



Performance Organisational Review of the Norwegian Missionary Council Office for Development Cooperation

May 2008

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

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Responsibility for the contents and presentation of findings and recommendations rests with the study team.
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Acronyms

AR	Areopagos
BN	Bistandsnemda - Norwegian Missions in Development
BNS	BN Secretariat
FU	Fagutvikling - special topic development.
WEGE	Women's' Empowerment and Gender Equality
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NLM	Norwegian Lutheran Mission
NMA	Norwegian Mission Alliance
NMS	Norwegian Mission Society
NOK	Norwegian Kroner
PYM	Norwegian Pentecostal Mission
RBA	Rights Based Approaches
SA	Salvation Army, Norwegian Chapter
TOR	Terms of reference

Foreword

This report presents the findings of a performance organisational review of Bistandsnemda, The Norwegian Missions in Development (BN) which was carried out between September 2007 and January 2008.

The objective of the performance review is to review the tools and resources available to BN and examine whether these allow BN to achieve its own objectives, be relevant to local partners and target groups, and be able to secure good results and cost efficient use of funds in line with Norwegian political priorities.

The review has been carried out through desk studies of documentation, interviews with staff in BN, Oslo and with representatives from a selected number of member organisations in Stavanger and Oslo, and a field visit to China. A second field visit had to be cancelled due to political unrest in Kenya.

The team consisted of Susanne Vedsted (team leader) and Kristin Skov-Spilling from COWI, and Senior Advisor Marit Bergrav, Norad. During the field visit in China, the team was assisted by consultant Ms. Wang Wanying.

The consultants from COWI bear the responsibility for the contents of this draft report and eventual corrections will be made after the workshop with BN and its member organisation in Oslo, scheduled to take place in March 2008.

The review team would like to thank all involved staff and stakeholders in and around BN for their kind cooperation and assistance in this process.

Executive summary

Introduction

Norad has decided to undertake performance organisational reviews on a regular basis of all its partner organisations. The Norwegian Missions in Development (BN) is one of Norad's large partners receiving NOK 140 million per year under the present agreement. BN is an umbrella organisation with 18 members, all of which are Christian mission organisations. At present 16 of them are active in development cooperation. The two main roles of BN are: administration of the framework agreement with Norad and quality control, and competence building of member organisations. It does not execute any programmes in the field.

The methodology used to collect information and data for this review is a combination of document screening, interviews with stakeholders in Oslo and Stavanger and a field visit to China. The focus of the report is more on processes and the capacity of BN to perform its tasks, and less on the performance and results of the individual programmes in the field

The mandate of BN is to negotiate and administer the agreement with Norad. It is further to provide quality assurance and ensure that the applications forwarded to Norad are in compliance with the agreement. BN's obligations towards Norad, as described in the present framework agreement¹, are to ensure that the programmes supported are relevant to the overall Norwegian development strategies and guidelines for NGOs.

Overall findings and conclusions

The overall conclusion of the review of BN is that it is a well functioning and competent organisation, with good procedures and committed and qualified staff. Despite the rather complex position of BN, the review team finds the organisation to be updated on the development agenda and active with respect to capacity development of members and needed tools. According to the team, there are however aspects that needs to be discussed and improved within the mandate of BN.

¹ Samarbeidsavtale på Strategi og Programnivå mellom Norad and BN, signed 08.02.07

a) A key question for the organisational performance review was to assess if BN as an umbrella organisation is able to achieve its own objectives. A second parameter was to assess the relevance to member organisations, their local partners and target groups.

The team examined the tools and procedures of BN and found that the BN Secretariat generally has adequate tools and procedures in place which are well functioning - both at the administrative/financial level as well as at the programme level. Members have their internal systems but are reporting according to templates provided by BN.

The Secretariat strives to improve existing tools and be more professional in the field of capacity building. FU is the cornerstone of capacity building in BN and the team finds the activities to be of high relevance. However, to ensure that members get training in fields where they lack capacity, the team suggests that training needs assessment of the member organisations are systematically undertaken to promote a more targeted and differentiated capacity development.

The team finds that BN has the capacity to fulfil the role as a think tank and also carries out 'think tank activities' such as annual and thematic meetings and other FU activities. However, there are limits. As BN acts as a kind of 'buffet' served to the members where they can choose between the different plates and only take the appetizing and digestible parts, it has no means to enforce member organisations to participate in discussions and take onboard new knowledge. In some organisations, capacity development therefore can be sporadic. BN has also limited means to force members to transfer capacity building activities to partners in the field.

During the review, the member organisations expressed satisfaction regarding the capacity building activities of BN and that being a member of BN provides influence in a positive way. With the limitations of this review, it is difficult for the team to document if there has been an increase in the level of technical competences amongst the members. However, based on the interviews with BN staff, members and other stakeholders and via reviewing reports, it seems capacity has increased although the actual impact at the organisational level may vary according to the existing capacity level of each member organisation.

BN carries out regular evaluations of member organisations and project activities and share results with member organisations and partners. Networking and exchange of experiences are important tools for BN. The team found that networking between members in Norway generally are working well whereas it seems to be more difficult in the field because of geographical distances, differences in activities and identities of the members. The team found that it is difficult for the BN Secretariat to implement the network strategy without a full commitment from members.

