

The Development Fund's

Partnership Policy



Introduction

Since its foundation, the belief that local civil society and local communities are the ones that are best positioned to identify challenges and solutions to improve their own lives has been at the core of the Development Fund's work. This was an innovative approach when we were founded in 1978 and continues to be valid 40 years after. Partnerships with local civil society organisations in our project countries has been the key for the successes and results we have achieved. Our partners contribute with knowledge on the local context, well-adopted solutions to local challenges, and technical expertise among others. The Development Fund contributes with funding, technical and managerial knowledge, platforms and networks for learning and advocacy among others that strengthen civil society organisations.

Our partnership philosophy is also founded on the belief that a strong and representative civil society is a precondition for inclusive development and democracy. We work to strengthen civil society organisations' capacity to influence their own welfare, as well as local and national development and decision-making processes. Our partnership policy is based on a set of values that have been guiding our work: solidarity; justice; participation; and sustainability. This has resulted in a set of principles for our partnership policy, which guide the development and follow-up of the partnerships. The principles are:

- Inclusion and participation
- Mutual respect and trust
- Long-term commitment and flexibility
- Common visions and values
- Local ownership
- Transparency and accountability
- Complementary purpose and added value

As our partnership evolves, we will consider additional steps to build stronger and/or different kind of partnerships. This may involve core support to selected partners, assigning additional roles of selected partners in programme set-ups (e.g. as lead partners in consortia).

Why and how we work with local partners

A strong and well-organised civil society is crucial for building and strengthening of democracy and good governance. In many of the countries where we are working, civil society organisations need constant support in order to increase their capacity to influence development processes at local, national and international level.

Strengthening of civil society is part of Development Fund's original mandate and long-term strategy towards 2030. Our goal is to contribute to a strong civil society, where national organisations, grassroots or community-based organisations, farmers' organisations and other kinds of organisations have the capacity to advocate for change in their communities and countries, contribute with technical knowhow and locally grounded solutions, defend human rights, act as watch dogs towards influential actors, follow-up on governments (from local to national) strategies and plans, engage and hold local and national authorities accountable. We do this through partnerships, which include capacity building in areas such as administrative management, project management and technical areas. To strengthen our target group's voice, be it farmers, women, youth's etc. is to strengthen their rights.

Strengthening of civil society is not only a goal for our work, but also a means to achieve desired changes. Through local partners, we can reach and support the most vulnerable and marginalised groups. In some cases, our local partners represent these groups directly in their capacity of being grassroots' or other forms of member-based organisations. In other cases, they are locally rooted and have established good and trustful relations with local communities. They can also have established good and trustful relations with local communities by working in the areas for several years. Other types of organisations, such as international organisations or research institutes, can also play a crucial role in reaching out to local communities and to build their own capacity and know-how of local communities and their organisation. A common feature for many of these organisations is that they have in-depth knowledge of the local context and are in a good position to ensure local ownership and participation through a bottom-up approach where the people we work for and with are included. This strengthens the embeddedness and sustainability of our work and the changes we achieve.

This approach is in line with the argument by several international initiatives, such as the Grand Bargain, of the need to increase the localisation of aid efforts by increasing the

involvement of national and local organisations in development countries. This is recognized as beneficial and necessary both to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of aid, but also to ensure better participation, ownership, coordination, collaboration, transparency, sustainability and to avoid that international organisations undercuts local civil society by recruiting their people, monopolising donor funding and “competing” for beneficiary groups and governments attention (avoid duplication).

We work with partners to

- Create change in local communities and among our target group
- Develop methodologies – combine local and traditional knowledge with new information and technologies
- Policy and work – influence policies at different levels through the promotion of good practices

DF’s added value

DF brings value to the partnership and partners in several ways beyond the mobilisation of funding. One of our most important added values is that the close dialogue and discussions with our partners where make each other better through contributing with strategic visions, ideas, know-how, insight, experience, networks, routines/standards, and examples from other partners/programmes etc. This is a non-tangible added value that is frequently mentioned by our partners when they assess our contribution. Partners also highlight the long-term commitment and flexibility as an important added value. By bringing different partners together in one programme, we facilitate learning and exchange or experience among partners. We also contribute to increased credibility and recognition of our partners towards other donors and stakeholders at different levels.

We also add value to the partnerships through the following:

- Development of new methodologies and approaches
- Facilitate learning and exchange or experience within and across programmes / countries
- Technical capacity building
- Increased awareness and capacity building of inclusion of women, youth, people

with disabilities etc.

- Promotion of international human rights
- Networks
- Facilitate links to private sector
- Documentation and promotion of good practices
- Capacity building in project management, including M&E and tools for qualitative documentation, reporting and project development
- Capacity building in anti-corruption and management of financial resources

Types of partnerships

We collaborate with different kind of partners. Many of our partners are locally rooted or have years of experience from our areas of engagement. They enjoy trust from the local communities and have valuable capacity in terms of community empowerment, organisation of grass-roots organisations, as well as in specific thematic areas such as management of natural resources, climate adaptive agriculture, income generating, agro-biodiversity etc. However, they may lack specific expertise in some areas. Other partners have specific thematic expertise in one or several core thematic areas but lack local representativeness.

