relevant and other relevant stakeholders and informants. The team met with a total of 481 persons, as in shown in table 2.2.

Annex 5 provides a list of persons and groups the team interviewed or discussed with.

2.3.3 On-line survey

The online survey collected perceptions data from a broader set of Norwegian CSOs with partners in in Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda regarding their approach to partnership, capacity

building of partner organisations and support to strengthening civil society in target countries. The survey was sent to 47 persons representing 44 Norwegian CSOs. The response rate was 90% and included responses from 40 organisations.

Findings from the survey are presented in Annex 7.

2.3.4 Country visits

The team conducted parallel field studies in the three case countries over a three-week period. We conducted interviews and where relevant focus group discussion to collect information about the local partners' views on the partnership with the Norwegian CSO and other issues

related to the evaluation questions. At the end of the fieldwork, each country team arranged a workshop to give local partners the opportunity to discuss and comment on the initial findings from the visit. The country teams recorded data in brief interview notes and summarised the findings on each partnership using a standardised template. The findings from each country are summarised in Annex 1, 2 and 3.

2.3.5 Limitations

The findings and conclusions in this evaluation is to a large extent based on a selected number of partnerships in three countries, but also supported by evidence collected from international evaluation literature, reviews and academic studies. A broad range of representatives from Norwegian CSOs were also interviewed and included in a survey covering most Norwegian CSOs with partnerships in the three countries.

3. How are funds from Norad’s civil society grant allocated? A mapping of Norwegian support

In the 2006-2015 period, more than NOK 13 billion was allocated from the budget line for civil society strengthening in developing countries (Ch. 160.70). In this chapter, the team has mapped the allocations from this budget line – hereafter referred to as the Norad civil society grant. We have also identified the main Norwegian CSOs involved in the three country cases – Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda. In addition, we have compared this to civil society allocations from other budget sources.

The allocations from Norad’s civil society grant has remained fairly constant in the evaluation period as a share of the total Norwegian aid budget – around 4-5% per year, or about NOK 1 billion in 2006 and NOK 1.9 billion in 2015. Table 3.1 summarises Norwegian aid to civil society to Nepal, Ethiopia and Uganda as well as the total global flows in the period 2006-2015. It compares data on aid from the Norad civil society grant delivered through Norwegian CSOs for civil society strengthening with aid channelled through international CSOs and/or directly to civil society in the three countries; other Norwegian aid channelled to or through

TABLE 3.1 // NORWEGIAN AID TO CIVIL SOCIETY IN ETHIOPIA, NEPAL, UGANDA AND GLOBALLY (2006 – 2015) (NOK MILLION)

	Ethiopia	Nepal	Uganda	Global
Long term aid for civil society strengthening through Norwegian CSOs (Norad’s civil society grant)	560.0	391.2	620.9	12901.5
Long term aid through international CSOs and direct to civil society in the recipient country (Norad’s civil society grant)	0.3	1.7	1.8	245.3
Aid from other budget sources channelled through Norwegian and international CSOs and/or directly to local CSOs	672.5	444.0	672.1	25187.0
Total Norwegian development aid	2 631.5	2771.7	3940.2	2 69189.0

Source: Norad’s Norwegian Aid Statistics, Access to microdata

civil society organisations; and total Norwegian aid to these countries.

There are several notable findings emerging from Table 3.1. One is the sheer dominance of Norwegian CSOs in disbursements from the civil society grant. More than 98% of the funds are channelled through them. This has been relatively constant in the period under review. A second main finding is that the amount flowing to or through civil society organisation from other budget sources is significant;

in fact, the volume of allocations from other sources is much bigger than allocations from the civil society grant in all three countries. The share of funding from other budget sources has increased over time – from an average of less than 10% to over 20% at the end of the evaluation period. Much of the expansion is linked to the expansion of humanitarian aid with Norwegian and international CSOs being major channels for disbursement, but the growth in a variety of thematic priorities in the Norwegian aid budget – from climate resilient agriculture

to education and health – has contributed to increased use CSOs in disbursement of aid.

Funding from other sources in the three case countries are for a variety of purposes. Much is for humanitarian interventions such as relief operations related to food security/drought and refugees in Ethiopia or the earthquake in Nepal, but the evaluation team also noted that there are significant allocations related to long-term development programmes, including civil society strengthening. It is also significant to note that a greater share of disbursements from the other budget sources are channelled through international CSOs and also directly to local civil society compared to the disbursement pattern from the Norad civil society grant. This is discussed further with more details in the separate country studies annexed to this main report (Annex 1, 2 and 3).

3.1 NORWEGIAN CSOs IN ETHIOPIA, NEPAL AND UGANDA

In the case of Uganda and Ethiopia, the Norwegian Embassies provide funding to multi-donor funds for civil society strengthening. In Ethiopia, there is also currently major additional funding to some of the bigger Norwegian CSOs receiving funding from the civil society grant (in particular the Norwegian Church Aid, Save the Children and the Development Fund). This funding often

involves the same local partners. See more on this in the country annexes.

The table in annex 4 lists all Norwegian CSOs that are or have been receiving funding from the Norad civil society grant for civil society strengthening in Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda in the 2006-2015 period. In total, 44 out of 205⁴ Norwegian CSOs receiving funds from the civil society grant have been active in at least one of the three countries in the period. Taken together the three case countries account for 12 per cent of total Norwegian long-term support for civil society strengthening through Norwegian CSOs. Nearly all the major Norwegian CSOs receiving funds from civil society grant are active in one of the three countries.

There is significant variation concerning the level of financial engagement in the case countries between the different organisations. Five organisations (Save the Children Norway, Digni, Plan Norway, Atlas Alliance, and the Norwegian Church Aid) account for over 60% of the funding in the three case countries. Around half of the organisations have received relatively small amounts from the civil society grant. 19 Norwegian CSOs were active in at least one of the three case countries in the 2006-2015

⁴ Here umbrella bodies or organisations are treated as one organisation.



Meeting with staff of Mary Joy Development Association, a child rights organisation established with the support from Save the Children Norway. PHOTO: ELLING N. TJØNNELAND

period, while 27 organisations were active for a period for more than five years. Six organisations were active in all three countries, while 17 were active in at least two.⁵

⁵ These figures treat umbrella organisations as one organisation. Of the relevant member organisations in Digni, Atlas Alliance and FOKUS, only The Norwegian Organisation of the Blind and Partially Sighted were active in two countries (Nepal and Uganda), the rest were only active in one of the sample countries. All organisations were present for five years or more.

Thematically the Norwegian CSOs are active in several areas, reflecting different origins and profiles of the Norwegian CSOs. However, in general there is much focus on organisation and community mobilisation related to service delivery (in particular rural development and education), but also some efforts to engage and provide policy advocacy at national level (education, disability). Various programmes addressing gender issues also feature prominently. The country context and political constraints on CSO activities also shape the profile and focus on Norwegian CSO engagement. The country annexes provide further details of the thematic profile of the Norwegian CSO support.

The team selected 17 of these Norwegian CSOs for further study. They are listed in Table 3.2. They were selected based on size, length of engagement and geographical breadth (cf. Chapter 2 on methodology). Further details are provided in the country annexes.

TABLE 3.2 // SELECTED SAMPLE OF NORWEGIAN CSOs

Norwegian CSO	Size (Share of Norad civil society funding to country – 2006 - 2015) *		
	Ethiopia	Nepal	Uganda
Atlas Alliance <i>The Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted, The Norwegian Federation of Organizations of Disabled People, The Norwegian Association of Disabled</i>		19%	8%
Caritas Norway			9%
The Norwegian Bar Association		3%	4%
Digni <i>Norwegian Lutheran Mission, Norwegian Missionary Society</i>	26%	9,5%	2%
FOKUS – Forum for Women and Development <i>Norwegian Women's Public Health Association, Sagal Help to Self-Help Organisation</i>	3%		2%
Norwegian Church Aid	16%	2%	0,3%
The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions	1%		1%
Norwegian People's Aid	11%		
Plan Norway	5%	13%	10%
Norwegian Red Cross		4%	
Save the Children Norway	27%	21%	26%
Strømme Foundation		4%	6%
The Development Fund	2%	11%	

* Based on data derived from Norad Aid Statistics, Access to microdata

4. Partnership policies and practices: The relevance and value added of Norwegian Civil Society Organisations

All the Norwegian CSOs reviewed have policies guiding their approach to how they work with local partners. However, these policies vary quite significantly. This chapter will present and review the partnership approaches of the Norwegian CSOs, the partnership characteristics, and assess the relevance and value added of the Norwegian CSOs.

4.1 THEORY OF CHANGE, POLICIES AND APPROACHES

The team categorized the approach of the Norwegian CSOs according to whether they managed their support through an international association or federation (the *international network* approach), through a direct representation in the country (*country office* approach) or direct from head office/Secretariat in Norway via visits, electronic communication and phone calls (the *bilateral* approach). We examine and assess the partnership contribution of Norwegian CSOs in each of these three main approaches.

A first finding is that all the Norwegian CSOs – irrespective of approach - have poorly developed programme theories on how they

intend to strengthen civil society in developing countries. They have policies and guidelines for working with local partners, but effects at local and organisational level are not linked in any systematic way to strengthening of civil society in the country. In some cases, there are programme theories seeking to address improvement in certain sectors (e.g. in education). In most cases, the mid- and long-term outcomes are not identified in results frameworks. This also has implications for monitoring and evaluation, which rarely is able to provide data on outcomes in relation to civil society strengthening.

4.1.1 The international network approach

Several Norwegian CSOs, and an increasing number, are now working through their international associations – Plan Norway (Plan International), Save the Children (Save the Children International), Red Cross (International Committee of the Red Cross), Norwegian Church Aid (ACT alliance), World Wildlife Fund Norway (World Wildlife Fund) and others. Justified by concerns related to harmonization of donor support and aid effectiveness, we may see



Meeting with beneficiaries and local partners in Amaru, Northern Uganda.
PHOTO: STEINERIK KRUSE

further moves in this direction. In our country cases and sample, we examined two of these – Plan Norway and Save the Children Norway. They channel their support through strong country offices of international organisations.

Plan Norway

Plan Norway does not have a partnership policy separate from Plan International. Plan International tends to see local civil society partners as essential instruments for programme implementation. Plan International, according to their 2015 policy document on partnerships

*“helps realise children’s rights by working in partnership with other groups and organisations. We constantly work with: children’s groups, community groups, civil society organisations, government institutions and others ...All Country Strategic Plans and (national office) Programme Strategies and Project plans should include a strong focus on building effective partnerships. For instance, this means identifying the most appropriate partners to work with, as well as allocating enough time and money to strengthen capacities and build up effective partnerships.”*⁶

Plan Norway’s contribution revolves around providing professional inputs to thematic issues in relation to both Plan International and the relevant country offices.⁷ In Uganda and Nepal, Plan Norway considered Plan Uganda and Plan Nepal as its main partner. Plan Norway’s main professional input and relations was with the country office while the links to the Plan Norway-funded local partners was most often indirect and irregular.

Save the Children Norway

Save the Children Norway is in a different position. They also seek to play a stronger role in relation to country offices. It came

⁶ See Plan International’s 2015 *Building Better Partnerships* (<https://plan-international.org/publications/building-better-partnerships>). The quote is from p. 1 and 8.

⁷ See also the 2015 Norad commissioned review of Plan Norway, Erlend Nordby et al, *Review of Plan Norway and WWF*, Oslo: Scanteam (<http://www.scanteam.no/2016-06-09-12-31-45/2015/218-review-of-plan-norway-and-wwf-norway>).

out of a strong tradition of managing their own operational programmes in developing countries, but this gradually – from the 1990s - gave way to an approach emphasizing local partnerships. With the 2013 merger of the national Save the Children offices into one joint Save the Children International office in each country, the organisation now has one country programme and one partnership policy in all countries. The different northern Save the Children organisations brought different approaches and practices on partnerships to the table. Major Save the Children member organisations – such as Save the Children US and UK – tend to see local partners primarily as instruments for implementing a Save the Children country programme while Save the Children Norway and other likeminded Save the Children organisations in the Nordic countries more strongly may emphasise the civil society strengthening perspective. In other words, Save the Children International has one country programme, but each country office manages conflicting expectations from various national Save the Children members.⁸ Save the Children Norway’s strategy, applications

⁸ This is well captured in several recent evaluations reports. See Swedish Development Advisors (2015), *Review of Save the Children Norway (SCN) Final Report* (unpublished, submitted to Norad), and Naomi Blight and Judith Friedman (2017), *Save the Children Norway Partnership Review. Final Report*. IOD Parc. (commissioned by Save the Children Norway) (<https://www.reddbarna.no/?nid=988436&pid=RB-DMFileBase-DownloadFile>).

and reports to Norad emphasises support to civil society organisations and stresses the importance of building a strong civil society. This is linked to an approach emphasizing cooperation between several types of partners, including also government and public institutions. They emphasise a programme approach to advancing children rights with civil society organisations being one of several actors. Civil society organisations may work within a programme area to improve conditions at local level or pursue advocacy at the national level. Substantial allocation from the Norad civil society grant are also often disbursed to government partners. The support to government is linked to e.g., specific improvement of policy frameworks (child rights) or delivery of services (education). Save the Children Norway also distinguishes between strategic and implementing civil society partners. Strategic partners are long-term relationships built around programmes and advocacy, but also includes resources for strengthening the capacity of the partners. Implementing partners are linked to delivery in programmes only, and are often of more short-term nature.⁹

⁹ Cf. Redd Barna, *Investing in children, Save the Children Norway Strategy 2014-2018* (<https://www.reddbarna.no/om-oss/organisasjonen/verdi-og-strategi?iid=1006054&pid=RB-BaseContentRB-Files.Native-InnerFile-File&attach=1>). See also the unpublished memo from Redd Barna, *Partnerskap og styrking av siviltt samfunn* (notat, 2017).