In summary, with the present umbrella structure it is difficult for BN to ensure that all procedures are communicated from members in Norway to partners in the field. BN is dealing with a rather inhomogeneous member-group with different needs and capacities.

Recommendations:

- BN depends on its members to deliver on its mandate and objectives. BN should thus be able to demand full commitment from the member organisations in order to be able to achieve its objectives;
- BN Secretariat should consider undertaking a training needs assessment of the members to elaborate more differentiated capacity building;
- BN Secretariat should emphasize the need for networking and the programme concept to the members at all levels;
- BN Secretariat should continue capacity building with respect to cross-cutting issues and include competent members and partners as resources.

b) The review also entailed assessing whether BN is able to secure good results and cost-efficient use of funds in line with Norwegian political priorities.

A large portion of the BN portfolio is concentrated on service delivery, and here the results in terms of tangible outputs are quite clear. In terms of results relating to the more overall development objectives of BN, reducing poverty and empowering the vulnerable and civil society the concrete results are not as easily identified. It is recommended that BN focuses more on baseline studies in the beginning of a new programme to uncover not only quantitative aspects but also more qualitative aspects which can be used to monitor progress on the advocacy and capacity building components of the programmes. The "reporting on results" project should also be finalised.

The umbrella model is efficient in terms of reduced transactions costs for the involved parties. It was found that the cost of BN is not excessive taken into consideration the mandate of, and the number of tasks undertaken by the organisation. In an alternative set-up where Norad would carry out what BN is actually doing, the transaction costs most likely would be higher.

In general, the team finds the activities carried out by member organisations and partners to be relevant to the overall focus of Norwegian development priorities and the guidelines for grants to civil society. BN has a strong poverty profile and emphasises local ownership and capacity building. There are however elements of the BN overall programme that are less in line with the Norwegian priorities, especially what concerns thematic and geographic concentration.

Recommendations:

- BN should focus more on baseline studies in the beginning of a new programme to uncover not only quantitative aspects but also more qualitative aspects which can be used to monitor progress on the advocacy and capacity building components of the programmes;
- BN should continue its focus on ensuring relevance with Norwegian policies and strategies. This would entail working strategically towards more thematic and especially geographic concentration. The members work in 42 countries, which poses important challenges for BN in terms of monitoring and quality assurance.

c) Lastly, the review team was to consider the country programme approach as well as the partner programme concept of BN.

With respect to the country programme process, it is the opinion of the team that the exercise has been cumbersome but also fruitful for BN and the members. It has forced them to start thinking in terms of programmes rather than projects and also consider their common points of entry, the strategic direction of the portfolio, and possible synergies between the members present in a country.

The partner programme also seems like a relevant development of the BN programme - strengthening local organisations and civil society organisations to promote ownership and a stronger sustainability. The implementation of the partnership will require more intense capacity training of members and partners of which BN will be in charge. The further strengthening of local partners is necessary in terms of achieving the overall objectives of BN.

Recommendations:

- BN should pursue the country programme planning together with the member organisation and identify areas of strategic harmonisation and more practical coordination, e.g. sharing premises and logistical tools;
- The country plans should contain a more analytical consideration of why the organisation considers it important to work in a particular country and region, with particular partners and on specific programmes. More focus on what the rationale is for being there and on the value added by the organisation is, and less focus on trying to combine the programmes or projects of each organisation at an overall country level. What specific and more strategic contributions can the organisation offer and how do they envisage doing it? This kind of analysis would assist in developing a more strategic direction to the BN portfolio;
- The review team suggests that BN should analyse the process and the experiences acquired regarding the country programme and include this in the partner programme work;
- The team suggests that BN takes the opportunity to do more targeted and differentiated capacity building of members to ensure that they have the right tools to train their partners, and to consider including a more institutionalised approach to capacity building of the partners by BN itself;
- BN should work towards more alignment and harmonisation to the partner strategies to reduce their transaction costs. The way forward lies in the country and partner programme approach, as strengthening the capacities and the quality of the partner management system will allow BN, and potentially other donors, to align to these systems.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Norad has decided to undertake performance organisational reviews on a regular basis of all its partner organisations. The Norwegian Missions in Development (BN) is one of Norad's large partners receiving NOK 140 million per year under the present agreement. BN is an umbrella organisation with 18 members, all of which are Christian mission organisations. At present 16 of them are active in development cooperation. The two main roles of BN are: administration of the framework agreement with Norad and quality control, and competence building of member organisations. It does not execute any programmes in the field.

The structure of the report is as follows: This chapter gives an overview of the analytical framework and the methodology that have been used in this review. It also presents assumptions and hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the review, which have been the working tools during the review. In chapter 2, a presentation and a description of BN and its member organisations are given. The mandate of BN as well as the required tools to lift its mandate will be discussed. Chapter 3 is a performance analysis of BN, which examines and analyses the tools BN has - and how they are used throughout their responsibilities. And finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented in chapter 4.

1.2 Purpose and scope of the review

According to the TOR, the purpose of the performance organisational review is to "learn from experience and be able to prepare programmes with high quality and excellent results". This will be done by looking into the ability of the organisation to achieve its own objectives, by examining its relevance to members, local partners and target groups and its ability to secure good results and cost efficient use of funds in line with Norwegian political priorities. Furthermore, the review is to consider the feasibility of comprehensive country programmes and the new partner programme concept which is planned to be pursued in the present BN strategy.

