

## Report on thematic visit

**Destination:** Ghana

**Time:** 19<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October 2024

**Theme:** Partner perspectives on cooperation about awareness raising and engagement in global development in Denmark

**Persons travelling:** Helene Holbeck Kannegaard and Camilla Bøgelund, Engagement Advisors in CISU – Civil Society in Development

### 1. Background

Rationale and justification for the visit is:

In 2024 CISU manage three funds that support projects that create awareness and engage Danish citizens in global development issues.

These three funds are:

- 1) The Engagement Fund (on behalf of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- 2) [The Fund for Information and Engagement Work \(OpEn\)](#) (on behalf of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- 3) [Connect for Global Change](#) (on behalf of EU DEAR INTPA – Development and Awareness Raising)

Cooperation between Danish civil society organisations and local partners has always been an essential criteria in the guidelines in CISU's funds supporting information and engagement work about global development. First and foremost because CISU believes that everyone has the right to tell their own story. Secondly, because it is a valuable way to provide true and nuanced stories about the global south. Furthermore, practice has shown that global perspectives also enhance Danish citizens' engagement.

However, CISU must keep improving as much as possible in this area. The Danish strategy for development cooperation as well as CISU's own strategy both prioritize popular engagement in global development, while at the same time highlighting that all development work must be locally led.

Awareness raising and engagement work in Denmark is not the same as actual development projects. However, the ambition about locally lead and/or equal partnership are still very relevant in this context. If the whole development sector does not keep improving in creating stories in close collaboration with those, the stories are about, we will be irrelevant in the future.

Thus, CISU aim to be front runners in equal partnerships, representation, and joint narratives in global development, and this requires up-to-date best practices.

**Methodology and selection of partners** To decide which partners to visit in Ghana, we mapped all of the projects supported by the Engagement Fund and The Fund for Information and Engagement Work (OpEn).

13 grantees noted in the application platform (Vores CISU) that their projects were connected to Ghana. Some of these only briefly touched on Ghana while also focusing on more countries at the same time, and others had shifted focus to different countries since they received the grant. These interactions typically resembled a journalist-source relationship rather than deep collaboration. Finding these sources can be challenging, and it would be even more difficult to interview a sufficiently large sample of them to gain useful insights about this way of involving voices from the

partner countries. However, in the future, it could be relevant to gain more knowledge about this way of involvement/cooperation.

We decided that these were not relevant for interviewing. The desktop review of the projects also identified eight projects with deeper collaborations involving Ghanaian partners organisations or actors.

Instead, we chose to visit project partners in Ghana whom we believed had established strong cooperation on their engagement projects, as we wanted to explore some best practices.

Based on this selection process we interviewed the following civil society organisations in Ghana:

- Dalun Community Library (partners with Ghana Library Friends)
- HopIn Academy (partners with FANT – For a New Tomorrow)
- YEFL Ghana (partners to Ghana Friendship)
- GDCA – Ghana Developing Communities Association (partners with Ghana Friendship)

We also interviewed Media Foundation for West Africa and the Danish Embassy in Ghana, even though these are not part of information and engagement work supported from CISUs fund or partners with Danish civil society organisations. We tried to set up meetings with other networks and INGO's as well, but unfortunately didn't succeed in arranging meetings with them during the thematic trip.

## **2. Objective**

The concrete objectives for this thematic visit, and thus the interviews in Ghana, were:

- 1) To improve the foundation for CISUs capacity building of applicants and member organisations on engagement and information work to Danish citizens when it comes to cooperation with actors in the global south.
- 2) To strengthen CISU, our members' and grantees' role as frontrunners on good partnerships between Danish actors and local partners in development education and awareness raising in Denmark.
- 3) To examine how and if CISU can be front-runners in a Danish context on the subject of joint narratives about global development

## **3. Observations on thematic issues**

The methods used were semi-structured group interviews with participants from the Ghanaian partner organisations carried out in the local offices. The persons carrying out the interviews were both Helene Kannegaard and Camilla Bøgelund, engagement advisors from CISU.

During the thematic trip, the two advisors carried out six interviews. The tendencies that stood out in these interviews are:

- **Themes for the awareness raising and engagement projects (Global development issues)**

Most of the information and engagement projects about Ghana supported by CISUs funds focuses on climate change as the central global issue (approximately more than 50%).