Save the Children Norway seeks to influence the new joint Save the Children International through participation in various global working groups (Norway currently chairs the group on education and participates in the working group on partnership) and – perhaps more importantly – through specific country engagement plans directly with Save the Children International’s country offices. The Norad grant is used to fund special components (the “Norad programme”) in Save the Children’s country programmes. Save the Children Norway seeks to contribute to the country office by providing thematic support and advice based on the formulation of annual “country engagement” plans with each country.

Save the Children International is also addressing the issue of partnership through a current development of a global partnership policy. Formally, it appears similar to what Save the Children Norway has developed. Save the Children International states in the most recent version seen by the team, that it has strategic partners at local and national level (and international). These partnerships are long-term, with on-gong collaborative programming (including advocacy) objectives. They include necessary capacity strengthening activities to ensure that each partner is able to create sustainable changes for children as part of a shared vision of achieving breakthroughs.

Then Save the Children have implementing partners. These are partnerships that contribute to specific program or project results through access, knowledge or skills that Save the Children does not have, often through time-bound budgeted partnership agreements. These partnerships are a functional way to meet Save the Children’s objectives.¹⁰

4.1.2 The country office approach

The Norwegian Church Aid, the Strømme Foundation and the Development Fund are examples of Norwegian development CSOs with country offices in their main countries of engagement. The largest of them - the Norwegian Church Aid - has in recent years developed a comprehensive partnership policy and associated tools and instruments for selecting, assessing, and supporting partners.

The Norwegian Church Aid

The Norwegian Church Aid understands partnership as a mutually empowering relationship where the partners are challenged, open to change, and where they and their partners learn from one another. It sees partnership as a way of strengthening civil society. The Norwegian

¹⁰ See e.g., the unpublished 2017 *Partnership framework* document. A series of new tools and instruments for engagement with partners are also being developed. This includes e.g. a standardized manual for assessment of local partners.

Church Aid will contribute to strengthening partners’ capacities to participate in formal and informal networks, their organisational development and financial capacity.

The organisation has adopted a rights-based approach to development, whereby the government is the principal duty bearer with a responsibility to respect, promote and realise human rights. The underlying principles for this rights-based approach are: Participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment. They define active citizenship as people acting in solidarity with others, participating in the transformation of their communities and seeking just decisions from their leaders. Through both its long-term goals – to save lives and seek justice – the organisation envisions communities where people are active participants in their own development and organise themselves to claim their rights.

Norwegian Church Aid believes that to reach its long-term goals, there needs to be different partnership categories, each with different rights and responsibilities. Core partners are the primary link to local communities and national authorities. They are most often faith-based partners.

They have also a second type of more strategic partners that are selected based on relevance

and need for specific programmes. These partners are typically community based organisations or NGOs. Sometimes, the organisation also operate with a category of resource partners – specialised, professional organisations and institutions in relevant fields, which are resource organisations for faith-based partners.¹¹

The Norwegian Church Aid has also sought to develop programme theories for the different intervention areas identifying how community mobilisation and civil society are central to the programme. For example, in the case of the main programme on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Ethiopia the underlying logic is

“if rural communities are to have sustainable access to safe and adequate and sustainable WASH facilities and services for their improved health and well-being, the rights holders need to participate, get organized, capacitated with knowledge and means for consultative change processes such as community dialogue/discussions, committees for management and protection of WASH schemes and introducing and managing users fees for scheme maintenances, and work with relevant government stakeholders at all levels to ensuring sustainability.

11 See these documents from the organisation: *Norwegian Church Aid Partnership Policy* (2015), *NCA partnership assessment 2016-2020, Mapping of organisational, accountability, advocacy and financial capacities, Information for NCA Country Offices* (n. d.), and *NCA partnership assessment 2016-2020, Questionnaire* (NCA n. d.).

Then the target communities will have access to water supply, and sanitation and hygiene facilities and services on sustainable basis.

Because sustainability of WASH schemes is largely dependent on timely maintenances and repair, which are the function of a smooth transfer of skills and responsibilities to the target communities.

Because improved health and well-being of the target communities is dependent on increased awareness and behavioural change of households towards good sanitation and hygiene.”¹²

The Strømme Foundation

The Strømme Foundation has historically emphasized results in programme interventions (education and microfinance) more than partnerships, but it has increasingly emphasised the need to work through and systematically strengthen partners. The Strømme Foundation has developed partnership policies for providing a platform for a new approach to partners. In the introduction to the 2013 Partner Assessment tool, it is stated:

12 The quote is from p. 14 in the NCA Ethiopia office (2017), *Ethiopia Annual Report 2016*.

“A key feature of our development cooperation strategy is our partnership model. We work entirely through local implementing partner organisations in our intervention countries. Although this may be a demanding structure, we believe it ensures a cost-effective, culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate approach to development. When problems and solutions are locally defined, we believe there will be better, longer-term results for our target groups. This approach will also ensure that acquired competency stays in the communities and that the capacity of local civil society is strengthened.”¹³

The Strømme Foundation does not consider itself as an operational agency in developing countries, but aims at fulfilling its vision, mission and strategic objectives by collaborating with local organisations. The partner organisations have the mandate to plan, implement, document the results and report to the Regional Offices within the agreed framework, and in consultation with the primary stakeholders on the ground.

13 See the unpublished *Partner Selection Criteria & Partner Assessment Tool. A tool for selecting and assessing SF's Implementing Partners* (Strømme Foundation, 2013). See also Elling N. Tjønneland & Espen Villanger (2014) *The Strømme Foundation. An organisational review* (Oslo: Norad/ Norad report 3/2014) (<https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2014/the-stromme-foundation.-an-organisational-review/>)

On the other hand, despite such a policy, we note that Strømme Foundation is still using the term “implementing partner” in its internal documents reflecting an instrumental use of partners for achieving their own objectives. This also included the partnership document itself.

It should also be noted that a partnership for the Strømme Foundation should normally last for five years – to avoid long-term dependence on one donor. On the other hand, contracts can be extended. The open call for suitable unknown “weak” partners in poor regions of Uganda for example, bears a high level of risk. It has been necessary for the Strømme Foundation in Uganda to terminate funding to some partners because of financial irregularities and underperformance.

The Development Fund

The Development Fund is a solidarity non-governmental organisation, with the speciality of promoting rural development, food security, agricultural biodiversity as well as agricultural adaptation to climate change. The Development Fund seeks to concentrate its work primarily on eliminating hunger and food insecurity. This is done through supporting farmers and target communities to make the farming system more robust and more beneficial. The Development Fund puts strong emphasis on advocacy and dialog with the government

sector. The Fund supports partner organisations and target groups to engage with the governments to advocate policies that improve small-scale farmers’ situation.

The Development Fund works mainly through local civil society organizations – mostly CSOs specializing on rural development issues, but it may also be smaller CBOs. Institutional development of these is considered an integral part of a programme intervention and are often defined as one outcome area. The main tool for this is to carry out institutional assessment of partners at regular intervals, and use such tools as both baseline and guidelines for institutional development.¹⁴

4.1.3 The bilateral model

The “bilateral” organisations Digni, the Atlas Alliance, Caritas and the Norwegian Trade Union Federation tend to select partners based on shared values and common interests. They often collaborate with very likeminded organisations. The Norwegian Trade Union Federation partners with trade unions; Caritas Norway partners with Caritas in other countries; The Norwegian Association of the Blind and

¹⁴ See Jarle Haarstad et al. (2009), *Organisational Review of the Development Fund*, Oslo: Scanteam (Norad Report 31/2009 Review) (<https://www.norad.no/om-bistand/publikasjon/2009/organisational-review-of-the-development-fund/>) and KPMG (2015), *Norad Review of the Development Fund Norway* (unpublished, commissioned by Norad).

Partially Sighted and other in the Atlas Alliance seek partnership with similar organisations; and the Norwegian Missionary Society, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission and others in Digni partner with Churches and related faith-based organisations. Typically, each Norwegian CSO may have only one partner in the country of engagement.

These Norwegian CSOs typically provide support for strengthening of the capacity of their partners and assist in programmes. They often also belong to similar international networks. In most cases, these Norwegian CSOs do not have any country offices, but manage their partnership from Norway.¹⁵ The main exceptions in our country cases are the Norwegian Missionary Society and the Norwegian Lutheran Mission. They have country offices in Ethiopia, but this is mainly linked to facilitating their overall evangelical relations with the Mekane Yesus Church with the development work funded by Norad being a small component of their total engagement with the Church.

4.2 PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

All the Norwegian CSOs active in the three country cases work through local partners

¹⁵ The Norwegian Association of the Disabled also follows the bilateral model, but they have combined this with the hiring of technical officer in Kampala to assist with the partnerships in Uganda.

and seek to achieve results through them. Below we have summarised our main findings in relations to selection of partners and approach to capacity building, programme development and implementation, and coordination and complementarity in the partnerships studied. We examined a total of 13 Norwegian CSOs and 6 of their partnerships in Ethiopia, 7 in Uganda and 9 in Nepal. We have also drawn upon relevant findings from other Norwegian partnerships in the country and from evaluation studies.

4.2.1 Selection of local partners

Broadly, local partners are identified and selected either because they are the natural partner based on shared values or interest, or because of programme needs.¹⁶ None of the Norwegian CSOs identifies and select local partners based on any overarching assessment or analysis of the needs or challenges facing civil society or democratization in the country.

Our survey of Norwegian CSOs with partners in Ethiopia, Nepal or Uganda also illustrates this (see the presentation of the survey in annex 7). When asked what their main approach to identifying and selecting local partners are,

¹⁶ Unless otherwise mentioned the data for this information is derived from the country annexes to this report.

28 per cent of the respondents answered that their organisation searched for partners with common values and interests. 21 percent answered that they searched for organisations with the ability and capacity to promote political and social change, while 17 percent sought local organisations that could implement programs and projects. The remaining third highlighted various other issues. Almost all of the respondents either specified their organisation's approach in detail, or selected multiple answer options, indicating that there is also a multitude of approaches within organisations.

The survey also indicates that Norwegian CSOs believe that their partner organisations have at least equal influence as themselves on most aspects of the support from initiation of partnership to planning and implementation of joint projects, and that they believe that their partner's influence grows the closer one gets to project implementation.

Findings from visits to local partners confirms that that they have largely been "found" by the Norwegian CSOs. This may have been through the Norwegian CSO coming to them with offers of cooperation, or through open or closed calls for expression of interest or applications. This has typically been followed by various form of

assessments of the local partners. Most local partners visited have been long-term partners (more than three years/one programme cycle).

Organisations like the Digni-affiliated missionary organisations, the trade unions, Caritas Norway or interest organisations for the disabled in the Atlas Alliance all have "natural" partners and stay with them. In many cases, such as Caritas in Uganda or Norwegian Association of Disabled and also Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted the partnership has been long-term – more than twenty years. In Nepal, the partnerships under the Atlas Alliance started with an aim to support the partner organisations' capacity to represent their members locally. The first contact varies: in the case of Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted and Nepal Association of the Blind, their relationship started when representatives of the two organisations met at an international conference. In some cases, there may be outside "third parties" that have encouraged the Norwegian CSO to be involved as was the case with the trade unions in Ethiopia (here the Embassy actively encouraged the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and the Norwegian Employers Association to engage with their Ethiopian counterparts).

Several Norwegian CSOs also select partners based on programme needs. This is done in several ways – from using country experience/ knowledge to open calls/invitations in national newspapers. It has often included informal assessments, visits to the country to identify potential partners, or partner selection has emerged out of previous engagements (e.g., a response to a humanitarian crisis that then lead to a development programme with a partner in the area). However, we have seen an increasing professionalization in partner selection based on the combination of needs and assessments of potential partners. The Strømme Foundation has one of the most systematic processes to select intervention areas and partners. In Uganda, they map country needs by looking at poverty in different districts and select districts with high levels of poverty and few donors. Then they search for partners – not the strongest, but the weaker with a potential to grow and being in line with what the Strømme Foundation wants to achieve. Because of such partner identification, the Strømme Foundation may end up with a group of unknown partners – with greater potential to grow, but also fail.

In Ethiopia, the Development Fund revisited the composition and selection of local partners in 2016-2017. They invited all members of Ethiopia's civil society network of rural development NGOs

to submit a concept note on how they could contribute to the Fund's Ethiopia programme. Based on these and a systematic partner assessment a final list of 10 partners were selected (based on about 50 concept notes received).¹⁷

Norwegian Church Aid relies on a combination of the two approaches. It has series of core partners that, in the case of Ethiopia, are all the main faith-based organisations in the country. They have development programmes with most of them. These remain partners for the foreseeable future. Then they have strategic partners selected based on needs of the three development programmes they have in the country.