The Christian platform and the diaconal work constitute the common point of entry for the various member organisations, which are otherwise relatively different. BN ensures that public funding is only used for development - and not

evangelical - activities. Undertaking a full performance review of BN would ideally entail reviewing the work of the BN Representative Committee, the BN Board, the BN Secretariat as well as the individual member organisations and their local partners. The objectives, activities and success criteria of BN are somewhat different from those of the members seen as individual organisations². The scope of this review is more focused on the BN Secretariat, which is the operational arm of the BN Board and basically carries out the activities expected of BN as a whole. Certain member organisations have also been consulted in more detail to get a clearer picture of the relationship and work modalities between BN and its members and their local partners.

In agreement with the Reference Group, the TOR for the review have been modified to accommodate the fact that BN is an umbrella organisation and does not implement programmes in the field. Due to political unrest in Kenya, one of the country visits foreseen in the TOR was cancelled and replaced by an additional visit to Oslo to consult further with BN and some of the member organisations. Hence, the focus of the report is more on processes and the capacity of BN to perform its tasks, and less on the performance and results of the individual programmes in the field.

1.3 Analytical framework

Norad's model for organisational reviews of NGOs forms the basis for this analysis, but it has been modified to accommodate the fact that BN does not implement programmes and that results at project level can not really be attributed to the umbrella organisation as such. As per its mandate, BN has limited contact with the local partners and the projects, and thus its performance can not really be assessed by reviewing the performance of the projects or programmes in the field due to the two layers of intermediaries: BN members and local partner. Focus at the local partner level has been on their experiences from working with the BN members and on assessing if BN's values, guidelines and procedures can be recognised by the local partners. Focus has also been on whether local partner projects are relevant and in line with both Norwegian and national priorities and seen to be organised efficiently and effectively.

Based on the model and specific questions listed in the TOR, the following issues have been assessed for each of the three main components in the organisational learning model:

Description of the organisation (Square): What procedures and instruments does BN have in place and make use of in order to fulfil its mandate and main tasks?

Performance (Arrow): Does BN perform its main tasks in a way that enables the organisation to achieve its objectives, be relevant to its members and their partners and ensures that they achieve good results and cost efficient use of funds in line with Norwegian priorities?

² Pls. see Annex 1 which illustrates the many organisational levels of BN and the members

Results (Circle): Have the member and the local partner organisations taken on board and made use of BN strategies and thematic guidelines? Are the projects in the field in line with Norwegian political priorities, based on partnership and local ownership and relevant to the national and local context?

In broad terms the mandate and main tasks of the BN Secretariat are the following:

- 1 To administer the agreement with Norad and provide quality control of programmes,
- 2 To provide advisory services and guidelines to members,
- 3 To organise and provide technical and thematic capacity building,
- 4 To facilitate networking, share information, and do lobby work.

The performance of BN may be analysed by assessing whether BN is able to carry out the above tasks given the available financial and human resources, capacities, tools and working methods. Furthermore, the quality of BN's performance is related to its ability to secure good results and cost efficient use of funds from its member organisations and their local partners - in line with Norwegian political priorities.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology used to collect information and data for this review is a combination of document screening, interviews and a field visit.

Document screening has been carried out in the first stage of the review to get an overview of strategies, programmes and working modalities.

Self-assessment forms were distributed by email to the BN Secretariat and Board and to the BN member organisations to get an impression of the organisation and its relationship with the members.

The key informant interviews were carried out in Stavanger and Oslo with representatives from Shincon A/S, the BN Board, management (General Secretary) and staff of BN as well as with representatives from the member organisations having activities in China and Kenya. Furthermore, the other two umbrella organisations receiving funding from Norad, FOKUS and ATLAS Alliansen, were also consulted.

The country visit to China took place at the very end of October 2007 and provided the team with useful information about the work of the BN member organisations, their local partners and the programmes they implement. The programme was initiated and facilitated by the BN members and their local partners.

A local consultant and an interpreter were part of the review team while in China. They contributed to the analysis and understanding of the local context during the visit.

Triangulation of information has been applied when appropriate to enhance the validity of the findings. Given the mainly qualitative nature of a review like this, indicators have not been used in a strict sense but has rather been considered in combination with the general judgement of the Review Team.

1.5 Limitations

There are certain methodological limitations associated with this type of review. For time and budgetary reasons it is based on a limited selection of respondents and field visits undertaken within a limited time span. The findings may not be fully representative, and especially in the field the findings may not be generalised. In this particular case the review ended up doing only one field visit to China, which represents a double challenge in terms of being representative. One country visit gives only very limited basis for comparison and reference, since BN via members and partners are working in more than 40 countries, and China is in itself a particular case within the BN portfolio.

Concerning the field visit to China there is also a degree of uncertainty associated with using interpreters. Some information at the more detailed level may get lost in the translation process. An attempt was made to compensate for this by having a local consultant participate in the field visit who was able to complement the translation if needed.

