



Partnership

on the development of mutual partnerships for the strengthening of civil society

1. WHY PARTNERSHIPS MATTER

In this age of growing global challenges, civil society organisations (CSOs) must be able to cooperate across national borders to solve local as well as global problems. Partnerships between CSOs in Denmark and local CSOs have proved effective, over many years, in efforts to improve the lot of vulnerable local groups. Partnerships are also important to bring about mutual understanding of what generates and what prevents sustainable development.

Depending on the context and the problems being addressed, such a partnership may take on a rather informal shape or a more formalised expression with written agreements. It is often entered into by CSOs being introduced to one another, sharing perspectives and formalising relations between them, for instance when obtaining external funding for a joint undertaking. At the same time, the problems being addressed by partnerships are often so complex and involve so many stakeholders that other actors need to be incorporated too. These can be, for instance, informal forms of organisation, movements, think tanks, research institutes, government entities and businesses.

Partnerships are at the heart of CISU's strategy, UN Sustainable Development Goal 17, Danida's "The World 2030: Denmark's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action" and "Policy for Danish support to civil society", all of which stress the importance of partnerships between civil society organisations, which, in interaction with the public and the private sectors, commit themselves to promoting people's rights and living conditions by means of development and humanitarian interventions.

2. WHAT IS PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

CISU views partnership as cooperation between two or more civil society organisations, which, having negotiated a shared foundation, enable each other to carry out activities and develop each other's competencies and strengths. Accordingly, the objective of a partnership is both to implement interventions together and to

develop each other organisationally and workwise.

The concept of partnership has traditionally been used to denominate most forms of cooperation between Danish organisations and their local partners often derived from a rose-tinted notion of an equal relationship, where both contribute professionally as well as financially to an intervention or some other joint undertaking. This is often at odds with a reality of unequal financial situations, skewed power relations and different agendas. The bulk of funding is usually channelled through the partner from Denmark. This does not make for a level playing field, no matter how respectful and equality-minded the partners might be to one another. Accordingly, CISU sees a need to introduce some light and shade into how we use the term 'partnership' so as to capture the multiplicity of relations which can be encompassed by such cooperation. At the same time, such clarification may help form a more realistic idea of what the partners can and want to achieve together

Partnerships need to pay attention to mutual obligations and contributions. Two organisations engaging in a partnership are mutually committed to one another. This makes it important for partners to define together what the foundation and objective of the partnership is, and how they wish the partnership to develop. There will typically be differences in what partners are able to contribute and in what motivates them to enter into the partnership. Both factors can create asymmetrical relationships and communication problems if matters have not been talked through from the outset. Thorough efforts to match each other's expectations at the beginning as well as during the course of a partnership can thus help prevent conflict, promote effectiveness and boost satisfaction with the cooperation.

3. PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

This matching of expectations with a view to developing partnerships based on mutual contributions may take place by paying attention to:

- A. The type of partnership entered into, and the strengths and challenges that this type tends to have.
- B. The mutual obligations and rights in the partnership.
- C. How the partners envisage the partnership will evolve over time.

These three subjects will be discussed below.

A. Partnership types – their strengths and challenges

Partnerships never cease to evolve and can take many shapes. The same organisation can also enter into different types of partnership with different partners. Reflecting on the type of partnership in which one is involved also helps shine the spotlight on some of the characteristics, strengths and challenges that need to be taken into account. Experiences of CISU's members show that certain types of partnerships have some typical strengths and challenges that can be considered in the choice of partnership. The table on page 3 shows five types of partnership and their typical strengths and challenges. However, partnerships may contain elements from several types.

B. Development of the partnership – mutual rights and obligations

It is important that the partners together discuss the extent of their rights and obligations to one another. All partnerships contain elements of wielding power and authority, typically related to control over resources and key decisions in the cooperation.

Who, for example, is entitled to define and redefine strategies, amend the budget or hire staff? Are the partners duty-bound to share organisational reports and accounts? And do such obligations work both ways?

It needs to be kept in mind that partnerships combine the purpose of carrying out interventions together and helping to strengthen both organisations on the basis of mutual and complementary contributions from both parties.

This may be in pursuit of organisational capacity development by means of mutual participation, accountability, non-discrimination and transparency. These four issues are elaborated upon in the position paper on rights-based work (www.cisu.dk/værktøj-metoder/cisu-temapapirer).

If capacity development forms part of the cooperation, it is important to discuss and analyse possible weaknesses in each of the organisations, as well as to agree on a description of the desired change, say, in terms of improved knowledge, skills, behaviour and abilities.

C. Expectations of how the partnership evolves over time

The strength of a partnership will typically hinge on whether it is in its start-up, consolidation or mature phase. For example, during the start-up phase, it is important to build mutual trust step by step. Consequently, the definition of rights and obligations will not be as much of a key concern as it will at a later stage. As the partnership evolves, it will often be necessary to reach agreement along the way to define rights and obligations in various areas.