In the two “international network” cases studied – Plan and Save the Children – the role of the Norwegian CSO is less well documented. Nominally, all partner selection is done by the country office, but there is strong involvement by the Norwegian CSOs in the design of the Norad-funded programmes in Uganda and Ethiopia (data was not collected on this in the Nepal case). In the case of child rights/ protection in Ethiopia, the Norad-funded programme will include funding both for local CSOs,

¹⁷ Interview with the Ethiopia Director of the Development Fund, 24 August 2017.

for government-owned media outlets, university departments (degree programme in child rights) and relevant government departments. The civil society partners visited are partners originally emerging out of the old Save the Children Norway programme with some additions and changes relating to other partners.¹⁸ This was also coordinated with the other donors in this thematic area, including a division of labour in supporting partners in the programme (the programme is fully funded by the three Scandinavian Save the Children organisations). The Norad-funded civil society partners in Uganda and Ethiopia are - in Save the Children Norway's terminology - long-term strategic partners. In the case of Nepal, the selection of partners is *de facto* based on a tender process.

Beyond selecting the local partner, there is also often another dimension to the selection process: selection of geographic target areas or project sites. For some this is done by the Norwegian CSO (e.g., the Strømme Foundation in Uganda), for others it may be a result of request from the local partner or joint consultation (e.g. the partnerships

¹⁸ The two civil society partners visited by the team all emerged out of the Redd Barna programme in the 1990s. When they closed their operational programmes and shifted to a strategy of funding local partners several local staff established CSOs. These two organisations have remained partners since. Others have been phased out and in the new education programme there are new partners.

between the Norwegian Lutheran Mission and the Norwegian Missionary Society with the Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia).

In Ethiopia, there is also another dimension: the strong influence by the government in the selection and choice of geographic areas (woredas and kebeles) for programme intervention. In the case of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission-supported project with the Mekane Yesus Church in South Omo (the Bena-Tsamai Capacity Building Project), the authorities said no to include the district next to Bena-Tsamai because they felt that there too many NGOs involved in that area.

4.2.2 Capacity building

All Norwegian CSOs provide support for capacity building of their partners, but the scope and focus vary widely. This may reflect both priorities of the Norwegian CSOs and needs of the local partners. However, an important finding is that all Norwegian CSOs reviewed now identifies organisational development of their local partner(s) as a main issue. For most, it is the key or main component in their contribution to civil society strengthening. The approach and efforts put into this varies considerably between the Norwegian CSOs, but the findings from the local partners are that this is welcomed and appreciated.

The Norwegian Church Aid, Strømme Foundation and the Development Fund in Ethiopia now uses partner assessments as a basis for identifying base lines and plans for capacity building support in the programme period. In the case of Norwegian Church Aid in Ethiopia for example, following a partner assessment, three of their core/faith-based partners were prioritized in 2016 for capacity building in financial management and reporting. For one of these core partners funding was suspended for a year.

In Uganda, we noted that both Caritas Norway, the Norwegian Association of the Disabled and the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted had a particular long history of capacity building support. In the beginning, the support for their Ugandan partners was focused on strengthening the organisational capacity. Programmes and projects were added at a later stage. The organisational growth of their Ugandan partners has been organic and incremental. The partnership has been influenced by a few key individuals and in all the cases the Norwegian partner has been the dominant donor. The same development over time was found in Nepal in the partnerships between Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted and Nepal Association of the Blind, Norwegian Federation of Organisations of

Disabled People and National Federation of the Disabled – Nepal. The Norwegian Church Aid's support for Tamira has followed a similar pattern – beginning with a focus on building organisational capacity and then expanding into other areas as the organisation grows.

The international organisations have a stronger “instrumental” approach to local partners. Organisational support may be provided – especially in relation to strategic civil society partners (in Save the Children terminology) – but will often be linked to programme implementation. Among the Norwegian CSO working through international organisations, Save the Children Norway has pushed for a capacity development approach that goes beyond programme implementation. This is mentioned in the country engagement plan in relation to Uganda and especially Ethiopia; although it is less clear to the team how and to what extent this has led to any special efforts by the country office of Save the Children. We noted that the country office has carried out – with the help of local consultants – a comprehensive organisational assessment of one of the civil society partners visited. This has included identification of strengths and weaknesses, which went well beyond programme implementation, but not much seem to have happened since then.

Common to nearly all the Norwegian CSOs providing support in this area is the strong emphasis on support for organisational capacities to monitor and report, and much less emphasis on issues related to internal governance and strategic development. This reflects stronger demands from donors and may in some cases have led to compliance issues becoming a central feature of many partnerships. In the Ethiopian context, this has been reinforced by government demands for reporting under the NGO regulations. However, the limited engagement may also reflect a certain reluctance to enter into the more sensitive dimensions of organisational development. This may often lead to an emphasis on the reporting dimension combined with capacity development linked to programme implementation.

The special regulations on CSOs in Ethiopia has had some particular impact on capacity building and partner relations. For example, more capacity building activities is now implemented by Norwegian CSOs for the partner rather than by the partner (local partners cannot spend more than 30% of the support on administrative costs, including capacity building, training and networking).

4.2.3 Programme development and implementation

Several of the Norwegian CSOs also provide much professional and thematic support related to programme development, design and implementation. For some Norwegian CSOs managing this from the Norwegian “bilateral” side, the support may be more limited, sometimes mainly inspirational or more related to programme management. The support from the Norwegian trade unions and the members of the Atlas Alliance may illustrate this, while some Norwegian CSOs with country offices are able to provide much support on technical advice and support in programme implementation with service delivery components. On the other hand, some Norwegian CSOs have also provided strong professional advice and support through the “bilateral” model. Examples of this will be the Norwegian Association of the Disabled with its support for inclusive micro-finance to its partner in Uganda, or Caritas’ new project on aquaculture also in Uganda.

The Norwegian Church Aid, the Strømme Foundation and the Development Fund may provide much support on these issues where they have country offices. For example, in the case of Norwegian Church Aid’s support to Tamira’s new “Safe Youth and Maternal Health

Programme” in Ethiopia the Norwegian Church Aid provided professional support in different ways. It helped develop the questionnaire that was used in needs assessments (interviews with stakeholders, focus groups) and helped crystalize the findings from the survey. They also helped facilitate training of Tamira staff before the launch and attended Tamira’s sensitizing workshop with communities, government and other CSOs. They also helped with specific training related to the new maternal health care component, including trainer of trainers. Beyond this Norwegian Church Aid formally visits the programme twice a year for monitoring purposes in addition to more frequent informal visits. Tamira itself, in interviews with the evaluation team, spoke highly of the relevance and quality of the professional support received from the Norwegian partner.

The Development Fund’s professional support to partners visited in Nepal (where they do not have a country office) was far more limited.

The international organisations (Plan and Save the Children in our case) are able to provide much professional and technical assistance to local partners. In Ethiopia, the local partners visited in the Child Rights programme highlighted support from the thematic advisers in Save the Children’s country office. They also benefited

from the informal networking between the partners supported through the programme.

The Norwegian CSOs have also in some instances provided support seeking to make a strategic contribution to address national policy issues. One example is the initiatives of the Norwegian Church Aid to facilitate inter-faith cooperation involving all the main Churches in Ethiopia. Another example, although on much smaller and more modest scale, is the efforts by the Norwegian Trade Unions to facilitate dialogue between the trade unions and employers in Ethiopia. In Uganda, the Norwegian CSOs in the Atlas Alliance has made strong efforts to build vocal national partners.

Finally, we must note that in the case of Ethiopia, the Norwegian CSOs have played an important role in supporting local partners in adapting to and coping with the new national regulations curtailing the way local partners can operate.

In none of the partnerships did we find examples of local partners being excluded from project and programme development. They are – but to different degrees – involved in this process. In a few cases, where the local partner is (or has become) a strong development NGO, the local partner may take a stronger lead. One example is the Development Fund’s national-level partnership

with the Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development in Nepal.

4.2.4 Coordination and complementarity in partnerships

The team noted very little cooperation and even coordination between the Norwegian CSOs receiving support from Norad’s civil society grant. The Norwegian CSOs largely operate independently of each other even when work within the same sector (e.g. three Norwegian organisations support education in Uganda). The partial exception is Norwegian CSOs being members of umbrella bodies (Digni and Atlas). This ensures some division of labour and facilitates sharing of experiences.¹⁹ There is however little coordination on the ground and in programme implementation. In Ethiopia, we noted that three different Norwegian CSOs have partnership with the Mekane Yesus’ Development and Social Services Commission all focusing in rural development projects (but in different geographic regions), but with no coordination in relation to capacity building support to the local partner.

There are some joint programmes between

19 See more on the role of umbrella bodies in NIRAS and CMI (2014) *Added costs. Added value? Evaluation of Norwegian support through and to umbrella and network organisations in civil society*, Oslo: Norad Evaluation Department (Evaluation Report 5/2014) (<https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2014/evaluation-of-norwegian-support-through-and-to-umbrella-and-network-organisations-in-civil-society/>)

the Norwegian CSOs and some informal communication. This includes the cooperation between the Save the Children and the Norwegian Church Aid in combating female genital mutilation in Ethiopia and between Norwegian Church Aid and the Development Fund - also in Ethiopia. These initiatives are however, funded from other Norwegian aid sources than the civil society grant. There have also been consultations between Strømme Foundation and Uganda National Association of the Disabled about micro-finance, but no formal communication between Norwegian CSOs in Uganda.

There are some examples of the same local CSO being supported by several Norwegian CSOs. These include current partnerships between both Save the Children and Plan with Child Rights Network in Uganda. In Nepal, Plan work with the same partners as both the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted and the Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People. In the Nepal cases, the support from the two Norwegian CSOs had different focus: The Plan partnerships focused on programme implementation, the partnerships with Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted and Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People had a strong focus on capacity building of the local partner.

TABLE 4.1 // THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH OF NORWEGIAN CSOs: INSTRUMENTAL VS INTRINSIC

Instrumental approach					Intrinsic approach
1	2	3	4	5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Plan International Norway (Uganda and Nepal) > Save the Children Norway (Uganda, Nepal and Ethiopia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Strømme Foundation (Uganda) > Norwegian Church Aid (Ethiopia) > Development Fund (Nepal) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Caritas Norway (Uganda) > The Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (Nepal and Uganda) > The Norwegian Association for the Disabled (Nepal and Uganda) > The Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People (Nepal) > The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (Ethiopia) > The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (Ethiopia) > Norwegian Church Aid (Ethiopia) > Strømme Foundation (Nepal) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Partners seen as means to implement pre-set objectives > Power monopolized by one partner > Sub-contracting > Capacity building goes down only > Accountability goes up only 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Strong partners are recognized as end in itself > Power shared between partners > Autonomous partners cooperating > Capacity building goes in both directions > Accountability goes in both direction

4.2.5 Instrumental vs intrinsic

In Table 4.1 we have summarised the discussion above by positioning the Norwegian CSOs studied on a continuum from having an instrumental approach to partnership – seeing partners as means to implement pre-set objectives to an intrinsic approach where strong partners are recognized as ends in themselves (see the country reports in the annex for further details).

4.3 RELEVANCE

The relevance of the Norwegian CSO's partnership with local partners have been assessed in relation to the needs of local partners, to local needs in the country and to Norwegian government priorities. The team's assessment in relation to local partners is generally positive. The evaluation found many examples of Norwegian CSOs suggesting and initiating projects that initially may have been met with some scepticism, but local partners have since been convinced and been supportive. Examples of such projects are several of the gender-related projects in Ethiopia (such as the Norwegian Missionary Society's women empowerment programme with the Mekane Yesus Church in Western Ethiopia or the maternal health component in the Norwegian Church Aid's project with Tamira).

There are some but few examples from our cases of Norwegian organisations exerting unwelcome pressure to include activities or project sites not prioritised by them. One example is one of the partnerships in Nepal where an interviewee questioned the relevance of including gender related activities as neither they nor the Norwegian partners had competence in this area. In Ethiopia, the evaluation team noted strong disagreements by the Development and Social Service Commission of the Mekane Yesus Church in relation to the Norwegian Lutheran Mission and their decision to phase out from certain Synods and move to new areas (Synods) based on the government's priority areas. Some of these areas are not prioritized by the Church. In Uganda, The Uganda National Association of the Blind noted that they were not qualified or interested in engaging in projects on blindness prevention suggested by the Norwegian Association of Blind and Partially sighted.

However, in the case of very large CSOs – such as the Save the Children's Ethiopia programme with its 50 offices, a staff of 2000 and an annual budget of USD 170 million – the evaluation did observe that some local partners complain that they find themselves small with limited ability to get its voice heard. The asymmetry relations between a donor and a recipient appears significant in such cases.