The different partners of DF will often complement each other. We want to build on each partner's expertise and experience and seek to establish partnerships with different kind of organisations where each one of us can add value to our work to achieve common goals.

While each partner brings expertise to our programmes, they will have different needs and roles to play. We have therefore developed two main partnership categories: full-scale partnerships and strategic partnerships. This approach helps us to identify our own role towards the partners. It also enables us to develop programmes where different partners play different roles and to facilitate learning between partners.

Engaging in **a full-scale partnership** is with an intention of a long-term collaboration towards the beneficiaries, but also includes a goal of learning, capacity building and / or organisational strengthening. The Development Fund will prioritise locally rooted national non-governmental organisations community-based organisations and social movements that represent the target group for full-scale partnerships. Capacity building and organisational strengthening of the partners are additional values to the partnership, where

the Development Fund in dialogue with the partners identifies areas where they have needs for capacity building, from institutional management, project management to technical skills and advocacy. When developing over time, this kind of partnership will foster confidence and mutual support and benefits between the partner and the Development Fund, which again is important for strategic planning and development of programmes and country strategies. The Development Fund may also support partners in advocacy and policy work at national or international level.

Strategic partnerships are established with actors that can have specific expertise, thematic, technical or otherwise, that are needed to achieve certain desired changes that the full-scale locally rooted non-governmental organisation partners or community organisations partners do not possess at the time. These are partners often without a specific geographic focus area for their work. While organisational strengthening of these partners is in general not a stated aim for this type of partnership, they are often involved in planning and programme development and strategy discussions. Common values and vision with DF are also important to establish this kind of partnership. Institutions within this category of partnership are international organisations, research institutions, government institutions, and in some cases non-governmental organisations that have specific areas of expertise. Strategic partnerships are often established for a more limited timespan, for example until the completion of specified activities, a certain project or achievement of specific policy objective.

How we select our partners

The Development Fund work with partners that complement each other and our own organisation. We select new partners, or decide to continue partnerships with existing partners, during processes of strategy development or/and programme/project development. We do assessments of our existing partners based on a series of factors, such as performance, thematic expertise, common values and interests among others. During this process, we involve and have a close dialogue with the partners.

We may seek new partners when we are developing new programmes/projects or strategies. If we decide to engage in new geographical areas or new thematic areas, we will identify new potential partners unless our existing partners already have competence in the new geographical or thematic areas. We also analysis possible gaps in the current partners

involved in a programme in order to identify needs for additional expertise.

Before entering into partnership with a new organisation, we make a thorough assessment of possible gaps in existing partnerships, the local context and the needs to achieve our goals. There are different reasons for establishing partners. In many cases, we establish new partnerships when we plan for long-term strategies, or if we want to start intervention in new geographical areas within the same country or enter into new countries. In other cases, we may look for new partners for specific programmes where we need additional capacity (mostly technical), or we need to replace an existing partner.

The selection of partners goes through different steps. We identify potential partners through actively searching/looking for partner, mainly by using our network in the countries or internationally, or by contacting organisations we have come to know of. Informal talks are often a useful introductory way of finding common ground and understanding, and we always have meetings with potential partners before making the next step. When we have identified and mapped potential partners, we use an assessment tool for potential partners we want to collaborate with. We use this tool to map the partners' capacity in key areas, such as relations and approaches to work with local communities, technical capacity, administrative capacity, financial management etc. During this process, we visit the partners' offices and have field visits to explore their work on the ground. In some cases, the assessment tool may be used as a kind of tender where we compare potential partners in order to identify the best partners, while in other cases, it is used to check that the partner meets selected basic criteria. We have not established a specific score that the partners should meet as this depends on needs and our own assessment of the partners strengths and weaknesses.

Criteria for selection:

The Development Fund partners with organisations that know the challenges and opportunities in a geographically or thematic area, have shared goals with us and fit within our objectives. We engage in partnership with organisations that work to combat disempowerment and focus on building long-lasting capacity among the beneficiaries.

The Development Fund apply different criteria for selecting partners, among which the most important are:

- Representativeness of the target group (e.g. grassroots organisations, farmers' cooperatives, other member-based organisations)
- Relations to and confidence with the target group and local communities (origin of the organisation, experience from the area, approach to community empowerment and participatory methodologies)
- Thematic expertise (in line with DF's priorities)
- Geographical focus
- Shared values
- Strategic priorities of the partner organisation

We also consider the partners' relations with other stakeholders, such as local or national governments. Depending on the local context, good relations with authorities may be important for selecting a partner, or we choose partners that act as watch dogs and a counter force towards the governments. We do not enter into partnership with organisations that violates international norms or whose work, vision and activities may undermine the overall goals DF is working for.

How we develop and monitor our partnerships

Development of partnership is the main part of our collaboration with partners. This is where many of our principles of partnership are put into practice.