It is a complex task to grasp the context and politics of an umbrella organisation representing 18 different member organisations and their partners and to delimit results of BN's work, as opposed to the members' and partners' work. The assessment is to a large extent based on personal judgement derived from consultations and observations made by the team. Total objectivity can not be achieved, though accuracy of findings has been sought by triangulating information from self-evaluation, interviews, documents and field observations.

1.6 Assumptions and hypotheses for the review

At the outset of the review, the team formulated a few hypotheses based on some assumptions about BN and the challenges the organisation faces as an umbrella organisation for 18 rather different members. The members need BN in order to access the Norad funds, but they do not want BN to take over their role in the field or lose their identity and organisational profile for the benefit of a stronger, more visible BN. Most of the BN members do a lot of fund raising and receive a lot of personal contributions to their diaconal work in addition to the funding they get from Norad through BN. They have no interest in BN becoming synonymous with all the projects they manage in the various countries. Overall BN country programmes will therefore have to remain project and organisation specific at a certain level. One thing is to ask one organisation to fo-

cus and concentrate thematically and geographically, another is to ask 16 different organisations to do the same.

BN was created for administrative purposes to manage the funds to the mission organisations on behalf of Norad. One may say BN serves two interest groups, Norad and the member organisations, and BN has to strike a balance between the two. It should not end up being considered as the extended arm of Norad by its members. On the other hand, it should maintain its objectivity in relation to its administration and quality assurance of the Norad-funded programmes implemented by the member organisations.

BN has also taken on a role of capacity builder ensuring a certain level of professionalism with all the member organisations and that they are up to date with the latest policy developments. BN is perceived among the members as a good and efficient mediator between the members and Norad, and also as a proactive agent for capacity building. However, the attempts of BN at developing the BN portfolio - for example, suggestions of more thematic and geographic concentration - are not necessarily always welcomed by all members. The BN Secretariat has to step carefully concerning the influence on the strategic directions of the various members' programmes.

The following hypotheses were therefore developed to guide the direction of the review:

- i) Norad can trust the administrative and technical capacities and procedures of BN to administer the framework agreement.
- ii) BN is capable of acting on and responding to a changing political development agenda.
- iii) BN is exerting a positive influence on its members in terms of learning and capacity development and improved technical competencies.
- iv) BN is the think tank for all the member organisations in terms of development work.
- v) The umbrella model is efficient in terms of reduced transaction costs for the involved parties.
- vi) Projects implemented by the BN members and their partners are cost efficient.
- vii) BN is balancing two interest groups with opposite objectives. Norad wants to see BN propose good programmes for funding, while the members want BN to forward as many programmes as possible to Norad and voice their concerns, values and priorities to the agency.

2 Presentation of BN and its Member Organisations

2.1 The Norwegian Missions in Development (BN)

The mandate and the obligations to Norad

BN was established as an umbrella organisation in 1983 on the initiative of the member organisations and in an understanding between the Norwegian Mission Council and Norad. The 18 member organisations of which only 16 are active in development activities are all faith-based and Christian Mission Organisations but vary in terms of size and capacity.

The *mandate* of BN is to negotiate and administer the agreement with Norad. It is further to provide quality assurance and ensure that the applications forwarded to Norad are in compliance with the agreement. BN shall also represent the member organisations publicly on issues related to development. Planning, implementation and continuation of projects are on the other hand the responsibilities of the individual member organisations.

BN's *obligations towards Norad*, as described in the present framework agreement³, are to ensure that the programmes supported are relevant to the overall Norwegian development strategies and guidelines for NGOs. This entails ensuring that the programmes are conducive to local ownership and focused on objectives and results. The programmes should be managed in a way that contributes to reducing poverty and other central development objectives.

The BN *strategy* for the period 2007 to 2011 further states that the main goal of BN⁴ is to "through its members organisations' development work contribute to a reduction of the number of poor, empower the vulnerable and marginalised people to obtain their rights, and facilitate the building of their organisations." To achieve this, three sub-objectives have been established:

1. "At the end of the intervention there shall be a sustainable social and economic development with a clear focus on empowering the vulnerable and marginalised people in human rights issues";

³ Samarbeidsavtale på Strategi og Programnivå mellom Norad and BN, signed 08.02.07