Relevance in relation to local context is a more challenging question. In relation to development needs on the ground, we note that that the relevance of programmes focusing on service delivery are often high. However, this also depends on whether we assess relevance in relation to priorities expressed by ultimate beneficiaries, by the state and local authorities, or by the local partner. One illustrative example of the Norwegian CSO support to local partners and programmes is in relation to female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia. The relevance may be high in relation to government policies, but it may not be the immediate priority of the local population. The increasing restrictions on civil society in Uganda and especially Ethiopia has also been addressed by Norwegian CSOs and many have managed to assist partners in coping with the situation and in enabling continued activities addressing empowerment and popular mobilisation. The relevance here may be high in relation to the needs of the local partner, but not necessarily in relation to needs of the government policies.

The evaluation found that relevance in relation to Norwegian development aid objectives is high. The partnership programmes are aligned with the broad grant scheme rules guiding the civil society allocations. In some cases –

especially evident in Ethiopia – we noticed that the large Norwegian CSOs active in the country (Save the Children, Norwegian Church Aid and the Development Fund) all have substantial funding from the Embassy and other Norwegian sources. This is support for projects that often amounts to an expansion and broadening of programmes implemented by the same Norwegian CSOs and their partners through the civil society grant.

There has also been a steady increase in Norwegian thematic priorities in the evaluation period and an increasing emphasis on the need for Norwegian CSOs to report on results. This may put pressure on Norwegian CSOs to select partners able to deliver in accordance with Norwegian priorities and potentially weaken the priority of strengthening civil society. This has in our country cases also led to selection of new local partners and new priorities (e.g., in relation to climate change and agriculture in Ethiopia). However, the evaluation did find that this has led to reduced efforts by the Norwegian CSO to strengthen the individual partner. What we did note were examples of local partner adopting to Norwegian priorities and to develop work plans and programmes embracing new priorities. This raises questions about the sustainability of such projects.

4.4 THE VALUE ADDED OF NORWEGIAN CSOs

Before turning to results, we shall address the findings above from another angle: What is the added value of the Norwegian CSOs beyond transferring funds to the local partner? Table 2.1 in Chapter 2 summarised the three main approaches and criteria for assessing value added. The survey data indicate that the Norwegian CSOs themselves are relatively confident of their value. Over 80% of the respondents argue that their projects implemented in collaboration with their partners has resulted in favourable changes at least to some extent across all dimensions measured. This includes strengthening local civil society organisations beyond the concrete partner organisation. Over 60% of respondents indicate that their projects have improved the social situation of beneficiaries to a large or very large extent. Many respondents highlight both their organisations' contributions to capacity building and individual changes at the micro-level, while concrete examples of advocacy successes are rarer.

The Norwegian CSOs all attempt to address this issue in their reports to Norad and in interviews with the evaluation team, but they are not always very good in presenting and documenting what that "added value" is. Many of the organisational performance reviews of Norwegian CSOs commissioned by Norad's civil

society department also provide data on this, including perception of local partners.

The interviews with the Southern partners also gave a clear message. Most interviewees spoke highly of their relations with their Norwegian CSO partner. They viewed them more as partners than donors. Norwegian CSOs were perceived as friendly, flexible and predictable with long-term commitment.

The evaluation findings of the value added of Norwegian CSOs are listed below. They are summarised under three dimensions: professional/thematic; capacity strengthening; and contribution to networking and civil society (cf. Table 2.1).

4.4.1 Professional/thematic competence

Most Norwegian CSOs provide some value added and is able to professionally contribute to strengthen local partners. For some, this is linked to thematic advice and technical competence in programme development and implementation. This is mainly provided through country offices with strong thematic competence and through international organisations with major country programmes. Norwegian CSOs ability to contribute to their international associations/organisations primarily depends on their own thematic competence and ability

to contribute professionally to the country programme. Other professional inputs and contributions are less demanding and linked to project management. They are offered by country offices without strong thematic competence or even through a bilateral channel directly from Norway. Some, but few country offices are able to provide strong added value through an ability to initiate strategic initiatives. This depends on deep knowledge of the country context coupled with an extensive network and contacts in the country. This also applies to the international organisations.

The evaluation found that Norwegian CSOs working with a bilateral approach and managing their partnership directly from Norway often may be less able to provide professional skills and advice, especially linked to service delivery and programme delivery on the ground. This typically requires additional support and follow up from the Norwegian CSO or donor. However, the evaluation also found significant exceptions to this. In particular, the evaluation found that certain organisations such as interest organisations for disabled persons (in the Atlas Alliance) are able to provide strong professional support. This seems to be based on common values between the Norwegian CSO and its local partners and an ability to talk to each other based on shared experiences and interests.

There are also examples where they have introduced technical innovations with support from external expertise.

4.4.2 Organisational and financial competence

All Norwegian CSOs reviewed have a focus on such competence and are contributing to strengthening the organisational capacity of their partners. The dominant dimension has been on administrative and financial capacities and on programme implementation. There has not been much support related to governance and accountability functions. There have been important contributions through the bilateral as well as the country office approach, but less through international organisations, in our case studies. Some Norwegian CSOs as well the international organisations mainly seek to strengthen partners through programme implementation.

In many (but not all) partnerships, the evaluation team found limited attention to internal governance and accountability issues. This may also be linked to the fact that these issues also are highly sensitive. It will often be easier for Norwegian CSO to zoom in on reporting and financial management or programme management.

The evaluation found a noticeable shift in many partnerships over time. Many local partners get initial support for organisational development, which gradually gives way to a stronger focus on programmes. However, the team has come across very few examples of this giving way to provision of core funding to the local partner. Save the Children did report on a few examples of this.

4.4.3 Networking competence

Norwegian CSOs also help strengthen the networking capacity of their partners, although the contribution in this area appears less dominant compared to the other two dimensions above. This is also confirmed by findings from the survey.

For Norwegian CSOs working through international organisations the evaluation finds that the country offices of the international organisations are often strong in facilitating networking within their own programmes, but they often pay less attention to networks outside their own. The sheer size of many of their country programmes tend to reduce their interest in participating in network with others. For Norwegian CSOs with a country office or bilateral approach will in many instances contribute to networking. The findings from the evaluation are however, more mixed. Some, including many with only one local partner, do not put much emphasis on networking.

5. Results and sustainability

The previous chapter outlined and discussed the “added value” and contributions of the Norwegian CSOs through their partnerships. In this chapter, we will examine results in service delivery, advocacy and civil society strengthening. We will also address issues of sustainability.

There is a growing imperative for Norwegian CSOs to demonstrate and communicate results of their work. They have made good progress in recent years in improving their monitoring and evaluation framework and the quality of results reporting despite persistent gaps and needs for improvement.²⁰

Most reporting still focuses on activities and outputs in the provision of services. There is much less data and systematic reporting in the areas of advocacy and capacity strengthening. However, there is growing recognition of the need to focus on results at the level of outcomes

20 See Andante – tools for thinking AB (2013), *A Study of Monitoring and Evaluation in Six Norwegian Civil Society Organisations*, Oslo: Norad Evaluation Department (Norad Report 7/2012) (<https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2013/a-study-of-monitoring-and-evaluation-in-six-norwegian-civil-society-organisations/>).

(changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour) and systematic information about long-term impact including advocacy and capacity strengthening.²¹

5.1 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

Partnership is a core value and approach for Norwegian CSOs. The organisations all seek to achieve results – not alone – but indirectly through partnerships with Southern organisations. However, partnerships refer to quite different relationships, which influence how results are assessed and what counts as results. The Southern partners of Norwegian CSOs are diverse and each type of partnership

21 The relevant evaluation literature draws attention to major data problems. A long-standing concern about how to accurately assess the impact of discrete CSO projects has been the combined effect of common weaknesses: a lack of clarity concerning the precise objectives of projects and how they might best be assessed; poor or non-existent base-line data; inadequate monitoring and project completion reports (Roger Riddell & Stein-Erik Kruse (1997). *Searching for Impact and Methods: NGO Evaluation Synthesis Study. A Report prepared for the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Evaluation*, April 1997.). These concerns persist. For example, one of the key conclusions of the Norad evaluation of NGOs in East Africa was that “most projects lacked the data and information required to be able to measure changes in indicators for key results accurately” (Ternström Consulting AB, 2011. *Results of Development Cooperation through Norwegian NGOs in East Africa*. Norad. xvii, 50-66 and 76-7.) In trying to assess the contribution of CSO interventions to wider and long-term development outcomes, attribution problems abound and escalate, as the number of factors that could potentially influence development outcomes increases, and it becomes more and more difficult to trace the causal relationship between the CSO contribution and the development outcomes.

presents a different set of challenges with regard to monitoring and reporting of results. In Chapter 2 the evaluation team outlined the three criteria for assessing results of civil society support.²²

They are:

- › *Service delivery* – Southern CSO reach and deliver services to ultimate beneficiaries and subsequently monitor and report such results.
- › *Advocacy* – the role and significance of the partners in policy development, policy implementation and policy monitoring, such as:
 - Contribution to pro-poor policies through research/documentation, involvement in policy formulation at local and national level;
 - Monitoring policy implementation at community level; or
 - Holding governments accountable by providing feedback and demand rights.

22 These are developed based on the criteria outlined in the grant scheme rules for Norad’s civil society grant. The civil society support through Norwegian CSOs is expected to have an impact on the target group/beneficiaries, to promote democratisation, realise human rights and reduce poverty, and to contribute to achieving other thematic objectives in Norwegian development aid policies.

- › *Strengthening civil society* – the role of the Southern organisation in creating/ strengthening and sustaining networks and civil society in the country, such as:
 - Strengthened individual Southern CSOs.
 - Strengthened national/regional/ international networks.
 - Strengthened civil society.

The primary focus in this evaluation are organisational partnerships and effects on civil society and not individual development activities. Results for ultimate beneficiaries have been assessed for a sample of projects, but this evaluation was not designed as an impact assessment of all the hundreds of large and small development projects supported by Norwegian CSOs in Ethiopia, Uganda and Nepal. We have also made special efforts to listen to and document response and feedback from Southern partners. The following seeks to summarise main findings for each of the three categories of results.

5.2 SERVICE DELIVERY

The overall finding from evaluations, annual reports, interviews and selected projects is that most projects progress well – activities are implemented and outputs delivered as planned and short-term objectives are to a large extent achieved – even if there are

examples of projects which have had very little impact. This is in line with the wider evaluation literature on CSO projects.²³ In other words, individuals and communities benefit from direct and indirect support in areas such as health, education, micro-credit and agriculture. More widely, civil society organisations have provided and continues to provide social services (especially in health and education) to significant numbers of people. This is also the area that our survey indicates that Norwegian CSOs are most confident of their projects' performance. This was also confirmed in interviews with Southern partners and ultimate beneficiaries.

The challenges with CSO projects are more related to limited scope and coverage of interventions and weak or missing wider effects. Successes at the individual project level mask major concerns about the systemic impact and sustainability of CSO-funded interventions. Data are weak in terms of the numbers of people assisted by projects, because it has not been a priority for the organisations to gather such data. The numbers

²³ See summary in Norad (2012). *Tracking Impact*. p. 74. See also pp 259 in Roger Riddell (2007). *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* Oxford University Press, Roger Riddell & Stein-Erik Kruse (1997) *Searching for Impact and Methods: NGO Evaluation Synthesis Study. A Report prepared for the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Evaluation*, April 1997. For a recent review, see N. Banks, D. Hulme and M. Edwards (2015). *NGOs, States and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?* *World Development* 66, 707-718. See also the literature survey provided in Annex 6 which *inter alia* summarises several recent evaluations.

assisted in most of the projects visited in this evaluation were not particularly large: for most projects, we are talking of a few hundred people (sometimes fewer), not tens of thousands of direct beneficiaries. There are examples of large projects through Save the Children and Norwegian Church Aid with more extensive coverage, but most of the interventions are relatively small - with small budgets.

The Norwegian Church Aid in Ethiopia reports that in 2016 their three development programmes in that country reached 140 000 people through a series of interventions in several regional states and districts. In the main water, sanitation and hygiene programme, this includes nearly 100 000 people and construction of 7000 latrines in 100 villages in the Amhara and Tigray states. Some 4000 people benefited in the water and sanitation project visited by the evaluation team.

An evaluation carried out by Caritas Uganda provides an illustrative example of a successful and relatively large project reaching its set objectives: In the period 2013-2017 Caritas Uganda and Caritas Norway have been implementing a programme on improved governance and sustainable livelihoods in four regions of the country. The programme reaches 6000 households (30 000 people) annually. An external mid-term evaluation of the

programme in 2015 documented very good results of the programme and concluded that it was on good track to reaching its set of objectives. The evaluation from 2014 found “tremendous progress towards realization of the target outcomes” (see Annex 2 for more details). Other project evaluations come to the same conclusions.

Results have been more challenging within the broad thematic area of reproductive health in Ethiopia, which revolves around improved gender rights access to health facilities, reduction and prevention of female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices. The activities and outputs have been impressive and the alignment with government priorities excellent. However, this has been an uphill battle with many obstacles linked to social norms, traditional beliefs and attitudes. One of the most effective strategies used by the Norwegian Church Aid in Ethiopia in trying to change social norms around female genital mutilation is to work with religious leaders at national level so that they can take ownership of the issue and then work through their own institutional structures to disseminate messages down to community level. Combined with community involvement through youth clubs and community conversation associations this has been a core approach used by the

Norwegian CSOs involved in this in Ethiopia.²⁴ Local partners interviewed expressed strong confidence in the ability of these high activities and outputs also contributing to outcomes – not least because of their close relations with both faith-based organisations and local government structures.

