

Management response - joint study on locally led development 2025

Background

The Center for Church-Based Development CKU, Disabled People’s Organisations Denmark (DPOD), the Danish Youth Council (DUF) and Civil Society in Development (CISU) (hereafter referred to as the pooled funds or fund managers) have supported equitable partnerships, local leadership and locally-led development for many years. With the recent Strategy for Development Cooperation - A CHANGING WORLD – PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPMENT, it is relevant to enhance the understanding, document best practices and identify where improvements can be made in supporting local leadership and locally led development through the pooled funds.

CISU appreciates the committed work carried out by the consultants leading to learning points on how to improve approaches to partnerships, local leadership, locally-led development within and through CISU. As the learning points are rather broad in character they will feed into already existing processes in the organisation, such as the development of a new strategy (2026-2029), the stocktake on the CSF reform and the ongoing work in the various working groups in CISU. In this management response we narrow our response to the recommendations that hold the largest potential for advancing Locally Led Development.

Follow up

- The management response is shared with relevant staff to ensure that the prioritised learning points feed into ongoing processes.
- The document is reviewed in the 4th quarter of 2026 with a renewed status on each immediate action under Approach and main direction. The Global Outreach working group will take lead in this.

Prioritized learning points

Four learning points are prioritised going forward, as they are areas of importance for CISU and also areas where CISU have most potential for improvement. The prioritised learning points require CISU to act at leadership level, at strategic level, or otherwise it requires a reprioritization of tasks.

The below table takes point of departure in the exact learning point as written in the review report; timing deals with the period where processes within CISU takes place that can capture these; Process track names the specific processes that are taking place/will be taking place where the learning point can be included; and the immediate actions are captured in Approach and main directions-column.

| Learning points (practices found to be conducive to locally led development) | Timing | Process track | CISU management response 2025 Approach and main direction |
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| Equitability in the partnerships | | | |
| Increasing the risk appetite - i.e. loosening up the financial control requirements and allowing organisations to a larger extent to share (financial) risks. Partners can embark on conversations about the risks that each of them runs and possibly create a risk register to describe, monitor and mitigate risks. | Immediate: strategy process is ongoing. Inclusion in group terms of reference January 2026 onwards. | 1) Strategy Prioritization in Terms of Reference for CISU internal working groups | <p>Status: There is an awareness in CISU about the need to increase risk appetite. However, there is a need to further explore what these risks are, beyond financial risks. This will inform how to ensure that risks to a higher extent are shared and where CISU has potential to loosen requirements.</p> <p>Going forward:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) An outline/overview of what risks are run by which stakeholder in managing CISU funds, considering grantees have different grant sizes and hence different capacities. (Advisors and Grant Managers, based upon Leadership prioritization of this) 2) Based on above overview, CISU will analyse where and how to allow for more risk sharing, through desk study, thematic learning visits and conversations with other donors. These inputs will implemented in the forthcoming strategic period (2026-2030) to allow for more risk sharing, supporting the principle of devolving decision making to the lowest appropriate level (cf. principles of locally led). (Grant Managers and Advisors to develop proposal for Leadership decision) 3) Furthermore, it can be explored through the MFA whether the wording of the Finance Act and possibly the Audit Instructions can be modified to ensure a stronger and more mutual role in the partnership. (POL based on strategy process). 4) We will explore whether we should advise grant holders on creating and using a risk register to describe, monitor and mitigate risks each partner runs in the project / programmes (Advisors). |
| The granting mechanisms: The pooled fund managers as donors | | | |
| Applying a strategic, long-term, transformational perspective in the partnerships with less focus on details, possibly with post-grant design and fewer restrictions on finances. | Immediate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stock take which is ongoing - Strategy which is ongoing | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Stock take 2) Strategy | <p>Status: The granting system is still relatively traditional focusing on the classical development project with set outcomes, results framework, monitoring plan mainly designed (by North based donor logic). The conventional, linear approach can lead to hesitancy to involve target groups to avoid raising expectations in case the applications does not go through.</p> |