⁴ "Annex 1" to the framework agreement with Norad

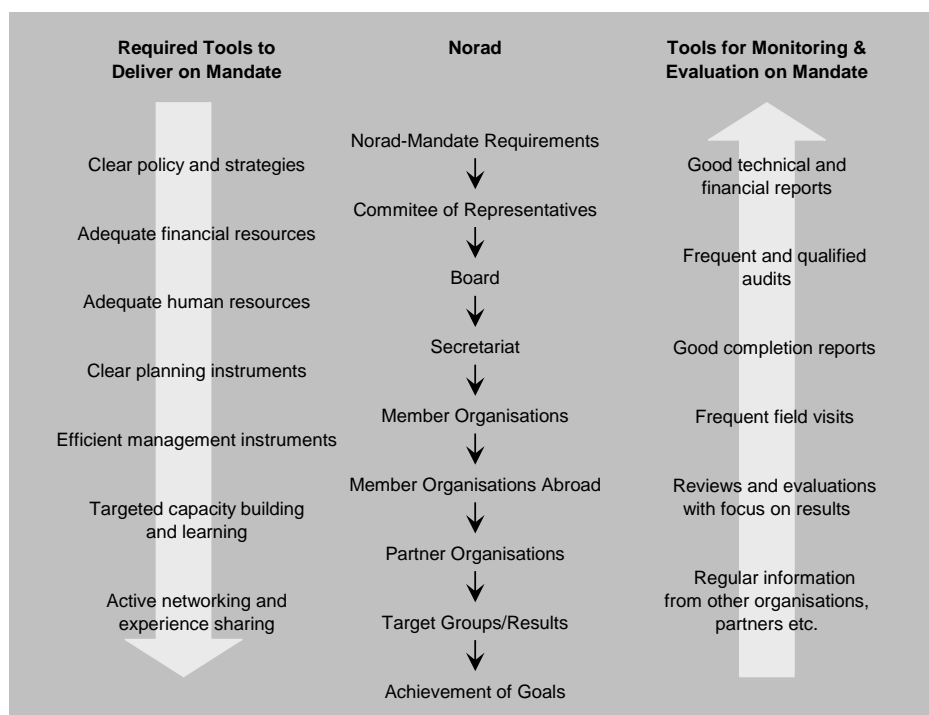
2. "In the areas where the BN members are working the civil society is empowered to directly contribute to the establishment of human capabilities to well-being and freedom by 2011 and churches and Christian based NGOs take initiative with and on behalf of the poor";
3. "BNs development work is rated high among development professionals, donors and receivers for a high professional and administrative quality and for effective exchange of experience and learning among the member organisations";.

The organisational set up of BN is as follows:

- The **Committee of Representatives** (*Representantskapet*) is the ultimate authority in the BN structure and is comprised by one representative from each organisation. The Committee decides on the overall strategy, guidelines, admission of new members, and elects the members of the Board.
- The **Board** is responsible for ensuring that the work of BN is in line with its mandate and strategy. The Board approves applications and budgets before they are presented to Norad and the Board is also responsible for the staffing of the BN Secretariat as well as for approving any proposals or recommendations fronted by the Secretariat.
- The **Secretariat** is the operational arm of the board and of BN as such. The Secretariat liaises with the members on development related issues.

Options for BN to deliver on its mandate and agreement with Norad

As a backdrop for the organisational performance analysis it is useful to consider what it would require for BN to deliver on its mandate and agreement with Norad given its operational structure. In the figure below we have attempted to illustrate these requirements and the various levels to which they apply.



As an umbrella organisation, BN has to rely on organisational, strategic, capacity building, networking, monitoring and reporting tools to deliver on its mandate. Its performance depends on the performance of its members and their partners and hence its ability to direct, support and facilitate the relevance, quality and cost-effectiveness of the project being funded by Norad and implemented by them.

2.2 BN members and partners

BN, through its member organisations, has an impressive catchment area: members, volunteers, financial contributors and other sympathisers represent around 300 000 persons from all over Norway. This broad based constituency puts BN in a unique position compared to many other NGOs. The personal engagement and interest of the many individuals is ensuring the organisation has a strong civil society platform and a potential to spread information widely on issues related to development cooperation.

Though united in the interest to express Christianity through solidarity and development work, the organisations differ in terms of size, constituency, church affiliation, organisational structure and type of local partners. They all have their own strategies and programmes, both overall and at country level. The country level programmes funded by Norad basically constitute the BN programmes at country level. The objectives of the individual organisations should all contribute to the overall goal of BN. Some work both in Norway and abroad, others focus on the inter-national work only. Also the diaconal work varies in terms management capacity. Some organisations have large development programmes in many countries; others have a few projects in perhaps only one country.

Furthermore, the type of local partner organisations varies between the members. The most common is a church organisation or a church. Some of the larger mission organisations cooperate with Lutheran church federations and others with the local chapter of their own church, e.g. the Norwegian Pentecostals Foreign Mission and the Baptists Society cooperate with the local Pentecostal church and the local Baptist church respectively in various countries. In other cases the partners are local NGOs and increasingly local government authorities at various levels. Some partnerships, especially with local church organisations, seem to have a long history and been established many years ago. Others are more recently established in relation to a new development programme.

The members decide themselves on who they enter into partnership with. BN has no influence on the choice, but has established some principles for partnerships which the members must live up to. Capacity building and empowerment of the local partner organisation are central element in the concept. Whether this is addressed and achieved in most places is impossible for the team to assess. What we did observe in China though was that there was emphasis on training and capacity building and that this was directed at both the partners and the target groups. As the partners in the case of China are local government authorities, it makes less sense to talk about these entities being "strengthened to control their own development" as it is expressed in the Partner Programme concept in the agreement with Norad. Rather, the capacity building has been directed at introducing methodologies for planning (participatory methodology) and acceptance and care for vulnerable groups (handicapped, elderly). To the team this seems like relevant types of partner cooperation.

The variety in the member base and its implications for BN

With reference to the figure above the great variety in the group of member organisations poses certain challenges for BN in terms of being able to fulfil its overall mandate. The various organisations need different "services" or follow-up from the Secretariat as they as organisations have different capacities, work in different countries, have different types of strategies and programme portfolios. This would ideally entail that BN both undertook needs assessments and had differentiated tools and procedures adapted to the various needs and capacities for the various organisations. Furthermore, the organisations have different levels of self financing. For some the Norad contribution through BN only constitutes around 30% of their overall development programme. For others it is 90%. This means that the reliance or dependency of BN and Norad funding varies greatly.