The Norwegian Church Aid’s Ethiopia partner Tamira, a youth association, targets some 10 000 young people directly in Shashemene town and woreda and seeks to provide sexual reproductive health services to 5000 people and to strengthen the capacities of 6 government health centres and 10 other service provision centres by the end of 2018. They report good progress and have both baseline data and data from areas where they do not work to facilitate improved assessments of the contribution of their activities.

Norwegian support to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Nepal has contributed to increasing the visibility and capacity of the disability movement in Nepal. This has enabled the movement to play a key role in lobbying for changes in policies that are of

24 See also the separate recent evaluation of this in Nicola Jones et al. (2016): *Evaluation of Norway’s support to women’s rights and gender equality in development cooperation. Ethiopia case study report* (Oslo: Norad Evaluation Department) (<https://www.norad.no/globalassets/publikasjoner/publikasjoner-2015-/evaluering/evaluation-of-norways-support-to-womens-rights-and-gender-equality-in-development-cooperation/evaluation-of-norways-support-to-womens-rights-and-gender-equality-in-development-cooperation-ethiopia.pdf>).

direct concern to people with disabilities. Service provision projects have contributed to improved physical functioning, self-reliance and social inclusion of targeted children and adults.²⁵

5.3 ADVOCACY

Most of the larger Norwegian CSOs articulate a rights-based approach to their development work. They combine service delivery with capacity building and advocacy work, and argue that the three results areas are both complementary and necessary. However, the extent to which the focus on advocacy issues and processes is concretised in practice varies from country to country and from organisation to organisation.

Advocacy takes place at many different levels – from global campaigning, national level initiatives to community level advocacy with local duty-bearers. The Norwegian CSOs also support advocacy initiatives in different ways – from strengthening partner capacity, conducting policy related research and advocacy activities jointly with partners or directly with policy makers. The evaluation found that situation in the three case countries varied considerably.

25 Cf. Nordic Consulting Group (2012). *Mainstreaming disability in the new development paradigm. Evaluation of Norwegian support to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. Nepal country report*. Norad Evaluation 1/2012.

A first finding: Level and type of advocacy are heavily influenced by the country context – in particular the civil society – government relationship. The relationship is most constrained in Uganda and Ethiopia and more open and liberal in Nepal.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of CSOs in Uganda – or probably three: Those primarily geared towards national advocacy and those primarily focused on service delivery – and those that combine service delivery and advocacy. More vocal rights-based advocacy organisations have been under indirect and direct attack from Government, and are often seen as partisan actors or even as part of the opposition (sometimes with merit).

These more controversial organisations in Uganda typically receive their funding through donor basket funds – the most prominent being the Democratic Governance Facility. Vocal rights-based organisations active at the national level do not feature among the type of Ugandan partners that Norwegian CSOs typically cooperate with. CSOs providing services in combination with less vocal advocacy have not faced any serious problems and the Norwegian CSOs are among those. In fact, many of these organisations are performing important service delivery functions that are welcomed by the

state. Notably, organisations working on disability and child rights are faced with an enabling environment as they can work within laws and regulations that clearly stipulate the rights of their constituencies. All the five organisations in our sample claim to have good relationship with the government.

The Norwegian CSOs and their partners in Uganda practice to a large extent “soft” advocacy – avoiding the most sensitive and controversial issues, such as human rights for sexual minorities and government corruption.²⁶ They do not push the borders and government sentiments. Several CSOs pursue grassroots and evidence based advocacy – documenting experience from local projects and use such cases in national level advocacy. They subscribe to a philosophy whereby strengthening individuals and providing them a platform for local participation and voice can lead to long-term changes. The advocacy work of Caritas Uganda has largely followed such an approach. National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda (NUDIPU) is an active and professional advocacy network with a list of national level “Disability Demands 2016-2021”. Save the Children Uganda and

²⁶ Sex education in school has just been banned – which in practice means any mentioning of family planning and sexual minorities (LGBTI issues) would create red lights and be banned.

Plan International in Uganda are important advocates on child rights issues. Caritas Uganda and Save the Children Uganda also provided examples of national level advocacy, but the local, more low-profile trend is dominant.

In Ethiopia, the potential for advocacy and for having a wider impact was dramatically curtailed following the introduction of the new civil society law. CSOs have all abandoned their rights-based language. The introduction of the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation (the “NGO law”) was driven by the view that some charities had played a significant role in opposition politics around the 2005 elections. The ‘90/10 Rule’: any charity or society receiving more than 10% of its funds from foreign sources is prohibited from engaging in activities relating to human rights, justice, peace building, democracy and governance.

Therefore, Ethiopian Charities and Ethiopian Societies can work on these issues, whereas Ethiopian Resident Charities and Ethiopian Resident Societies cannot. Currently, 67% of registered organisations are Ethiopian Resident Societies or Resident Charities. Several Norwegian CSOs have been strongly affected by this. Some programmes had to be terminated – such as the Norwegian Church Aid’s initiative to facilitate inter-faith initiatives

involving all the main faith-based organisations to promote peace and reconciliation in the country. More significantly, many Norwegian CSOs made an effort to continue with the rights-based approaches, community mobilization and advocacy, but had to reclassify and rename their programmes.

The team noted that in Ethiopia it has – compared to Uganda – been more challenging to mobilise through service delivery and build evidence from below for “soft” advocacy purposes. There has *de facto* been much more emphasis on developing capacity to satisfy needs rather than tackling the more sensitive task of developing capacity to realise rights. The team noted a tendency among some - including the Norwegian Lutheran Mission - to emphasise the former while others - such as the Norwegian Church Aid - (still) seeking to emphasise rights, but struggling to do so. Save the Children in Ethiopia appears to make progress in influencing government policies on child rights in selected areas. This seems to mainly to be based on programmes directly with government, with the civil society partners visited appearing more disconnected from these efforts.

In Nepal, there are plenty of examples of CSOs involved in advocacy activities and lobbying, but it is not so clear how effective and influential they have been in contributing to the changes in policies, which have occurred. The fact

that many CSOs tend to be politically aligned, often constrains their credibility and legitimacy. In terms of effects on the legal environment or “civic space” in Nepal, the country report notes that multiple local partners have been active in advocacy, commonly on similar themes (rights, inclusion etc.). Multiple local partners are proud to have contributed to significant changes in the legal environment (inclusion of child rights in the constitution, recognition of inclusion issues in the schooling system, recognition of minority rights).

A Nepalese partner of the Development Fund – the Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD) mentions in a comment to the draft report that they work closely with several government departments. The support from the Development Fund has assisted LI-BIRD in their successful efforts to improve government policies on agrobiodiversity management.

Following the political changes of 1990 in Nepal, a massive expansion of civil society organisations has taken place. Initially, these were accompanied by international CSOs free to engage in independent service delivery programming. Local civil society organisations invest in trying to understand and adapt to the new systems. A 2016 EU report describes the legal environment and notes that the new Constitution of 2015 recognises the rights to

association, peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.²⁷ The constitution also guarantees the right to information as a fundamental right as well as recognising several other rights including groups’ rights. The report goes on to identify civil society strengths as a country wide presence, broad representation, an active and catalytic role in promoting democracy and human rights, actively increasing awareness about rights and duties as well as a prominent role in promoting inclusion of minorities and good governance. As such the government – civil society relationship is more “friendly” in Nepal than in the two other countries – and more open for advocacy.

5.4 STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

All the Norwegian CSOs have contributed to strengthening civil society in Uganda, Ethiopia and Nepal - in one way or another – mostly at local levels. Local partners have been strengthened and more grassroots organisations have been formed and nurtured into becoming civil society actors. Southern partners interviewed unanimously agreed to such a conclusion. Through survey responses, over 50% of respondents of Norwegian CSOs active in Nepal and Uganda indicate that they have strengthened local civil society

²⁷ EU country roadmap for engagement with civil society, 2016 – 2020, Draft approved July 2016, <https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/csormp.pdf>

organisations beyond their partner organisation largely.²⁸ However, a major challenge is the weak conceptual clarity about what constitutes civil society - a requirement for knowing how to support and strengthen that society and measure the results. Civil society is often loosely defined and operational plans for how to strengthen civil society at various levels have not been worked out.²⁹ There has been a tremendous change over the last two decades in terms of organisational awareness and capacity strengthening of partners – beyond individual projects. Most Norwegian CSOs include capacity strengthening objectives and activities. On the other hand, systematic monitoring of organisational change and capacity is still weak or missing. The evaluation looked at results at three different levels.

5.4.1 Local level results

All the country reports from the evaluation team refer to strengthening of individuals, groups and informal networks at local/community level – people coming together for a common purpose and being strengthened as a collective, which is an example of strengthening civil society at local level. It should be noted that several of

²⁸ In Ethiopia, only 3 out of 11 respondents indicate this level of confidence.

²⁹ The same is true for “capacity strengthening”, but to a lesser extent. Project interventions are most often well presented and explained while civil society is a short add-on.

the Norwegian CSOs also support partners and projects in extremely remote and poor areas. Strømme Foundation in Uganda is one example – deliberately selecting weak partners in poor areas involved in local community development work. The saving groups supported by National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda is another example. The Plan project in Uganda through Straight Talk Foundation established youth clubs in schools. Caritas Uganda works with community groups in four dioceses – all making contribution to strengthening civil society at the local/grassroots level. In Ethiopia, the Norwegian missionary organisations are noted for their efforts to concentrate support to some of the country’s most marginal and poor areas.

The Ethiopia country report noted the many efforts to mobilise and organize small groups of beneficiaries (farmers/pastoralists, women’s groups, youth, parents/teachers/children) through often innovative community forums and discussion clubs. This has helped create knowledge, awareness and ownership and helped ensure sustainability of the interventions. In water supply, for example, affected communities play a critical role in maintaining the infrastructure established.

The Nepal country report pointed to numerous examples of individuals (or groups of individuals) who had been empowered through greater awareness of their rights, improved skills to organise and claim such rights, or simply through expanded self-respect and/or income generating capacity. A range of examples were cited of successful approaches to local authorities/duty bearers to highlight issues or access resources such as road repair, recognition of Madrassas for local government school support, changed agricultural practices accepted by local government extension services, or support for inclusion of disabled in “normal schooling”.

The challenge has been to assess the wider and possibly more systemic effects of such small initiatives at local level. The organisations struggle to demonstrate how change at the local community level contribute to wider systemic change. The initiatives are often small in coverage and numbers and effects may easily dissipate after a short period. It is difficult to know to what extent new knowledge, skills and attitudes “trickle up” and are replicated more broadly. For many Norwegian CSOs “small and local is still beautiful.” Save the Children on the other hand recognizes that small in many cases is not sufficient for making impact. The organisation invests heavily in education in

cooperation with the government in particular in Ethiopia and Uganda and can report significant quantitative results.³⁰

5.4.2 Organisational capacity

Strengthening organisational (partner) capacity has emerged as a priority for Norwegian CSOs, and they are confident that they have contributed to increased capacity among local partner organisations on a wide range of aspects.³¹ This is also a trend supported by the evaluation team's interviews Southern partners. However, capacity strengthening is also defined and operationalized differently by the Norwegian CSOs. They employ a range of formal and informal approaches to capacity strengthening including coaching and mentoring, technical assistance, training, peer learning and facilitating access to knowledge. Several organisations have developed tools for assessing organisational capacity and prepare also systematic capacity strengthening programmes. Others maintain a similar ambition, but have a more informal approach. There are also examples of Norwegian CSOs seeing organisational development as an end in itself,

30 See Results section in Save the Children Norway. *Investing in Children*. 4 years application to Norad 2015-2018.

31 See the findings from survey summarised in Annex 7. The only aspect, which displays markedly lower scores, is their contribution to increased fundraising capacity of local organisations.

while most combine programme or project support with capacity strengthening. There are several examples of Norwegian CSOs first putting emphasis on strengthening the capacity of the local partner and then fund and support programme implementation. Others may search for an implementer with capacity to implement their programmes and then strengthen their capacity to comply with donor demands.

All the five Norwegian CSOs in Uganda have contributed to strengthen individual civil society organisations. The work with Caritas, Uganda National Association of the Blind and National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda have in periods focused exclusively on strengthening the organisations with projects added later. Strømme Foundation claims that capacity strengthening is for them is an end in itself, but in practice they combine capacity strengthening and project interventions. Plan and Save the Children Uganda have adopted a partner approach, but most partners play a role within their broader programmes and objectives. The Uganda Child Rights NGO Network is different and is considered a strategic long-term partner.³²

32 There is an important conceptual and practical difference between (a) identifying a thematic area and or/sector, searching for relevant partners in that area and nurture those organisations in their own right– helping them to operate and deliver more efficiently and effectively and (b) do the same, but define and place them within their own programmes and make sure they contribute to similar objectives.

