

HOW TO IMPLEMENT A LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT MINDSET IN SHAPING A PROGRAMME STRATEGY

? Why

CISU has from 2025 revised the Guidelines for the Civil Society Fund, taking a further step into **the locally led development agenda**, encouraging applying partnerships to base their work on a stronger relationship with the constituency behind the partners, and the communities and target groups whose experience and development issue are central in the intervention you plan for.

CISU is committed to facilitate strong independent civil society organisations, working in equal and mutually benefitting partnerships to address relevant issues and represent marginalized groups. We have confidence in citizens' ability to organize around what matters to them. Civil society allows **citizens to organize around a common issue**. Finding the right strategy to make a change on this issue depends on who is affected, who can influence, and what resources and capacities you have at hand.

Therefore the starting point should always be the lives lived and the people who are facing the challenges on a daily basis. **It is a question of justice, equity, empowerment and dignity.**

Who

This Tool Paper is relevant for organisations who wish to strengthen their understanding of and work with locally led development.

In particular, it is aimed at those who have previously applied for project-based funding with CISU and are now applying for programme-based funding. You will find direct references to CISUs Guidelines for the Civil Society Fund where an equal partnership is part and parcel of your eligibility for applying for funds.

Generally, however, this Tool Paper can be a relevant starting point for all transnational partnerships between civil society organisations and movements, no matter if you are just two organisations as well as if you are several partner organisations.

LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT AND CISU'S GUIDELINES FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY FUND

Locally led development should be seen as an ongoing development process where local actors have agency in **framing, design, delivery** (including control over resources), and **accountability**, with or without the support of international development cooperation

(CISU's Guidelines for the Civil Society Fund)



Locally led development is at the center of Programme Support in several assessment criteria. Project Support is expected to be based on the same principle.

What

Locally led development is a strong narrative that seeks to change practice. Working across borders and working in settings that bring people living in different realities in an unequal world together, is bound to come with dynamics of power, culture and interests. Considering the unequal and unjust conditions of this world we share, and why there even is a need for support to certain communities is what should drive us to consider the dignity of the people we aim to support.

As development partners applying for funding, you want to do something with someone. No matter if you are a Danish-based organization or a Global South-based organization. It is essential to start from a perspective of respect towards and dignity of the people you seek to support.

This tool paper gives you thoughts and tools to guide you towards starting with the communities that you want to support.

LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT STARTS FROM COMMUNITIES

Global Fund for Community Foundations define communities like this:

“Community” is most commonly defined by geography, but it can also be defined by identity, interests, and shared values, particularly now with the proliferation of social media groups that allow people to congregate and mobilize electronically.

(How Community Philanthropy Shifts Power, p. 10)



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OVERALL STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMME STRATEGY

In CISUs Guidelines for the Civil Society Fund, it is possible to apply for Programme Support, which aims to be able to support “processes of change beyond shorter project cycles” (p. 17).

When you apply CISU for a Small Programme, you are asked how the programme strategy reflects each partners’ strategic priorities.

The intention is that you point to how your choices for strategy in this specific programme is part of the larger strategic priorities, and the social political change that you and partners work for, on a larger scale.

The programme strategy is thus understood as your plan for what you want to do at this stage with the specific funds that you are applying for with CISU. See e.g. also the Application Format for Small/Medium/Large Programmes, chapter 3. In other words, your programme strategy should still lead you towards achieving the same change as in your overall strategies.

For some organisations and partnerships, overall strategies and programme strategy will be more or less identical, if the programme concerns core areas of work and methods of the organisations. For others, the programme will cover only part of their activities and approaches and therefore the programme strategy will be different from the overall strategy.

Being strong on locally led development, your programme strategy needs to present ideas and plans that are well in sync with the constituency or the community that you are aiming to support.

In other words – how well does it fit the target group and their challenges and local needs?



How

Locally led development promotes local actors having agency in **framing**, **design**, **delivery**, and **accountability**.

Agency is both a sense of control and ability to take action. In a partnership between organisations, it is about the ability to influence or choose what actions that are needed.

CISUS PROJECT GUIDE

You can also look to CISUs Project Guide that revolves around a similar management cycle for development projects and processes.