It seems plausible that the more economically independent organisations also are more strategically independent, meaning that they may not necessarily want to take on board all BN or Norad policies and would even be able to get away with it financially by their own means. BN does not have many enforcement opportunities and the system to a certain degree relies on trusting each member. In the view of the team it would be useful for BN to be able to enforce certain policies and practices, not just pertaining to reporting and application formats, but also in relation to the direction of the programmes to ensure the overall strategic direction and fulfilment of the mandate and strategy.

The review team had in-depth interviews and talks with some of the member organisations to get a better understanding of their relationship with BN as well as of their views on strategies and partnerships. The selection was based on the anticipated field trips. Please refer to Annex 5 for a more detailed presentation of six of the members.

3 Performance Review of BN

In this chapter we analyse whether BN's policy, strategy and programme tools enable the organisation to achieve its objectives, be relevant to partners and target groups and be cost efficient in its use of resources in line with Norwegian priorities.

3.1 Overview and assessment of policy and programme tools

Policies and Strategies In addition to its mandate, BN has a five year strategy which applies for BN as a whole, including the member organisations. Poverty reduction, focus on the rights of vulnerable people and a strengthened civil society are central elements. The total BN programme portfolio covering all countries is meant to contribute to achieve the goals. This again means that the individual strategies of the member organisations also have to lead up to the same overall objectives. The team has not assessed the individual strategies of all the member organisations but it is expected that they complement the BN strategy as the programmes and projects they implement in relation to their own strategies are the same as for the BN strategy. The strategy is clear on its goal and objectives and thematic areas, but it is very ambitious.

For an umbrella organisation, which in itself as an entity is not responsible for implementing programmes, there is a heavy dependency on the delivery and performance of the members to achieve its goals and live up to the agreement with Norad. BN is trying to address this element of uncertainty through strengthening capacities of members so that they are better equipped to deliver. In this respect, BN has also formulated other, more specific policies or concepts; for example on evaluation, poverty reduction, anti corruption, capacity development, and partnerships. Parts of these policies are in their form and content more like guidelines for managing the programmes than actual strategies for programmatic direction and content. This focus is in line with the mandate of BN where the members are in charge of the planning and implementation of the programmes. The new agreement with Norad is however more strategic and results oriented and less focused on individual projects. This will probably entail that the BN secretariat is increasingly involved in defining the strategic direction and thematic content of the programmes.

It is commendable that the policy papers are available electronically and in four languages as it facilitates knowledge sharing and partnership. There is as such

no "excuse" for not sharing the BN strategies with partners in the field. In the case of China, however, it did not seem like partners were very familiar with or actively used the strategies The Shincon staff related mostly to their respective member organisations' policies. The team encourages member organisations to use the strategies more systematically, as they provide an overall strategic direction that is common for all members. This would be useful, for example, when preparing country plans.

Resources and Programme tools to deliver on mandate

Financial resources

Under the present agreement with Norad, the annual budget of BN is NOK 140 million for a five year period. In 2007, around NOK 9 million were used to run the Secretariat, which is fully financed by Norad. This amounts to approximately 6.5 % of the total amount allocated. According to the Secretariat's management, the real percentage is in fact closer to 5.6 % if resources designated at project level e.g. via WEGE or FU, are excluded. In the opinion of the team, this is a reasonable cost and is not excessive taking into consideration the different tasks the Secretariat is undertaking on behalf of BN as a whole.

The resource envelope has not increased much after BN entered into framework agreements from 2003. Before then, the annual budget was determined more by the project portfolio and thus there was scope for annual increases. From 2000 to 2003, the budget rose by NOK 20 million but since 2003 it has only risen by NOK 1.3 million.

The framework agreements are based on fixed annual allocations for the agreement period and it is thus only in the next framework agreement period that BN will be able to negotiate a budget increase. In real terms, this means there is a decrease in the actual spending power of the budget during the agreement period.

It is interesting to note that, even though the resource envelope is fixed, BN is submitting annual requests worth more than what has been agreed. According to the BN secretariat they receive requests from the member organisations and consider it their responsibility to forward the requests on behalf of the members. This seems to be a futile exercise though, as time is spent on preparing and reviewing proposals that are subsequently rejected. There is clearly a challenge for BN in having a static funding level over a number of years, but it is a fact of which the planning and programming staff ought to be cognisant and take into account as they prepare their annual requests.

Once they have arrived in BN, the programme funds are distributed among the members according to a distribution template which is based on the budget and expenditure of each organisation over the last three years. This distribution principle makes the funding levels to each organisation fairly static as well, and there is limited scope for the various member organisations to increase their overall BN funding. BN is reviewing the distribution template in order to include a qualitative aspect and be able to "reward" the good performers. The funds to be used for quality rewards will be reserved from the overall contribu-

tion from Norad and make the distribution model less static but also reduce the remaining amount for programme funding. There is an incentive element here which could inspire the members to improve their work further and allow BN to explicitly reward what is perceived to be good and in line with the priorities and goals of BN. However, given the variation in capacity among the members, the model could end up benefiting mostly the larger and stronger organisations. This is a concern that is being addressed in the ongoing revision process which seemed to be welcomed by all organisations interviewed.