There are also reports on results related to the strengthening of local partners in Ethiopia. Among the partnerships selected the Norwegian Church Aid's relations with their partner Tamira stands out. They helped develop the organisation in numerous ways, but today the Norwegian Church Aid is one of several donors and they now concentrate on providing professional support to Tamira's programme interventions. The Norwegian Church Aid has bigger challenges in building the organisational capacity of their core faith-based partners and their development wings. This also goes for Norwegian Lutheran Mission where the main support has been in relation to programme implementation.

With respect to the cooperation between the Ethiopian and Norwegian trade unions, the reports consulted by the evaluation are less clear about results. Data is provided on activities and outputs (such as number of training workshops and participants). There are also data on outcome indicators related to the strengthening of Ethiopian trade unions (recruitment of more members, more collective agreements and so on). The reports itself as well as interview with the trade unions officials attributed this support from the Norwegian partner. The interviewees also spoke highly of the partnership with the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Union and their

importance as transmitter of relevant Norwegian experiences. However, while not underestimating the importance and relevance of the partnership, the evaluation finds that the Norwegian support is only a contributor to the growth of the trade unions. Other factors, including the union's own resource mobilisation, have been crucial.

All local partners in Nepal have strengthened organisational capacity according to the Nepal country report. Several local partners in Nepal interviewed described the Norwegian CSO support as fundamental to the development of the local partner as an actor for their target group and within Nepali civil society. These CSOs described administrative and finance systems, organisational strategies and governance structures as existing in their current form only thanks to Norwegian support. Several bilateral local partners cited digitisation of financial systems, a more focused long-term vision and strategy, improved understanding of advocacy and a separation of governance and management.

Norwegian support to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Nepal has contributed to increasing the visibility and capacity of the disability movement in Nepal. This has enabled the movement to play a key role in lobbying for changes in policies that are of direct concern to people with disabilities.

The most noticeable result of the Norwegian contribution has been the increased capacity of local Disabled People's Organisations to advocate for their rights and raise awareness on disability issues. Norway has been one of the most important and long-term donors to the Nepali disability movement.

The Nepal report found that bilateral relationships involved more holistic changes with a focus on overall strategy and governance structures while the international organisations focused more on capacities needed to implement services contracted or live up to compliance rules. In several cases, local partners were being supported in helping multiple beneficiary groups or small community based organisations to consolidate into more organisationally stable and sustainable NGOs.

The tools for organisational assessment (e.g. by Save the Children, Strømme Foundation, Digni and the Norwegian Church Aid) facilitate a holistic assessment of organisational capacity so capacity interventions should in principle cover any organisational ability. However, the previous discussion of added value suggests that Norwegian CSOs focus on strengthening planning and reporting systems and procedures – important donor requirements. Whether it has helped strengthen, the overall capacity of

partners to make a more effective development impact is more difficult to determine.

The evaluation finds that monitoring and evaluation of capacity strengthening remains a weak point – e.g. how to measure and determine if an organisation have been “stronger” and perform better. The range of organisational assessment tools could have been used – not only for planning, but also for monitoring changes/improvement in organisational capacities, but the evaluation team has not come across examples of such use. The documentation of organisational results tends to be weak and probably partial compared to what really has happened.

5.4.3 Societal/systemic capacity

When it comes to civil society at national level, the situation is complex. The evaluation team's focus is what goes on beyond the individual organisations based on the notion that civil society is more than the sum of its parts. Civil society may be strengthened by creating more civil society organisations. However, this is not necessarily true.³³ More CSOs do not automatically translate into a

³³ Evidence from Nepal suggests that in recent years, the rise in the number of civil society organisations has taken place at a time when civil society as a whole seems to become weaker (Norad (2012). *Tracking Impact*).

stronger civil society. Civil society comprises far more than the sum of formally constituted civil society organisations. It includes informal organisations, networks and often temporary coalitions of formal and informal groups, citizens' groups and individuals brought together to lobby and campaign on specific issues. Strengthening these groups will often not be achieved by focusing solely on strengthening formal civil society organisations. In other words, creating a stronger and more vibrant civil society require an analysis and understanding of which organisations can and will contribute to such a civil society.

Looking at aspects of higher-level capacity strengthening, participation in national networks is one example. Save the Children Uganda provides support to several civil society networks for children. Plan Uganda does the same. Uganda National Association of the Blind and National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda are themselves national network organisations. Caritas Uganda is not formally a CSO (church based organisations are not categorized as CSOs in Uganda and do not fall under the NGO Law), but is in practice member of the national NGO forum and active in other national networks. Strømme Foundation has a slightly lower focus on national level networking.

The Ethiopia team found that interviewees and reports tend to pay limited attention to how the partnerships and projects have contributed to civil society strengthening beyond strengthening the individual partner. Norwegian Church Aid pays the strongest attention to these issues among the selected Norwegian CSOs in the Ethiopia case. The organisation emphasizes the need to support strengthening of civil society and organisational capacity building of their partners, both through direct support for organisational development, targeted support to strengthen their programme implementation, and efforts to ensure that they became part of various subnational and national civil society networks. Individual partners have been strengthened and there has been some important initiatives from the Norwegian Church Aid to work with their core partners in joint ecumenical efforts.

Save the Children Norway has formulated a strategic approach to partnerships, but their approach is less focused on civil society strengthening broadly and more directed at interaction between authorities and civil society organisations to advance children's rights, provide protection and to deliver public services, such as education and health. Save the Children seems focused on implementing a programme with a

more limited attention to building local partners to become independent civil society actors.³⁴

The Norwegian Lutheran Mission and the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions in Ethiopia have less clearly developed guidelines for assessing how partners may contribute to civil society strengthening. They are guided by commitment to supporting a partner based on shared values and bonds of affinity that goes beyond traditional development aid perspectives.

In terms of effects on the legal environment or "civic space" in Nepal, the evaluation team notes that multiple local partners have been active in advocacy, commonly on similar themes (rights, inclusion etc.). Multiple local partners are proud to have contributed to significant changes in the legal environment (inclusion of child rights in the constitution, recognition of inclusion issues in the school system, recognition of minority rights etc.). The evaluation team cannot attribute any of those changes to the activities

³⁴ Comment from Save the Children Norway: It seems like this conclusion is made on general terms and not connected to a specific country context that would support or justify the statement. Save the Children Norway don't consider this conclusion to give the right picture of our position on partnership and strengthening civil society. In several countries we have strengthened and supported civil society organizations as independent civil society actors, especially as part of our Child Rights Governance programme, but also facilitated children's right to a quality education. Save the children's education programmes are not "service delivery" per se. They are built around the communities in the schools, where parents and community stakeholders are mobilized in different ways to improve the learning environment of the children.

of specific local partners of to specific Norwegian support. There is, however, consensus that the concerted advocacy efforts of civil society as a whole has had impact on the emerging legal and policy landscape in Nepal.

The evaluation found that many Norwegian CSOs are struggling to find the right balance between supporting partners as civil society actors and implementing partners that shall deliver results. Part of the problem, according also to many interviewees, is conflicting expectations from the donor (Norad). An increasing emphasis on creating and documenting results tend to favour an instrumental approach to local partners.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the Norwegian CSOs has contributed to facilitating vocal debates on development issues in all three countries. It has helped to increase the voice of civil society, perhaps more strongly at local and district levels. This has however, in the case of Uganda and Ethiopia not led to improved operating conditions for civil society actors.³⁵

³⁵ These findings are also confirmed by several recent evaluation of “likeminded” Northern CSOs. See e.g. the 2013 evaluation of Danish support which compares support to civil society in Nepal and Uganda. INTRAC, TANA and INDEVELOP (2013), *Evaluation of Danish Support to Civil Society*, Copenhagen: Evaluation Department, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Evaluation 2013.01) (https://www.oecd.org/derec/denmark/CS_strategien_web_DANIDA.pdf). See also further references in the literature survey in Annex 6.

5.5 UNINTENDED EFFECTS

The reports from local partners in Ethiopia partly addresses the issues of unintended or unplanned effects. There are positive unintended effects: Lessons from one programme intervention have created important lessons and benefits for other programme interventions, mobilisation of community forums in one programme has important spin-offs to other programmes and so one. Successes in service delivery in one area, for example, have often lead to requests and demands from potential beneficiaries in neighbouring areas. However, other types of “unplanned” results were also noted. Common to nearly all service delivery projects visited were complaints related to the per diem rates for local staff and government officials involved, a remuneration typically associated with training. What are the implications of this for sustainability? Will targeted staff attend and stay committed once the project closes and there are no funds for additional remuneration? The Ethiopia country report also found that efforts to transfer a project approach from one area where it had been successful to another was not guarantee for success with unintended backlashes also being noted. This applied to efforts to reduce female genital mutilation.

Another effect in the Ethiopia case not specifically planned was the growing cooperation and inter-

action with government authorities, especially at the district and local. This emerged out of government need for control and regulation, but it has helped to ensure better alignment between Norwegian CSOs, local partners and national policies and priorities in delivery of basic services. This may have positive spin-offs both for effectiveness and ownership and for sustainability in provision of government services. Unintended effects noted by the Nepal report include beneficiary groups taking the initiative to (or being requested to) replicate activities in nearby areas. Examples include Group of Helping Hands and Socio Economic Empowerment with Dignity and Sustainability programming supported by Strømme Foundation and the Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development seed bank in Dang supported by the Development Fund.

There are also examples of unintended positive effects in Uganda such as microfinance being linked to a rehabilitation programme for the disabled (Norwegian Association of the Disabled) and negative effects such as partnerships being terminated because of persistent weak capacity and/or financial irregularities (Strømme Foundation).

Most partnerships studied in this evaluation are based in some way on “like-mindedness”

– meaning that Norwegian CSOs select partners based on shared thematic interests (children, environment, disability) and religious/ideological frameworks (churches, labour unions). This is as would be expected and intended. However, the implications are that while certain parts of civil society are included in the support given, a range of traditional and especially more informal organisations are excluded, because they do not have the required organisational capacity to work with external donors. Strømme Foundation seeks for instance to select and work with weak partners in marginalized areas, but they must fulfil a set of basic, predefined criteria as outlined in the strategic plan, such as functional board, management and field staff, good track record in documentation and reporting, quality assurance systems, etc.³⁶ Such criteria are easy to understand, but will in practice exclude informal/traditional organisations.

5.6 SUSTAINABILITY

The questions are twofold: To what extent have the partner CSOs the necessary systems, knowledge and funds to continue functioning without the Norwegian support; and if the Norwegian support has influenced national ownership and processes to strengthen civil society. The evaluation found interesting

³⁶ See Strømme Foundation. *Strategic Plan 2009-2015*.

differences between the three countries when it comes to sustainability.

All partnerships in Uganda have critical sustainability issues, particularly when it comes to funding. On the other hand, the organisational capacity is much stronger. A majority of the Southern partners have systems and procedures, skills and experience to continue without a Norwegian partner. The country studies have also showed that significant efforts have been invested in capacity strengthening of Southern partners and often with good results. Five out of thirteen respondents who answered our survey concerning their organisation's work in Uganda argue that sustainability or donor dependence is the main challenge in their work. This is markedly higher than in both Ethiopia (one out of twelve) and Nepal (two out of eleven).

Financial sustainability remains a challenge as also agreed by Southern partners interviewed. A majority of CSOs in Uganda will not be able to sustain their services without external funding. Several would not have existed either without donor funds. In our selection of organisations, Plan International and Save the Children International are international donors. These international organisations are robust, because their size and standing increase their fundraising capabilities and may possibly lower

their administrative costs. They are all concerned with sustaining the benefits of their programmes, but they depend themselves on donor funds and would disappear without.

The only partnership that we can relatively safely say has contributed to lasting structures is the Norwegian Association of the Disabled - National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda (NUPIDU) partnership. NUPIDU is a well-established interest organisation for various organisations of disabled people. Again - some of their projects will not be sustained at the same level in the future without external support, but NUDIPU will most likely continue as an interest and advocacy organisation for the disabled in Uganda. The Catholic Church will remain regardless of donor funding – not all Caritas projects, but the Church will have a diaconal/service mandate regardless of donor funding.

Sustainability is a general CSO challenge in Uganda. This is partly a result of the current government being relatively happy to allow CSOs to deliver services and represent the interest of groups that they are currently not able or willing to represent. Lacking state capacity thus makes sustainability without donor funding relatively unattainable. A general sustainability challenge in Uganda is linked to the political system. While the state

is not lacking capacity concerning some issues, in terms of service delivery there are still major deficiencies. The CSOs who typically focus on addressing these gaps in service delivery work on amicable terms with the government, but there are significant challenges in terms of government uptake. According to officials of some of the organisations interviewed, there is a willingness to engage and adapt at the local government level, but there is little political change at the central government level. The question then is if the support provided by these CSOs allows the government to remain 'wilfully' weak concerning service delivery and rights for particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups.

A similar picture emerges from the Ethiopia case. Some partners will remain also without partnerships with Norwegian CSOs. This includes churches, faith-based organisations, and the trade unions. Some local organisations began almost fully funded by Norwegian CSOs but several of them have now become organisations with funding from their Norwegian partners being a small component in their total income. Examples included the Norwegian Church Aid's Tamira or Save the Children's Mary Joy Development Association.