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| | | | <p>Going forward:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) CISU will map out whether we are ready, already at this stage, to have a clearer distinction between pre-designed and post-grant designed interventions (relevant only for programmes). <i>(Stock take – Civil Society Fund group)</i> 2) CISU will at strategy level develop wording around the different roles in the partnerships, informed by the longer term perspective of what the Civil Society Fund should be supporting, combined with how some of CISUs other funds and capacity building elements can support in terms of developing strong partnerships that are capable of working with post-grant design. <i>(Strategy process to outline, and Advisors to develop here upon)</i> |
| <p>To a larger degree ensuring predictability in funding to promote continuity, avoid draining organisational resources and invest in local capabilities.</p> | <p>Immediate: - Stock take which is ongoing</p> | <p>1) Stock take</p> | <p>Status: Predictability in funding is challenged because of the high competition, and this also leads to constant changes in guidelines, eligibility etc., simply to address the high pressure. There is also a challenge that these changes happen with very short notice.</p> <p>Going forward:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Develop a clearer narrative to be communicated on what is intended from CISUs side, what is expected from CISUs side in terms of the usage of the modalities. <i>(Stock take – Civil Society Fund group)</i> 2) CISU will move away from the practice of doing ongoing minor adjustments to existing frameworks and instead create more predictability by only making changes through official reform processes <i>(Leadership decision that informs how the Civil Society Fund group manages the Stock take process)</i> |
| <p>Ensuring equal access [to information] for both partners in the partnership.</p> <p>Full text: <i>Ensuring consequent use of English in grant management platforms to provide equal access for both partners in the partnership.</i></p> | <p>Immediate: - Prioritization of development tasks with external service provider for VORES CISU, preferably within 2025.</p> | <p>1) Prioritization in group Terms of Reference</p> | <p>Status: There are still some imbalances in who can access which information. Most often, partners rely on Danish organisations to share information from CISU with them. This is because much information is in Danish or only shared with the Danish organisations.</p> <p>So far, the following gaps in access to information has been identified (where partners do not have direct access to information):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The CISU grant management platform can only be accessed by Danish organisations. - Prior to projects/programmes: basic data about the organisations (<i>stamdata</i>) and advisory services - During projects/programmes: contract (is currently in Danish), milestones, requests for change, grant management guidelines - After projects/programmes: feedback on final report <p>Going forward:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Map which information the partners would like to have and what is most pressing <i>(Grant managers / Vores CISU to develop a brief survey for a representative group)</i>. 2) Based on this, change procedures to start sharing information more equally to both partners. 3) CISU to consult with other Pooled Funds managers in terms of their learnings from their software solutions <i>(Vores CISU to initiate meetings)</i>. 4) CISU to update the grant management platform to ensure more equal access for Danish organisations and global partners. E.g. through a B-access to partners to the grant management platform <i>(Vores CISU to develop and prioritize following above steps)</i>. |

Subsequent learning points

Other learning points where CISU are fairing well in terms of existing processes where similar considerations are already considered.

| Learning points (practices found to be conducive to locally led development) | Timing | Process track | CISU management response 2025 Approach and main direction |
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| Civil society cooperation and locally led development | | | |
| Providing access to pooled funds for small and diverse civil society organisations to enable partnerships with ditto diverse organisations in the Global South. | Ongoing | 1) Stock take 2) Strategy | Status: This is one of the underlying principles for all CISU funds (CSF, DERF, CCAM, the Neighbourhood Fund, OpEn and Connect for Global Change) and is part of CISUs core mandate. Going forward: 1) Stay on course and keep ensuring that a broad range of different types of civil society organisations have access to the fund. This means, to also ensure that smaller and new organisations continue to have access. |
| Reassessing approaches to storytelling in public engagement activities in Denmark by promoting a 'power-shifted' approach to collecting personal stories in the Global South | 2025/2026 | 1) OpEn 2.0 | Status: CISU requires that stories told in information and engagement activities supported by CISU are done in an equal, constructive and respectful manner involving the people whose life it is about. This is present in current guidelines, advisory practices, as well as the granting system for OpEn, Connect for Global Change and the Information Fund. Going forward: 1) Stay on course and explore how to further strengthen this in the updated guidelines for OpEn and the Information Fund. |
| Ensuring that guidelines for public engagement pools promote locally led development | 2025/2026 | 1) OpEn 2.0 | Status: LLD is not explicitly mentioned in OpEn, Connect for Global Change and the Information Fund. The focus is on including actors from the Global south and that stories are told in an equal, constructive and respectful manner involving the people whose life it is about. Going forward: 1) Explore if it should be part of the updated guidelines for OpEn and the Information Fund. |
| The added value of membership, peer-to-peer partnerships and volunteers | | | |
| Supporting member-based, peer-to-peer relationships and voluntary engagement to enable equitability in partnerships | 2025/2026 | 1) CISU Capacity development group (KUG) | Status: This is one of the underlying principles for capacity building of members and grant holders and all CISU funds (CSF, DERF, CCAM, the Neighbourhood Fund, OpEn and Connect for Global Change). There is an increased focus on having courses, webinars and workshops where partners can participate. Going forward: 1) Stay on course and explore how to further strengthen peer-to-peer relationships in capacity development services. |
| Offering advisory services and activities at times and locations that work for volunteers | 2025/2026 | 1) CISU Capacity development group (KUG) | Status: Advisory sessions and courses are held at times which accommodates volunteers. Going forward: 1) Stay on course and continue to balance times for courses to accommodate volunteers as well as employees. Continue being flexible in times for advisory sessions. |
| Assisting grant applicants in defining context-sensitive and reasonable budgets for volunteer related expenses to recognise the role of volunteers in the partnerships | 2025/2026 | 1) Stock take | Status: The recent introduction of community contributions in the budgeting for CSF projects can be seen as an acknowledgement of this. Going forward: 1) Take this into consideration in the stock take of CSF. It is important that it does not become a rigid requirement to have volunteers involved in the programmes. |
| Equitability in the partnerships | | | |
| Nurturing long-term partnerships and personal relations to build trust and mutual respect, which are key preconditions for equitability in a partnership. | 2025/2026 | 1) Strategy | Status: The current grant system and the high competition of funds is challenging for nurturing long term partnerships. More programmes might partly be a solution to this. Most partnerships supported by CISU are characterized by strong personal relations. This is part of the soft power CISU has. Going forward: 1) Keep the importance of long-term partnerships and personal relationships in mind in the development of the upcoming strategy. 2) Continue having courses focusing on partnerships and encourage experience sharing beyond funding. |
| Being clear about division of roles and responsibilities in the partnership and about who should be involved in decision- | 2025/2026 | 1) Stock take / strategy | Status: CISU explicitly asks about the division of roles in applications for all funds. An assessment of decision making in the partnership is part of the |