In order to be less dependent of Norad funding and create a space for growth, BN is considering looking into alternative sources of funding. The job description for the Secretary-General (SG) of January 2007 gives a clear mandate to the SG to look into alternative funding possibilities. The member organisations support the initiative as long as BN is not competing for funding in their markets. Given the development of the resource envelope from Norad, the team finds it is a rational strategy for BN to consider alternative funding sources. It is, however, a demanding and time consuming task for the SG to take care of alone. Some organisations have special "resource mobilisation staff". BN could consider this option if new resources start arriving and the programmes grow.

Human resources/BNS The human resource envelope available to deliver on BN's mandate is extensive as it includes the Secretariat and also the member organisations in Norway and abroad as well as the local partners. For the purpose of this review, the team has mainly considered the human resource base in the Secretariat. The BN Secretariat has nine staff members⁵. Apart from the Secretary-General, there are four persons working as programme or technical advisors, three persons dealing with finance and administration, and one with media and information activities. The management structure is horizontal with few management levels.

The recruitment process for Secretariat staff follows standard regulations but it would appear that the applications are by and large from persons with relations to one or several of the member organisations. BN also receives fewer applications for posted positions compared to other development NGOs. Nevertheless, the team is of the impression that the staff has the relevant educational background and understanding of development issues.

The SG has been in office since 2003⁶ and appears to have the stature and experience needed for servicing 18 mission organisations. He has relevant and extensive experience with development cooperation and faith based organisations, is familiar with the current development agenda and is interested in strengthening and modernising the organisation and its members.

Not all staff have the thematic and geographic competencies relevant for the programme portfolio and the thematic areas they administer. This is, however,

⁵ This was the situation in February 2008. After the new SG was appointed in the end of February there are five technical advisors.

⁶ The team learned during the visits to Norway, that the secretary general had resigned and would be replaced some time in the early 2008. The review is however based on the situation when he was still in office.

being actively addressed by BN. New staff members are sent on field visits to get to know the country programmes and are also allowed to take training courses to increase their competency level on relevant thematic subjects.

Since an intensive staff audit was not a part of the TOR, it is not really possible for the team to assess whether the number of staff is sufficient given the Secretariat's workload and expected deliverables. It seems, however, as if BN employees have a considerable workload throughout the year with a portfolio management that is time consuming given the multitude of projects and countries.

Almost half the workforce has been replaced over the last two years. Since the SG took up his duties in 2003, he has been working on strengthening the profile of BN to make it a more professional organisation by focusing on capacity development of staff and members and on the internal organisation of the Secretariat. It seems that there has been some controversy concerning this process but the team does not have enough information to expand on this.

The team finds that the vision and ambition of the SG to professionalise BN and its members is a relevant objective. There is increasing competition for Norad funds and all NGOs must be able to point to relevance and results. On the other hand, it is not easy to convince 18 different member organisations to prioritise in the same way. The members need BN primarily to access the Norad funds, but they do not want BN to dominate or interfere in their activities in the field. Nor are they interested in losing their identity and organisational profile for the benefit of a stronger, more visible BN.

Planning and management instruments and templates

Annual Action Plan

The overall strategy is supported by an annual action plan detailing goals, challenges and priorities for all working areas and staff. The overall priority of the 2007 action plan is: To anchor vision and strategy in the work of BN and special prioritised tasks are: (1) Identification and assessment of results; (2) Networking between members and partners; (3) mapping and documentation of the working processes in BN. Five year country plans based on templates are developed by the technical advisors.

The action plan is organised into 6 sub-sections with respect to: Management of the agreement with Norad, counselling, 'fagudvikling' - hereafter referred to as 'FU', improved information/communication, networking and finally administration and management of the Secretariat.

Each member organisation has its own action plan based on its strategy. In addition to this, they also elaborate country, annual programme and priority plans following templates provided by BN.

Even if BN is not directly involved in the implementation of activities of the members and is mainly responsible for quality assurance, BN programme staff are supposed to monitor the projects in the portfolio. BN has elaborated a moni-

toring document which provides clear guidance on which tools to use and when⁷.

The different templates and the plans themselves elaborated by BN are all found to be relevant and useful for BN itself as well as for members. The challenge is to get sufficient precise information both for BN and members since the templates only offer limited space for narrative.

ISO-certification

During the last two years, BN has had a large turnover of staff. The fact that a part of the 'institutional memory' of BN disappeared was a wake-up call for the organisation and it was decided that all internal working procedures should be described. BN chose to initiate an ISO-certification process that has been going on since June 2007. A consultancy company has been hired to assist in the process and one staff member experienced with this process together with the SG are the responsible persons in BN. As a result of the process, BN expects to get a better overview of the activities of the organisation; more satisfied staff, improved development work and be less vulnerable vis-à-vis eventual future changes⁸.

The ISO certification process has certainly contributed to get a clearer picture of the existing procedures via an in-depth mapping of working procedures as well as revised job-descriptions for each staff member. In the view of the team, however, it seems to be a rather time-consuming process and is perhaps beyond the needs of a relatively small organisation. Time may have been better used by introducing a less ambitious tool to reorganise BN.