Another important question is what would happen to the programmes and impact sustainability if the Norwegian CSO ended its support. A notable feature in the Ethiopian context is the strong relations with government and its service delivery programmes. The government – through agricultural extension workers, health officials, education officers and others – play a key role as implementers in nearly all projects visited by the evaluation team. Norwegian-funded projects may provide a small or big project staff to provide support and assistance, including paying for upgrade of facilities and project expenses. In the case of education, Save the Children also second staff to local authorities.

The close cooperation with government holds well for sustainability. The assumption is that the government will be able to sustain activities when the Norwegian funding ends. The assumption holds to some extent: the government has staff and funds to keep the basic services running. On the other hand, there is high staff turnover and little additional funding for staff training. Moreover, there is even less funds and capacity to keep the community mobilization up and to sustain efforts to change social norms and traditional practices. This is particularly challenging in the most marginal and vulnerable areas.

In Nepal, several of the partners have discussed exit strategies over the past few years. Meanwhile, many partnerships are not perceived by either party as "projects with an end" but rather as a permanent relationship, the content of which may evolve over time, but where the relationship itself should remain.

The sustainability of project effects will vary depending on project design. Many activities are focused on empowerment programming, rights awareness programming on gender, disabilities, inclusion of minorities or the ability to organise (savings groups, advocacy networks). Such activities if done well, have significant potential for sustainability of project effects.

Specific project activities are seldom sustainable. However, several local partners have shown that they are able to access sufficient resources from local authorities or other international NGOs for a limited continuation when projects end. On the other hand, all local partners interviewed are likely to continue to exist even if all Norwegian support is withdrawn. The effects on the legal environment or "civic space" in Nepal are unlikely to be reversed in the current political climate.

6. Findings and conclusions

This chapter summarises the major findings in relation to each of the evaluation questions and presents the main conclusions in response to each.

6.1 MAPPING SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY AND APPROACHES TO PARTNERSHIPS

The Norad civil society grant has remained relatively constant at 4-5% of the annual aid budget in the 2006-2015 period. Virtually all of this - 97-98% - is channelled through Norwegian civil society organisations. There is hardly any direct transfer from the Norad grant directly to civil society organisations in the south. Twice as much has been disbursed from other Norad departments and sections, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norwegian embassies to Norwegian, international and local civil society organisations for a range of humanitarian purposes and long-term development programmes. In some countries, this also includes specific support for civil society strengthening from other sources than the Norad civil society grant, including through Norwegian Embassy support to joint donor funds.

The same disbursement pattern is evident in the three case countries. More than 60 Norwegian civil society organisation receive funding from the Norad civil society grant for civil society strengthening in the three countries, but current funding is mostly channelled through a smaller group of 15-20 organisations. The Norwegian embassies in Ethiopia and Uganda also support joint donor funds that allocates funds for civil society strengthening. In Ethiopia, there is also significant funding from the Norwegian Embassy and other Norwegian sources to some of the main Norwegian organisations that receive funding from the civil society grant.

The 13 Norwegian civil society organisations selected for the case studies manage their programmes differently. Some work through their international associations such as Plan Norway and Save the Children Norway. Some will have their own country offices such as the Norwegian Church Aid, the Development Fund and Strømme Foundation. Others manage their support directly from Norway such as Caritas, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions

and interest organisations for the disabled in the Atlas Alliance.

All the Norwegian organisations reviewed work with local partners and seek to achieve results through them. They also have policies guiding their approach to how they work with them. The policies and guidelines vary significantly – not just in terms of how elaborate and comprehensive they are, but also in their views of the role of local partners. Some Norwegian organisations have tools and instruments to help select, assess and manage relations with partners. Others seek “natural” partners with common interests or values and not necessarily with any elaborate policies in place from the start. None of the organisations has any programme theory in place that can help manage and monitor partnerships in relation to the goals of civil society strengthening. The focus is on the capacity of the individual partner and programme objectives.

There are important differences in what role the Norwegian organisations see for local partners. Some go for local partners that can implement

programmes and tend to have an instrumental approach to partnerships. Others may have an intrinsic approach – targeting like-minded organisation and emphasizing strengthening civil society as an aim in itself.

Conclusion: The volume of support provided for Norwegian support to civil society strengthening is large with the Norad civil society grant being one of several funding streams. There is also a multitude of Norwegian civil society organisations being funded to help achieve the goals. The Norwegian implementation of the support is guided by a wide variety of policies and approaches.

6.2 RELEVANCE

The evaluation found the relevance of the Norwegian support to be generally high, but with variations in relation to local partners, needs and priorities and Norwegian thematic priorities. Norwegian civil society organisations have suggested and initiated projects that initially may have been met with some scepticism, but local partners have since been convinced and taken ownership, e.g. in several gender-related projects. There are few examples from our cases of Norwegian organisations exerting unwelcome pressure to include activities or project sites not prioritised by them.

The survey of Norwegian organisations indicates that the organisations themselves believe their local partner organisations have equal influence as themselves from initiation of partnership to planning and implementation of joint projects. They also believe that their partner's influence grows the closer one gets to project implementation.

Relevance in relation to needs in developing countries is more mixed and depends on the target group, direct beneficiaries or the government, or the overall objectives of the partnership. The Norwegian CSOs support are generally found to be relevant in relation to efforts to deliver services to direct beneficiaries and will often also align with government/national priorities where possible. The focus on national advocacy is more limited, but the evaluation found several efforts to mobilise locally and build on these efforts to influence changes at the national level, e.g. in relation to the rights of people with disabilities.

Norwegian CSOs in Uganda and Ethiopia have responded in different ways to increasing restricted space for civil society. There has been a general shift towards service delivery for beneficiaries and – in the case of Ethiopia – towards increased cooperation with government institutions. This may lead to an emphasis on

Norwegian organisations developing capacity to satisfy needs rather than tackling the more sensitive task of developing capacity to realise rights. The evaluation also found examples of Norwegian CSOs helping to facilitate increased space of operation for local partners.

Relevance in relation to Norwegian development aid objectives and thematic priorities are generally considered high. The partnership programmes are aligned with the broad grant scheme rules guiding the civil society allocations. In the case of Ethiopia, we found major additional support from the Embassy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad to some of main Norwegian organisations and their local partners. Much of this is essentially an expansion and broadening of programmes funded through the civil society grant.

Conclusion: The Norwegian civil society support is broadly relevant in relation to local needs, priorities and possibilities. It is also in line with thematic priorities in Norwegian development cooperation and the grant scheme rules guiding the Norad civil society allocation.

Norwegian CSOs were found to introduce and indirectly influence local partners, but - with few exceptions - not imposing new ideas and projects.

6.3 EFFECTIVENESS AND RESULTS

6.3.1 The added value of Norwegian civil society organisations

The survey data indicate that the Norwegian civil society organisations are relatively confident of their value. Over 80% of the respondents stated that projects implemented in collaboration with their partners have resulted in favourable changes including strengthening local civil society organisations beyond the individual partner organisation. Over 60% of respondents indicate that their projects have improved the situation for beneficiaries to a large or very large extent. Many respondents highlight both their organisations' contributions to capacity building and individual changes at the micro-level. The interviews with the Southern partners also gave a clear message. Most interviewees spoke highly of their relations with their Norwegian CSO partner. They viewed them more as partners than donors. Norwegian CSOs were perceived as friendly, flexible and predictable with long-term commitment.

The Norwegian organisations reviewed attempt to address the issue of added value, but are not always good at presenting and documenting what that "added value" is. Few organisations have a systematic approach to and plan for value addition. A dominant "value added" identified by most Norwegian organisations

through the survey is support for their partners' capacity to provide reports and comply with donor requirements. It is evident in all types of partnerships, but the emphasis is stronger as we move towards organisations with a more instrumental approach to partners.

The Norwegian organisations all provide support for organisational development and strengthening of local partners. For some, this is primarily linked to programme implementation while others emphasise support for administrative strengthening, which might in turn gradually be phased out and substituted by increased support for programme management and implementation. Some, but few Norwegian organisations do this based on formal assessments of local partner strengths and weaknesses. The dominant dimension in organisational support has been on administrative and financial capacities and on programme implementation. There has been far less support related to local partner's governance and accountability functions, even though this is something that academic literature and evaluations highlight as a major challenge.

Most Norwegian organisations also provide professional programme support to local partners. For some, this is linked to thematic advice and technical competence in programme development and implementation. This is mainly

provided through country offices with strong thematic competence and through multilateral organisations with large country programmes. Other Norwegian organisations may confine their support to programme management or strategic development.

Norwegian civil society organisations also help strengthen the networking capacity of their partners, although the contribution in this area appears less dominant compared to organisational development and programme support, especially in Ethiopia and Uganda. Networking between organisations that represent common constituencies – such as the member of the Atlas Alliance and their respective partners – is common. This is also confirmed by findings from the survey.

Conclusion: Norwegian CSOs add value to their partners, but such support is in most cases not systematically planned for and reported on. In recent years, there has been much more attention to strengthening capacities of local partners. There is significant variation between the organisations. Many large civil society organisations can provide important technical contributions in thematic areas while smaller may use their skills and experience in strengthening organisational capacity. In both cases, it is difficult to measure how much value is added.

6.3.2 Service delivery

The overall finding is that projects progress well – activities are implemented and outputs delivered as planned and short-term objectives are largely achieved – even if there are examples of projects, which have had very little impact. Individuals and communities benefit from direct and indirect support in areas such as health, education, micro-credit and agriculture. More widely, civil society has provided and continues to provide social services (especially in our cases health, agriculture and education) to significant numbers of people in many local communities.

The challenges with CSO projects are more related to limited scope and coverage of interventions and weak or missing wider effects. Successes at the individual project level mask major concerns about the systemic impact and sustainability of CSO-funded interventions. Data are weak in terms of the numbers of people assisted by projects. The numbers assisted are not particularly large: for most projects, we are talking of a few hundred people (sometimes fewer), not tens of thousands of direct beneficiaries. There are examples in our sample of large projects through the Norwegian Church Aid and Save the Children Norway with more extensive coverage. However, in the case of Ethiopia the government has in recent years attempted to regulate

the role of CSOs by ensuring that they work more closely in tandem with local and district governments. This may potentially increase the effectiveness of service delivery.

6.3.3 Advocacy

Most of the larger Norwegian CSOs articulate a rights-based approach to their development work. They combine service delivery with capacity building and advocacy work, and argue that the three approaches are complementary and necessary. However, the extent to which the focus on advocacy issues and processes is concretised varies from country to country and from organisation to organisation.

Level and type of advocacy are heavily influenced by the country context – in particular the civil society – government relationship. The relationship is constrained in Uganda and Ethiopia, but open and liberal in Nepal. The legal constraints are more severe in Ethiopia with a greater risk that Norwegian CSOs run the risk of developing capacity to satisfy needs rather than tackling the more sensitive task of developing capacity to realise rights.

Most of the Norwegian CSOs and their partners practice “soft” advocacy – avoiding sensitive and controversial issues, such as human rights for sexual minorities and government corruption,

or in the case of Ethiopia is forced to stay out of any direct focus on advocacy. Several CSOs pursue grassroots and evidence based advocacy – documenting experience from local projects and use such cases in national level advocacy.

6.3.4 Strengthening civil society

The evaluation found that the Norwegian civil society grant and the Norwegian CSOs have contributed to strengthening civil society in Uganda, Ethiopia and Nepal - in one way or another. Local partners have been strengthened and more grassroots organisations have been formed and nurtured into becoming civil society actors. In the survey among Norwegian CSOs, the most frequent answer to the question about the purpose of the partnership were strengthening partner capacity to implement programmes, closely followed by strengthening or building civil society organisations and increasing partners’ thematic knowledge. Nearly half the respondents stated that a main objective was to strengthen partners to live up to donor requirements. The survey also found that respondents have a positive view about the extent to which the programmes have contributed to strengthening civil society in the three countries.

The evaluation found no systematic differences between the international network, bilateral and regional/country office approach about which

approach is most effective for strengthening civil society. Strong country presence and regular capacity building is no guarantee for impact on civil society. Large Norwegian CSOs with a major presence in the country and/or working through an international federation or organisation may more easily achieve bigger results for beneficiaries by being able to reach more people in the communities. These models may not necessarily have similar advantages in building the capacity of individual organisations, or civil society networks. Norwegian CSOs without a presence in the country may also be able to play an important role and add value for local partners when the partnership is based on common values, interests and commitment. However, when partner programmes involve implementation of major projects on the ground requiring strong professional competence and skills Norwegian CSOs with a presence in the country may be better positioned to add value to programmes compared to Norwegian CSOs without such presence.

The choice of approach to partnership is however, only one factor in determining impact on civil society. Cost considerations are important and so are the purpose and objectives in relation to the country context.

The evaluation found in all countries major examples of results in strengthening of

individuals, groups and informal networks at local/community level – people coming together for a common purpose and being strengthened as a collective – even at a small scale.

Several Norwegian CSOs have developed tools for assessing organisational capacity and preparing systematic capacity strengthening programmes. Others maintain a similar ambition, but have a more informal approach. There are also examples of Norwegian CSOs seeing organisational development as an end while most combine project support with capacity strengthening.