Framing	<p>The framing aims to inform the design. Would usually consist of context, stakeholder and target group analysis, and others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At the overall strategy level: How do the people you work with and for (target group) influence your organization and the decisions you make as an organization? How does a constituency or a community take part in influencing the framing of your work?
Design	<p>The design is about the concrete programme strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At a programme strategy level: How are the communities involved in the idea generation and planning of interventions, supporting you to identify relevant local needs to address? <p>Immediately after funding has been secured, the plans/strategy needs to be more specific and ready to be carried out. This is often referred to as inception. This is e.g. a finished system of monitoring, processes of daily collaboration, fine-tuning budgets, and similar.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you develop a proper system to ensure feedback from the communities to adjust your approach and activities along the way?
Delivery	<p>Delivery, or implementation, revolves around the activities and interactions among the stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In accordance with the design/inception stage above, delivery should be iterative – meaning that experience and feedback inform changes needed.
Accountability	<p>Accountability towards community and the target group can often be downprioritised. But in the spirit of locally led development, this should rather be a crucial focus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work to actively involve local stakeholders and community members, in designing and conducting the evaluation to ensure their perspectives.• Develop an evaluation process that is culturally relevant and sensitive to the local context.



Integrating these aspects, will give you perspectives to include in your application. There are several guidance questions in the Application Format for Small/Medium/Large Programmes that build on these aspects. Similarly, once you submit your application, the actual assessment will be looking at the concrete assessment criteria found in the Guidelines for the Civil Society Guidelines. Several assessment criteria focus on assessing your locally led development aspects.



How

Concrete tools and advice that can be helpful at the different stages to involve communities and target groups

Many tools have been developed and below is just a glimpse of relevant materials to use in workshops where you explore local needs and local interests, advance your power sharing, and ensure a strong buy-in from communities you seek to support.

On the following pages, you will find our recommended actions divided into the different processes of **framing**, **design**, **delivery**, and **accountability**.

SYMBOLS OF ACTIONS:



Specific tools for implementation



Recommendations for further reading and inspiration



Concrete actions to integrate in your planning process

FRAMING

For meetings and discussions with communities



Find numerous workshop tools to work with in community meetings on reflectionaction.org as well as participatorymethods.org/tools.



Classic tools here are also SWOT analyses; but do a search on “alternatives to SWOT” to find other relevant tools.

For discussions between partners



Discuss your different roles. Use e.g. tools such as [Power Awareness Tool](#). Based on this, talk about how you want to strengthen local ownership and decision making.



See various exercises on analyses in [CISUs Project Guide](#), you can carry out when circling in on the development issue and desired impact or change you want to work with. E.g. PESTEL analysis, Problem Tree, Stakeholder analysis



Identify capacity needs, organizationally, and in terms of implementation. Include activities around this in applications. Read more on how to rethink what is actually capacity needs from [Global Fund for Community Foundations](#) (p.14)

DESIGN

For meetings and discussions with communities



Take inspiration from this [Toolkit for participatory mapping and co-design](#) developed by youth organizations.



Consider local giving as part of your design, allowing for communities to contribute with own resources. See also [CISUs Guidelines for the Civil Society Fund](#) for inclusion of own financing and local assets and resources.



Develop setups where communities have decision-making powers. This can be structures where programme delivery is discussed, or it can be through small sub-grants or participatory grants making, where communities decide over portions of the funding. [See results from a study on this and the effects on community ownership.](#)

After funding has been secured (inception):



Realign your detailed planning with communities and target groups in dedicated workshops to ensure timing and seasons are fit for purpose.



See great visualizations on participatory M&E from South African [SaferSpaces.](#)



How do you ensure that safeguarding measures and complaint mechanisms are culturally appropriate and accessible to all members of the local community? See Accountable Now's [Dynamic Accountability Guidebook](#), and for specific requirements related to a grant from CISU, see CISUs site for various accountability measures.

For discussions between partners



What strategies do you use to build capacity among marginalized groups within the community, ensuring that diverse voices are represented in decision-making and designing the intervention? [Take inspiration from Global Fund for Community Foundations' reflection on capacity \(p. 12-15\)](#)



Setting up a structured way to involve and listen to communities / target group / constituency will add value along the way. Ensure representativity, transparency, democratic structures, and agree on decision making powers, to make it worth everyone's time.

- This can be in a steering committee for a given intervention or a more systemic influence from community level into the implementing partners' governance structures (board, membership, general assembly).
- Or through feed-in structures using staff or volunteers to be advocates for the local agency into the larger programme team.

DELIVERY

For meetings and discussions with communities

- ➡ Fulfil the intentions of the structured ways to involve and listen to communities that you agreed upon during the inception exercises.
 - This would for instance be the mechanisms in place (during inception) to gather real-time feedback from the local community, informing you how to adjust activities. Look at [INTRACs paper on feedback mechanisms](#) in order to ensure adaptive programming and learning.
- ➡ Address tensions, disagreements, misunderstandings along the way. Do not underestimate their impact to a healthy collaboration.