- **Inclusion and participation:** We involve partners in strategy discussions and programme and project development. Throughout the lifetime of programmes and projects, we have a close dialogue with partners to identify examples for learning, challenges, needs for adjustments etc. We and our partners keep each other updated on changes within the organisation and other important issues, such as government priorities, international trends etc. We may also consult our partners when relevant for the development of policy positions on specific issues.
- **Mutual respect and trust:** We aim to have an open dialogue with partners and share our own assessments of their strengths and weaknesses. We also invite the partners to share

their view and assessment of us as a partner, and to listen to their concerns regarding the partnerships.

- **Long-term commitment and flexibility:** Development of partnership is important for our long-term commitment with partners. Long-term commitment is an important part of the full-scale partnership, where capacity building and organisational strengthening are important. Long-term commitment contributes to building mutual respect and trust, as well as well as learning and mutual building of know how. We also aim to be flexible to changes and adjustments when necessary, both with full-scale and strategic partners. Partners also show flexibility in terms of adjusting to and addressing our concerns. Dialogue, inclusion, mutual respect and trust are important for reaching mutual levels of flexibility.
- **Common visions and values:** We look for partners that share our vision and values. We support our partners with capacity building in gender equality and social inclusion, and promotion of human rights is an important part of our partnerships. We do not enter into partnerships with organisations that have goals that may undermine DF's goals and values.
- **Local ownership:** Partners often know the context well, and are better positioned to involve beneficiaries in planning, implementation, accountability to beneficiaries. We expect our partners to involved beneficiaries in planning and implementation, and to build on their assets. This is an important part of building sustainability in our programmes.
- **Transparency and accountability:** While trust and open dialogue are important, there is also a need for mechanisms for accountability and transparency. We set clear expectations to our partners on management of funds, anti-corruption, achievement of results and compliance with our requirements. We support the partners with capacity building and close follow-up when necessary. We also have a responsibility to foster dialogue around issues of transparency and accountability towards other stakeholders, particularly the target group.

We monitor our partnerships through different mechanisms. We have regular partner meetings to discuss progress, exchange experiences and needs for adjustments of the programme/project. These meetings involve all partners that are part of the same

programme. We also have bilateral meetings with partners where we discuss performance, challenges and solutions, among others. Partners submit quarterly reports (activity and financial), and annual reports, to which we provide comments. We also follow-up specific issues with the partners. Staff with technical expertise in the thematic area, MEAL advisors and financial staff are involved in the monitoring of partners. Our staff regularly visit the partners and project areas to monitor progress, quality and management. During these visits, interaction with beneficiaries and other stakeholders is crucial. We provide feedback to the partners during and after these visits. We do not have a standardised system or tool for assessing the partners performance but will consider the development of such tools where both we and our partners can assess performance and partnership. To monitor capacity building and organisational strengthening, we have developed a tool for institutional assessment. We conduct an institutional assessment of the partners at the start of the partnership to map their strengths and weaknesses. The tool identifies gaps and is used for our capacity building of the partners. We conduct the institutional assessment tool towards the end of a programme/project period as to assess the partners development and capacity. While we aim to have mutual partnerships, we are aware that there might be conflicts of power and interests between us as a donor and the partners. The development of partnership as described above, where mutual trust, dialogue and transparency are key aspects, will enable both us and the partners to reduce and handle such conflicts when they arise.

How we phase out or end partnerships

There are many reasons for ending partnerships. Partnership can be ended because we decide to phase out a country programme or stop working in specific geographical areas in a country. Changes in strategic focus or thematic priorities may also be a reason for ending partnerships. Changes in a partner's strategic priorities can also lead to an end of partnership. There may also be specific challenges with the partnership and collaboration between us and a partner, which can result in the decision to end the partnership. These challenges can be too slow progress, lack of achievement of results, poor financial management, mismanagement of funds and weak organisational capacity to ensure the sound management of the projects.

The end of a project or programme period is the most "natural" time to consider if we should phase out some partners. In this process, it is important to assess the existing partners in line with the criteria for choosing new partners. We base our decision on to whether we will

continue to work with a partner or not on an analysis of each partner's contribution and role in a new phase or programme/project, and the value they will add to the programme and our work.

When we decide to phase out or end a partnership, our guiding principle is to allow long-term partners, and ourselves, time to prepare for the out-phasing. Depending on the type of organisation, we will develop an exit plan. The sustainability of the partner organisation and follow-up of the beneficiaries should always be addressed in the exit plan. This is particularly important when the partner organisation is small and locally rooted, such as community-based and/or membership organisations. Ideally, ending partnership with this kind of organisation should be prepared in at least two years in advance.

In some cases, it is not necessary to plan for a long-term process when we end partnerships. This can be the case of strategic partnerships, and/or the partner is strong and likely to maintain its activities without support from the Development Fund. However, it is important to have a close dialogue with the partner and to prepare for a possible ending of the partnership as early as possible. In these cases, it is also important to have an exit-plan for the project/programme as to ensure sustainability of the changes and results among the beneficiaries.

In exceptional cases, partnership is ended because of non-compliance with agreements, such as mismanagement of funds. In these cases, we follow our guidelines and policies for anti-corruption and reporting of mismanagement of funds. In these cases, we do not prepare exit plans but ensure that all outstanding funds and assets are handed over accordingly.