The evaluation found that more limited attention was paid to how the partnerships have contributed to civil society strengthening beyond individual partners. There are clear deficiencies in almost all partnerships in terms of how they are contributing to a vibrant, national civil society capable of affecting and altering outcomes on politically sensitive topics. Most direct project activities are well planned and formulated, while the broader aims and objectives are not so well operationalized.

Overall, the evaluation finds that the Norwegian CSOs have contributed to facilitating vocal debates on development issues in all three countries. It has helped to increase the voice

of civil society, perhaps more strongly at local and district levels. This has however, in the case of Uganda and Ethiopia, not led to improved operating conditions for civil society actors. The evaluation found that in some instances the Norwegian CSO-supported partners have also contributed to change government policies, e.g. in relation to people with disabilities.

The ‘results agenda’ among donors has, according to many interviewees, contributed to a shift in focus from civil society as advocacy organisations and change actors at the national level to civil society as service providers working with local organisations. The Norwegian CSOs are struggling to find the balance between supporting partners as civil society actors, and implementing partners that shall deliver “results”.

Part of the problem according to Norwegian CSOs interviewed is related to conflicting expectations from the donor (Norad). The increasing emphasis on creating and documenting results tend to favour an instrumental approach to local partners while an emphasis on partnership and long-term strengthening of civil society favours a more intrinsic approach.

Norwegian CSOs have made progress in recent years in improving their monitoring and evaluation framework and the quality of their results reporting

despite gaps and needs for improvement. Result frameworks and reports tend to focus on activities and outputs - numerical and easy to measure achievements. Organisational capacity, advocacy and civil society strengthening are inherently much more difficult to measure and much less/weaker documented.

There is a much weaker understanding that there are various categories or types of results. The performance criteria for service delivery, advocacy and capacity strengthening are different. Results in the latter category are best captured in coverage indicators while success in advocacy is better assessed in terms of indicators such as quality, relevance and replicability. In the Results-based management system, results are to large extent reduced to quantitative and numerical indicators.

The evaluation found that Norwegian CSOs have a much better understanding today that the most important results are those changes that occur above and beyond the level of outputs – even if progress largely is still described in terms of activities and outputs. However, a persistent challenge is the weak conceptual clarity about what constitutes civil society – a requirement for knowing how to support and strengthen that society and measure the results.

Conclusion: Norwegian CSOs can document tangible improvements for the target populations in line with short-term objectives. There is also evidence that Southern partners have strengthened their internal capacities and involvement in mainly local-level advocacy, but monitoring and reporting on results is weaker. The Norwegian CSOs have contributed to facilitating vocal debates on development issues in all three countries. It has helped to increase the voice of civil society, perhaps more strongly at local and district levels. This has however, in the case of Uganda and Ethiopia, not led to improved operating conditions for civil society actors.

6.4 SUSTAINABILITY

All partnerships examined have critical sustainability issues (while the situations in the three countries differ); particularly when it comes to funding while organisational capacity is much stronger. Most Southern partners have systems and procedures, skills and experience to continue without a Norwegian partner. All the country studies show that significant efforts have been invested in capacity strengthening of Southern partners, often with good results.

Large parts of civil society in the three countries are maintained by donors and will not be able to sustain their services without external donor

support. Some organisations such as churches or trade unions are not dependent on foreign donors and northern CSOs. In our cases, we also found many examples of local partners whose main source of income was a Norwegian CSO, but has now been able to diversify its income sources with Norwegian support now being just one of several sources of funds.

Most partnerships between Norwegian CSOs and Southern CSOs depend to a very large extent on external donor funds. Like-minded organisations and partnerships based on shared values and interests have a higher potential sustainability. Interest organisations of disabled people may not be able to sustain projects at the same level without external support, but will most likely continue as an interest- and advocacy organisations.

Conclusion: Norwegian CSOs have contributed to strengthen organisational capacities and sustainability, but most partners will not be able to sustain programmes and projects financially when external support ends – despite variation between countries. It should also be noted that many partnerships are not perceived as "projects with an end", but rather as a permanent relationship the content of which may evolve over time, but where the relationship itself will remain.

7. Lessons Learnt and recommendations

In this final chapter, the team identifies main lessons learnt emerging out of the findings and conclusions from this evaluation. This is followed by our recommendations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad.

7.1 DONORSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP

Southern partners view their relationship with Norwegian civil society organisations more as “partnership” than “donorship”. Based on shared values and interests, Norwegian civil society organisations are interested in their partners beyond projects – being friendly, flexible, predictable and long-term. There are few examples of Norwegian imposing their priorities and programmes on Southern partners.

However, Norwegian organisations remain donors with more power and other more indirect and subtle mechanisms for influencing partners. Paradoxically, the “donor” dimension may have been reinforced in recent years with the increasing calls for “results”. There is a persistent challenge to promote ownership on the one hand and measure and document that Norwegian aid contributes to quick and

measurable results on the other. Ownership is a condition for achieving sustainable results, so a balance needs to be found between the “results agenda” and ownership. The conflicting objectives should be more recognized and managed.

Norwegian development aid steadily promotes new thematic priorities and adds new results measures. This also applies to Norad’s civil society grant. The same priorities may not be pursued by Southern partners, but they tend to adopt and expand their mandates and programmes with Norwegian funds. Local partners support and embrace such expansion. This raises questions about the sustainability of such projects.

7.2 INNOVATION FOR NEW PARTNERSHIPS

The partnerships and partnership models have mostly remained unchanged in the evaluation period. Most development aid for civil society strengthening are channelled through Norwegian organisations with little direct transfer to organisations in the south, several partnerships have lasted for many years and even decades. A dominant relation between Norwegian and local partners still revolves around reporting

and financial management. Moreover, despite noble partnership principles, asymmetries of power between a donor and recipient remain. This calls for more innovative ways of using the partnership model to strengthen civil society. This may include more funds being managed by civil society organisations in developing countries; less reliance on Norwegian support for reporting and more use of local skills and resources to manage relations with Norwegian organisations; and a partnership focusing more on professional and technical added value or sharing of experiences in programme development and management.

It is how money is spent that matters. Relationship building rather than money management should be a major concern for CSOs. CSOs should invest as much or more time in their relationships up, down and across the aid chain as they currently spend in managing their money – in meeting planning and reporting requirements.

7.2.1 Missing strategic framework: Aid effectiveness and a vibrant civil society

There is no strategic framework for Norwegian civil society support at country level – nor any overall assessment of needs and opportunities as a basis for making strategic choices and securing optimal impact. Few, if any Norwegian civil society organisation undertake their capacity building efforts within the context of contributing to a broader aim of “strengthening civil society”. At best, it could be argued that they hope that by strengthening local partners they contribute to the wider objective. As such, the civil society portfolio in each country is highly fragmented between the respective Norwegian civil society organisations and between the organisations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Embassies and Norad. The whole is the sum of all the independent and often isolated parts.

Norwegian CSOs are not (alone) responsible for the missing/weak holistic view of civil society. The lack of coordination and high level of fragmentation are parts of a broader systemic problem in the Norwegian development aid sector. Norad or the Norwegian Embassy could have played a role in preparing a broader civil society analysis in individual countries. Norwegian embassies may meet with Norwegian organisations for information sharing, but do not play any role in strategic

planning and coordination. Nor has the Civil Society Department in Norad taken up the responsibility. The Department deals with individual organisations and their applications – not with countries so the broader issue of civil society with a country focus is not addressed.

These deficiencies in the management and effectiveness may have widened with the challenges of supporting civil society in authoritarian countries and in other countries with decreasing or weak space for civil society action. Development aid agencies will often turn to Northern civil society organisations as a way of promoting political change and service delivery in such contexts. The findings from the literature as well as from case studies in Uganda and Ethiopia suggest that there is space for this and that important achievements are recorded. There are also risks: civil society priorities may be shifted towards developing capacity to satisfy needs rather than tackling the more sensitive task of developing capacity to realise rights – or to build civil society.

The strength of the Norwegian approach to civil society strengthening through Norwegian CSOs is multitude of approaches, the willingness to take risk and the support to a wide variety of partnerships. The weakness is that the full potential of Norwegian support may not

be realised. There is no easy solution to this dilemma. Most recently, the 2017 evaluation of the Norwegian support to education in conflict and crisis through CSOs found that the assistance is not more than the sum of its parts. Important achievements and results are recorded, but these are largely realised on the CSOs’ own terms. The approach has not succeeded in combining or leveraging collective capabilities to deliver higher-level or broader-ranging results.³⁷

7.3 ALL RESULTS MATTER

Most of the organisations have adopted rights-based programming and use some sort of results-based management approach and tools for monitoring and reporting. There is a tension between rights-based strategies with intangible goals such as empowerment and results-based management focusing on tangible measurable results. The risk of “crowding out” intangible results have been discussed in the report - to what extent it is becoming harder for Norwegian organisations and their partners to support transformational approaches (including civil society strengthening) when they are increasingly expected to report quantifiable,

37 Cf. the Julia Betts et al. (2017), *Realising Potential. Evaluation of Norway's Support to Education in Conflict and Crisis through Civil Society Organisations*, Oslo: Norad Evaluation Department (Report 9/2017) (<https://norad.no/ombistand/publikasjon/2017/realising-potential-evaluation-of-norways-support-to-education-in-conflict-and-crisis-through-civil-society-organisations/>)

easy-to-measure results. Have such developments led to a greater emphasis on service delivery instead of capacity development and policy reform as the predominant programmatic approach to development? Has extensive use of “log frames” led to regressive learning, which occurs when a partner “learns the ropes” and changes its own values and ways of working to respond to the requirements of the donor?

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings, conclusions and lessons learnt the team makes several recommendations. The Norwegian guidelines for civil society support must sharpen the role and purpose of Norwegian civil society organisations as intermediaries. This must address the value addition of using Norwegian organisations beyond their role in transferring funds; the role of transfers from Norad directly to civil society organisations in the south; and a better definition of the purpose and objective of the civil society grant, including a better management framework for the use of Norwegian organisations.

1: The current rules and procedures for support to civil society strengthening in developing countries must sharpen the purpose and objectives of the Norad civil society grant. The grant should maintain the aim of “strengthening civil society”,

but there is a need to distinguish between purposes related to delivery of services in education, climate resilience and other thematic priorities in Norwegian development assistance, and purposes related to civil society strengthening and democratisation.

2: The Norwegian support to civil society strengthening must rebalance traditional North/South partnerships. There is a need to empower and create more ownership among Southern partners. This can be achieved through a shift towards more increased direct transfers to civil society organisations and networks in developing countries – when sufficient capacity exists. In addition, the grant should stimulate to more innovative partnerships by Norwegian organisations that goes beyond funding of specific programmes and projects. Norwegian organisations should also provide long-term core-funding and capacity development support to partners, based on these organisations’ own strategic plans.

3: Norad should encourage and support Norwegian civil society organisations, including putting a stronger emphasis on identifying their potential valued added. This includes:

a) Ensure that operational plans for their value addition are prepared – both what

value they expect to contribute to partners and how. The value addition must go beyond supporting improved reporting and meeting donor requirements;

b) Developing methods and tools for better assessing and documenting results from advocacy and civil society strengthening at local, organisational and national level;

c) Including objectives and indicators in results frameworks that reflect their approach to adding value in partnerships and explore how to connect this to end results; and

d) Adopting a systematic approach to capacity development and to the evaluation of capacity development outcomes, outputs and activities.

4: Any major increase in the effectiveness of Norwegian support to civil society strengthening requires a better coordination of different Norwegian aid instruments and support modalities. This may best be addressed at the country level with a better coordination between support provided by Norad civil society, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Embassies. This presupposed a shift to a more strategic use of the Norad’s civil society grant.

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank	NAD	Norwegian Association of the Disabled
AMFIU	Association of Micro Finance Institutions in Uganda	NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
CBO	Community based organisation	NGC	Nordic Consulting Group
CETU	Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions	NFDN	National Federation of the Disabled Nepal
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute	NGO	Non-governmental organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	NLM	Norwegian Lutheran Mission
DAC	(OECD) Development Assistance Committee	NMS	Norwegian Missionary Society
DASSC	Development and Social Services Commission of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus	NOK	Norwegian krone
DICAC	Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission, Ethiopian Orthodox Church	Norad	The Norwegian Agency for International Development
EU	European Union	NUDIPIU	National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda
FFO	Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People	OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
FOKUS	Forum for Women and Development	SCN	Save the Children Norway
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	SF	Strømme Foundation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation	Tamira	Tamira Reproductive Health and Development Organisation (Ethiopia)
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual and Intersexed	ToR	Terms of Reference
LO	Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions	UCRNN	Uganda Child Rights NGO Network
NABP	Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted	UNAB	Uganda National Association of the Blind
		USD	US Dollar
		WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
		WFP	World Food Programme

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- 10.99 Evaluation of AWEPA, The Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa, and AEI, The African European Institute
- 9.99 Evaluation of the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)
- 8.99 Aid Coordination and Aid Effectiveness
- 7.99 Policies and Strategies for Poverty Reduction in Norwegian Development Aid