For discussions between partners





- ➡ Work deliberately to ensure that collaboration between local stakeholders, project staff, and other partners remains strong and coordinated throughout implementation?
- ➡ If you work with funding from CISU; 'Programme support' operates with a high level of flexibility towards how you can decide or devolve decision making to various stakeholders. If you work with CISUs 'Project Support', you are free to make most decisions in the partnership and only need to request for approval from CISU if you add or remove activities if that affects the objective of the intervention.








Photo: Yellow World

ACCOUNTABILITY

For meetings and discussions with communities

-  Work to actively involve local stakeholders, including community members, in designing and conducting the evaluation to ensure it reflects their priorities and perspectives.
-  Develop an evaluation process that is culturally relevant and sensitive to the local context.
-  Find inspiration from INTRACs paper on [participatory evaluation](#) that can also be used in combination with other evaluation forms.
-  Ensure that the evaluation findings are shared with local stakeholders in an accessible way.

For discussions between partners

-  See also references under Inception.
-  If a strong Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plan has been developed during inception or if embedded into your general work as civil society organisations, this part is so much easier!
-  Take rich inspiration from ALNAPs [Framework for locally led evaluation](#)
-  When developing your Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plan, you can look to [INTRACs Participatory M&E](#), and see their reflections on who plans and manages the M&E-process, as well as the role of the various stakeholders. A key message from this insight, is that: Although participatory tools and methods are useful, what often distinguishes genuine, empowering participatory M&E is how it is facilitated.
-  Be guided by measuring what matters and seek to be in sync with what people working at the local level see and feel is important. As Global Fund for Community Foundations asks: “Do complex issues – for example, around building dignity and trust – take second place to more easily outputs such as “number of wells drilled”?” The point is to build something that is more organizationally founded and looks at the entirety of your work as an organization – not developing unique systems for each individual grant.

GOOD READING MATERIALS ON LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

Good reads for thought-leadership on locally led development

[The Nine Roles that Intermediaries Can Play in International Cooperation](#)

Peace Direct provides this insightful thinking to look beyond funders being merely conduits for funding to organisations in the Global South. The role of intermediaries is far richer than just a mechanism for managing donor funds.

[How Community Philanthropy Shifts Power](#)

This paper from Global Fund for Community Foundations is aimed at funders that deliberately discuss approaches to community philanthropy and putting people in charge of their own destinies.

[What makes a good “locally led” funder](#)

BOND has made this collection of stories that provides concrete ideas to help design funding models that are accessible and appropriate for community-led development.

[Framework for locally led evaluation](#)

ALNAP has gathered insights from research and developed an overall framework for locally led evaluation and also gathered Practical steps to advance locally led evaluation.

[Participatory M&E](#)

INTRACs paper on engaging different stakeholders, especially targeted beneficiaries, in monitoring and evaluation processes.

[Participatory Evaluation](#)

INTRACs paper on participatory evaluation that actively involves key stakeholders.

[Project-based Grant Facilities](#)

A study of the role and effect of participatory funding mechanisms, project-based grants and loan facilities.

Sites and sources of tools for direct use

<https://reflectionaction.org>

Action Aid has developed a large collection of many relevant community level activities to have conversations that inspire reflection and action.

[Power Awareness Tool](#)

A tool from Partos that can be used as a point of departure to discuss your different roles in the partnership.

[Fabo - Working with communities](#)

Sign in for free on Fabo for many tools and courses, and on this specific site to access various tools and methods to be used when planning interventions. Sign-up is free.

[Toolkit for Participatory Mapping and Co-Design](#)

This Toolkit will help you to facilitate workshops for youth-led mapping and design processes.

[Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation](#)

Insightful visualizations and tools from Saferspaces.

[Dynamic Accountability Guidebook](#)

A practical guide for organisations on their journey towards becoming more dynamically accountable - no matter their starting point.

CISU sources

[CISUs Civil Society Fund](#)

Main fund for Danish civil society to engage and strengthen civil society globally, where all geographies and thematic areas are relevant.

[CISU's Tool Paper: Locally Led Partnerships](#)

CISU Tool Paper on Locally Led Partnership that aims to provide inputs and inspiration on how to work with local leadership in the partnerships and proactively engage in ensuring a stronger locally led partnership to address unintentional power imbalances.

[CISUs Tool Paper on Locally Led Adaptation](#)

CISU Tool Paper on Locally Led Adaptation that includes CISUs perspective and stocktake of the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation, and to provide inspiration for civil society organisations engaging in partnerships to address climate change adaptation issues.

[CISU Project Guide](#)

CISU Project Guide contains several practical tools that can be used for carrying out analysis, design and inception of a development intervention. There is an illustrative case that is used continuously throughout the guide.

[CISUs Accountability site](#)

Guidance to the specific requirements on accountability measures when holding a CISU grant.