The model below illustrates a potential partnership development from the initial exploratory phase to either



Types	Typical characteristics	Typical strengths	Typical challenges
Value-based partnership	<p>This is based on a shared foundation of core values, e.g. of a religious, political or personal nature. It is the community of values which is the starting point for cooperation rather than the prospect of projects and grants, which are seen as appendices to the partnership. The time horizon is long-term, and there is no plan for terminating the relationship.</p> <p>Example: a country-to-country friendship association and a religious organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for sharing a vision and hence for establishing a long-term partnership. • A community spirit that goes beyond the ongoing activities. • Often built on very close personal bonds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendency to stick to the old routines. • Conflicts can be difficult to handle, since the relationship is built on close personal bonds. • Difficult to catch sight of other relevant partners.
Project-based partnership	<p>Large grants tend to command a rather dominant share of attention. This requires the partnership to strike a balance between being a value-based and a donor-to-recipient type of partnership. The time horizon can be long-term, but specific projects have become its framework for the time being.</p> <p>Example: A partnership that has been awarded a major grant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partners know each other well. • Often produces a highly relevant project initiative with a close relationship to the target group. • There is a wish for a long-term partner relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project implementation tasks impose unaccustomed demands regarding division of responsibilities and decision-making powers which can challenge the pre-existing mode of cooperation. • Potential differences in understanding of the time horizon for the partnership.
Professional partnership	<p>This type of cooperation springs from a particular professional field, such as renewable energy, health, education, conflict resolution or human rights. It will have an element of donor-to-recipient relationship, since projects feature prominently in the justification of the partnership. The time horizon is often delimited, starting off with intense initial project cooperation followed by a gradual phase-out, typically over a long time.</p> <p>Example: partnership between agricultural, labour or environmental organisations. This type may later evolve into an alliance partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual professional knowledge-sharing. • Project work is often underpinned by vast professional capacity among the partners. • Project experience can lead to the formation of an alliance partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential differences in understanding of the time horizon for the partnership. • Propensity for the Danish partner to deliver professional and technical solutions and concepts at the expense of local ownership
Partnership under the auspices of an international organisation	<p>Here the Danish organisation (and sometimes its local partner as well) forms part of an international network. The partnership remains based on a direct relationship between a Danish and a local organisation, but they benefit from the capacity and knowledge contributed by the international network. International NGO networks are often characterised by long-term and permanent partnership between local chapters.</p> <p>Example: an internationally-affiliated child-sponsorship organisation with local partners from inside or outside the network.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local efforts are often able to draw on international capacity • Potential for local results to feed into international/global advocacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The international organisation's field office, rather than locally based partners, may end up playing an unintentionally central role in the implementation of activities • Budgets must cover salaries of employees in different parts of the organisation.
Alliance partnership	<p>This focuses on the exchange of experiences and information. Such partners do not usually follow each other's day-to-day work with projects, but are instead gathered around a particular professional or political agenda. The flow of information is more important than that of money between the partners. The time horizon is long-term, or as long as there is a community of interest or shared political goals.</p> <p>Example: a partnership between fishermen's organisations aimed at collecting knowledge for a global advocacy campaign, for instance, about the UN Sustainable Development Goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The professional or political standpoint is the shared foundation. • Potential for expanding each other's network. • Limited dependence on external funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous dialogue can be hard to ensure without specific project cooperation. • Partners may become distant professionally and politically over time without realising it.

a close partnership or a clear exit strategy:

Important points:

- Partnerships do not necessarily have to evolve towards ever closer cooperation but can also work towards a phase-out. What matters is that the partners have the same expectations of the destination and of the time it will take to get there.
- Organisations are composed of individuals who are often replaced. This adds even greater urgency to writing down clear agreements and expectations at an organisational level.
- It is important that partnerships do not have an exclusionary effect, which would limit the partners' scope for broad-based cooperation with others

4. C WITH THIS POSITION PAPER, CISU WISHES TO PROMOTE Danish civil society organisations and their partners developing mutually beneficial relationships. This means contributing towards:

- Partners forging a shared understanding of the foundation for their cooperation and the course that their partnership should chart over time.
- Ownership of interventions primarily emanating from the target group and the partners representing it, with responsibility being gradually transferred to partners in the countries of cooperation
- Partnerships taking a flexible approach to finding practical solutions to the problems
- Partnerships being innovative and involving other actors, such as social movements, businesses, youth organisations and traditional authorities, with partners supporting each other in exploring other relevant partnerships and networks
- Partnerships including organisational entities formed by poor and vulnerable groups, and cooperating with informal movements which have the determination, opportunity and popular support to influence decision-making processes and which represent vulnerable groups

CISU'S THEMATIC PAPERS

CISU draws up thematic papers setting out our view of how our member organisations may understand, interpret and apply various key concepts in civil society cooperation.

The thematic papers are based on our practice and experience of member organisations' international work, our advisory services and courses, as well as our administration of funds open for applications.

5. HOW TO USE CISU

Funds: Danish organisations and their partners can apply to CISU's funds for support for developing their partnerships through development cooperation.

Capacity services: CISU's member organisations may turn to CISU for advice on how to work with partnership development. They may also attend CISU's courses or suggest subjects to be addressed by CISU.

6. IF YOU WANT TO KNOW AND DO MORE

CISU recommends that the following three processes and tools be considered:

1. Clearing up expectations. Together the partners should reach a common understanding of:

- a) The type of partnership. The types presented in this paper can be used to home in on typical strengths and challenges depending on the context.
- b) The partnership's development. How should the partnership evolve?

2. Partnership agreement: The clearing up of expectations may lead to drawing up a partnership agreement that goes beyond specific joint project undertakings. Such an agreement may set out overall expectations of the cooperation, a common vision, a time horizon and a division of rights and obligations.

3. Project cooperation agreement in relation to a grant: If grants have been awarded for administration under the partnership, a written project cooperation agreement must be drawn up. Unlike a partnership agreement, a project cooperation agreement concentrates specifically on the division of responsibilities, rights and obligations in relation to the project concerned.

See examples of both types of agreement and good ideas for the process at:

<http://www.cisu.dk/værktøj-metoder/partnerskaber>

The position papers are approved by CISU's Board. They are not carved in stone, but will be revised at appropriate intervals in view of experience gained. Moreover, new position papers will be drawn up on other issues.

See the latest version and other position papers at www.cisu.dk/værktøj-metoder/cisu-temapapirer



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