Ghanaian partners generally agree that this is a relevant topic, but when asked, they highlight other development issues that they think are even more important for Danish audiences to

understand. These themes are education, the impact of inflation, the skills and talents of Ghanaian youth, religious tolerance, culture, and daily life in Ghana.

Ghanaian partner organizations recognize the importance of climate change and are aware that it is a high-priority issue in Denmark; for this reason, they accept it as a relevant topic.

- **Level of cooperation**

As part of our interviews with Ghanaian stakeholders, we introduced a model inspired by the British professor Jess Crombie. The model focuses on the level of involvement of local actors in the storytelling processes and look like a 'staircase.'

We adapted this model to a CISU-context, that now outlines the following levels of involvement – with the top being the highest level of engagement:

1. **The Ghanaian partner or individual took initiative, and the story was directed and told only by locals:** *The Ghanaian partner/individual took the initiative to tell the story and takes all decisions about it, and the storytellers are Ghanaian.*
2. **The Ghanaian partner or individual, shared decisions with Danish partner/individual:** *The Ghanaian partner/individual took the initiative to tell the story and shares decisions with the Danish partner about what it should be about, how it should be told and who the target group should be.*
3. **The Danish partner took the initiative and shared decisions with Ghanaian partner or individual:** *The Danish partner took initiative to tell the story and shares decisions with the Ghanaian partner about what it should be about, how it should be told and who the target group should be.*
4. **The Danish partner consults the Ghanaian partner/individual:** *The Danish partner seeks advice from the Ghanaian partner/individual about how the story should be told and how it should be used.*
5. **The Danish partner informs the Ghanaian partner/individual:** *The Danish partner gives knowledge to the Ghanaian partner/individual about how the story will be used in Denmark and why they have chosen to tell this specific story.*
6. **Tokenism:** *The Danish partner only includes the Ghanaian partner/individual in a symbolic way to give the appearance of involvement from the Global South*
7. **Manipulation:** *The Danish partner pressures the Ghanaian partner/individual to be a part of the story, sometimes in sneaky ways and/or lies about what the story will be about and how it will be used.*

Our interviews made it clear that Ghanaian partner organizations did not necessarily view the top level of involvement as the ideal. They generally find it perfectly acceptable for the

initiative to come from the Danish partner organization, but they emphasize the importance of creating projects and products collaboratively.

Most Ghanaian partners placed their specific projects at the level where "Danish partners took the initiative and shared decisions with Ghanaian partners". They pointed out that these products and projects were developed jointly, with each organization contributing with its unique strengths. For example, Danish partners often had greater insight into the target audiences and platforms used, while Ghanaian partners brought knowledge of relevant local development issues and access to those affected.

There was also an example of a product that was created solely by the Danish organization, with the Ghanaian partner being informed only about the outcome. This process was criticized by the partner who argued that for the partnership to be mutually beneficial, local partners should have the opportunity to contribute relevant input. The input could be knowledge (to make it a true story) but it could also be input on how to make the product relevant for the Ghanaian partner – e.g. putting the local partner organisations logo on a video showing a joint initiative.

- **Collaboration – best practice**

- Generally, we can conclude that long standing partnerships results in better cooperation about engagement and information work.

At the thematic visit we experienced methods for engagement and information work that are equal between global north and global south partner. Those were:

- Involving local target groups in writing a book about their own lives for northern target groups
- Facilitating a cooperation between artists in the global north and the global south to create art about global development issues

Based on the interviews with the partners, we collected the following tips for best practices for cooperation between a partner in the global north and a partner in the global south.

General tips for best practice:

- Involve the local partner before you publish anything about them/their context or the project.
- Remember that everything you publish on the internet can be seen in both the global south and global north context (and might not be understood in the same way).
- Ask the local partner what development theme from their context they would like for Danes to be informed about or engaged in.
- Consider using a local person to interview the target group to avoid cultural misunderstandings.
- Elements of exchange between actors in the global north and south often enhance projects and stimulate engagements in both contexts. Such exchanges can include visits to each other's contexts, which are highly stimulating for individual engagement. However, it may not always be the most cost-effective or climate-friendly approach. Alternative forms of exchange, such as virtual connections, should also be considered and can be used to achieve meaningful engagement.
- If possible, build the information and engagement work on top of a partnership already existing.
- Co-creation! Take initiative and build something together.