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| making about which issues. One way could be to establish project steering committees where relevant community members and/or local partners have the majority. Another way could be to regularly conduct a partnership assessment where the different roles and responsibilities as well as the overall partnership are reviewed. | | | final reporting to CISU. CISU does not/will not dictate how partnerships should be setup (e.g. by having steering committees). Going forward: 1) CISU to uphold an emphasis on the "subsidiary-principle" – those who are closest to the problem should be the ones to solve it. |
| Facilitating more South-South exchange to provide space for local groups to reflect, plan and learn together. | 2025/2026 | 1) Strategy | Status: This is an untapped potential. E.g. by facilitating joint platforms between organisations in the respective countries receiving CISU support. This could e.g. be done through the embassies (Kenya is a good example of this). CISU has been the focal point for Danida Fellowship Center – to share opportunities for trainings with CSOs in the Global South. Going forward: 1) The strategy development should consider whether it is time for CISU to take up a more substantial role as a convener. |
| Creating consortia where more South organisations partner with one Danish to obtain a better power balance in the partnership. | 2025/2026 | N/A | Status: This is already possible but requires even more clarity about the division of roles and responsibilities. Going forward: 1) Stay on course. But can develop into a more used setup if “lead” organisation can be both Danish and south-based organisation |
| Establishing small-grant facilities that can devolve decision-making to community level. | 2025/2026 | N/A | Status: This is already possible and is encouraged in the advisory sessions. We have also held courses about this. Going forward: 1) Stay on course. |
| The role of language and terminology | | | |
| Being conscious about language biases and changing language practices that reinforce power asymmetries. | 2025/2026 | 1) Stock take | Status: CISU still has some challenges with language and choice of words. The guidelines are in a language that can be difficult to understand. Going forward: 1) Continue to make a conscious effort to simplify language in guidelines, formats etc. Revisit the use of words such as capacity development, aid, advice, technical input. |
| Access to knowledge and information | | | |
| Ensuring that pool websites, guidelines, policies, templates etc. are (fully) accessible in English. | 2025/2026 | 1) Web and communications group | Status: The website is translated to English. Going forward: 1) Stay on course and make use of the technical solutions that are possible that doesn't compromise the legitimacy of what is written and upholds the safety of our data. |
| Offering training courses – particularly leadership training – also to South partners, i.e. online, in English and during different working hours. | 2025/2026 | 1) CISU Capacity development group (KUG) | Status: There is an increased focus on having courses, webinars and workshops where partners can participate. It is however important to keep in mind that CISUs mandate (for now) is to provide capacity development services to members. Going forward: 1) Continue to be more ambitious in offering trainings where partners can participate. |
| Ensuring that evaluations serve as integrated learning processes involving all relevant stakeholders throughout the process. | 2025/2026 | 1) CISU M&E group | Status: it is not a requirement that evaluations are made as part of project and programmes. However, evaluations are more often made for accountability purposes rather than learning purposes. How to do good evaluations are already part of MEAL courses by CISU. Going forward: 1) Stay on course. |
| The granting mechanisms: The pooled fund managers as donors | | | |
| Allowing for sharing of administrative fee in budgets to provide less restrictive core funding to South partners. This change could be made by the pools within the current framework. | 2025/2026 | 1) Stock take | Status: This is possible within the current framework. Going forward: 1) We will explore if it is possible to provide more core support to partners or if it needs to be emphasised more how it is possible now in the current guidelines. |
| (Further) opening pool advisory meetings, status meetings and evaluation meetings for South partners and offering advisory service in English (and possibly Spanish (Arabic, French?)). | 2025/2026 | N/A | Status: Partners can participate in advisory meetings. Partners are required to participate in status meeting. We can offer advisory sessions in English and if available, also in Spanish. Going forward: 1) Stay on course |