- When using digital platform and methods not common for the persons/organisations make sure to explain the method to get a real consent (as they will not know that they consent to participate in).

These pieces of advice must be explained further, so that Danish actors understand exactly what they must do on the basis of them and that the themes and messages in the projects first and foremost must reach Danish target groups. This will be done in the toolpaper on the subject.

It is also important that they are described in the tool paper that the pool of funds, CISU manage, may have separate requirements.

- **Narratives**

All the organisations we interviewed have experienced stereotypical narratives about Ghana or even the work of the organisation.

Some of the examples of stereotypes or missing narratives were:

- A Ghanaian person told us, how he/she met a class with children in Denmark who thought that no Ghanaians have clothes and shoes to play football.

- One person said that Africa is portrayed as poorer than they are (and unhappy) while Europeans are portrayed as being well (economically). The person highlighted how it is not clear in the narratives that this does not mean that Europeans are happier than Africans.

- Another person mentioned that European narratives about Ghana lack to show that the Ghanaian government is also part of the problem when it comes to corruption and a general lack of development. The same goes for Western companies. There is also a lack of stories about their responsibility.

- Some of the people we interviewed said that they do not believe that there is one subject equally relevant for every context – every context has their own specific ‘most urgent’ development issue.

- However, many mentioned that they prefer stories that can be told both in Denmark and Ghana.

- Last but not least, the actors visited found that Ghana is normally framed as a peaceful and democratic country in communication about their country in the western world. They themselves think that there are more nuances to this story. They are happy about their democracy but can find many places where they want to improve it.

Based on this we can conclude that the partnership between the six organisations in Denmark and Ghana is generally really good and equal, but there is room for improvement in the mentioned areas.

#### **4. Outputs and Dissemination**

- Outputs – reflecting ToR

**4.1** Based on the interviews, we give the following recommendations to CISU for internal use in relation to courses, advisory services and grant management and assessment

### **Capacity building**

- When guiding applicants for CISUs funds, we should encourage them to ask their local partners or contacts which topics are truly important to them before deciding.
- CISU should urge applications to contact local journalists who can interview local target groups for the project. This increases the chances that perspectives from the global south are included in a true and equal way.
- CISU must create a model that can show applicants how they can strengthen the inclusion of voices from the global south in their projects. The model should reflect how local actors view effective collaboration. The ideal is co-creation rather than projects solely initiated and controlled by Ghanaian partner organizations.
- CISU should offer a workshop series that provides an in-depth introduction to best practices for including voices from the global south. We recommend a longer-term approach, as this requires time to find good practice and involve southern voices in a meaningful way.

### **Strengthen partnership**

- Make the guidelines for information and engagement funds available in English (and maybe in the future also the whole website, such as [openpuljen.dk](http://openpuljen.dk)).
- Change the guidelines of ‘formidlingslegater’/ ”grants for individuals working with dissemination of information” and make it mandatory for Danish people with communication skills to work with a local person or organisations.
- To facilitate an ERFA-like-session or panel discussion in Denmark with actors working on information and engagement work where they share practices at the inspiration meeting about joint narratives.

### **CISU as front-runner on joint narratives**

- Introduce OpEn to Danish embassies in OECD DAC countries per email with an instruction about how to see engagement and information projects related to the countries, the embassy cover. The purpose of this is to make them aware about how good projects work to inform and engage Danish citizens in development issues in relation to the countries, they work in.
- In the future the OpEn-fund should look into how to use exchanges – either in person or online – between people in the global south and in the global north as a relevant engagement method which probably can also lead to knowledge-based stories about global development.
- CISU should highlight best practices about good cooperation between north and south actors in the tool-paper about the matter, at the inspirations meeting for project applicants and owners and to share it with the Danish MFA, the DEAR support team and CONCORD GCE

network.

- CISU will offer to present the tool-paper about joint narratives for EU DEAR, The Danish MFA and potential MFA-partners like GLOBUS.

#### **4.2 Tool Paper**

We will develop a tool paper in the standard format, including practical advice and step-by-step recommendations on creating joint narratives.

#### **4.3 Other types of products for public dissemination**

We have already planned a public inspirational meeting (for OpEn-grantees and others interested persons) where CISU will share the learnings from this thematic trip. It will take place on January 29.

#### **Annexes:**

- ToR
- People met and itinerary
- Background documentation