Financial management

The financial unit in BN employs two financial staff members and there is a clear division of work between the two persons. The budget is adopted on the basis of BN's annual activity plan. The financial unit is working closely together with the programme advisers to follow the process of submission of applications and approval of projects - both new and old. Each approved project has its own financial project sheet from which the financial unit can monitor progress. The budget is also monitored throughout the year via financial reports from members and half way through the year members are contacted with respect to reallocating funds based on exchange rates and disbursement level.

BN set up a new data-based management tool last year - PETRUS - which has become the basic mechanism for financial administration of the projects. Both the financial and programme advisers can access the system and thus easily exchange information on progress and disbursement. Financial advisers may also contact the financial staff member responsible or programme adviser for additional information when needed.

⁷ "Evalueringsstrategi for Bistandsnemnda (BN) og norske organisasjoner", Oslo, revised in 2005.

⁸ "Etablering av kvalitetssystem ved Bistandsnemnda. Handlingsplan, versjon 0.2, 08.01.2008

The Secretariat has elaborated a set of procedures to guide the work of the financial staff that, in the view of the team, are relevant and meet the standards for a well functioning management system.

BN's financial system meets the organisation's demands for efficient monitoring and control. In this perspective, the development of 'PETRUS' seems to be an important tool as it is already reducing the workload of staff (including the financial- and administrative unit) even though it is not yet fully operational.

Despite the fact that the staff turnover also affected the financial unit, financial management continues to operation effectively. One former staff member has returned to the organisation (although in a different position) and the financial director has come from a similar position in one of the member organisations.

Programme administration

The programme portfolio consisting of around 150 programmes is administered by the four technical advisors who each have been designated geographic and thematic focus areas. These include HIV-AIDS, indigenous people, gender and results monitoring. For the advisors, the workload intensifies in September each year when the period for application administration starts. BN has developed checklists to be followed by the advisors to screen if the applications are reflecting basic and thematic development principles, such as poverty reduction initiatives, gender equality, environment, Rights Based Approaches (RBA), etc. Furthermore, advisers in the Secretariat use each other for sparring and member organisations in Norway may also be contacted for clarification if needed. The application is entered in PETRUS which serves as an important tool for the advisers throughout the application process and afterwards when an application is approved. All proposals are quality assured by the SG prior to being presented to the Board for approval.

The administration and monitoring responsibility of BN and members is described in a document elaborated by BN⁹. Advisers and member organisations meet once a year to negotiate new proposals and discuss the ongoing projects. These annual meetings, where the programme adviser responsible for the project to be discussed meets together with a second BN adviser, are the forum where reports from field visits are included in the discussion to verify if recommendations have been taken into consideration. The ultimate consequence - if the adviser detects too many irregularities and the member has not followed up on eventual advises from BN given during a field visit - may be that funding to a given project is temporarily frozen. The option of sanctions towards a member can thus only take place at the annual meetings.

Members in Norway are responsible for elaborating annual work plans which are the tool for monitoring and for reporting (according to a BN-template) back to BN on progress, results and disbursement. The reports serve as basic input to the annual reporting to Norad and are also included in the discussion at the annual meeting.

⁹ Evaluation Policy for Bistandsnemda (BN), 2005

Identification of new projects is done in collaboration between members in Norway and abroad including partner organisation, although a major part of the work seems to be decentralised to the field. The member organisations in Norway screen new project proposals to ensure they are in compliance with strategies and guidelines but fact finding missions and identification meetings are often delegated to partners with some supervision from members abroad. Although all proposals are screened prior to submission to BN, the team got the impression that in some cases, partners have rather free play during the identification and formulation process and may have difficulties to make a clear cut in the prioritisation of activities and geographic sittings because they often are interconnected to the target groups in the field.

The team recommends that members should ensure that partners have sufficient documentation regarding criteria and priorities based on BN's vision. The team felt that the interpretation by some members of the word 'ownership' is equal to a high degree of independence which many partners are not yet ready to assume.

Tools and procedures available in the programme unit are well developed. However, the review team finds that BN needs to elaborate a more nuanced indicator system to be able to document qualitative results in the field. BN has mainly been working with quantitative indicators which limit the documentation for a number of project activities. Since many projects are becoming more process oriented, it would be necessary to develop qualitative indicators to improve the standard of reporting of results. The review team learned that a working group has initiated this task as a part of a special tools development (FU) activity and strongly supports this initiative.

Capacity building and learning

In addition to the administration of their project portfolio, BN advisors are also involved with thematic competency building or special topic development ('fagudvikling' - or 'FU') as well as teaching an annual development course at the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger or at Fjellhaug in Oslo, a mission school run by NLM.

BN has taken the initiative to develop a number of tools for capacity building on development related projects and on organisational development and adapted to the needs and specialities of BN and its members.

'Fagudvikling' (FU)

An important tool for capacity development developed by BN are the activities related to FU. FU is addressed at three levels: Development work which is anchored in one or several partners in South; development work which is anchored in a Norwegian missionary member organisation; and finally development which is anchored in BN. More concretely, three types of development initiatives should be delivered: (a) New and innovative activities; (b) 'updating' or 'maintenance' activities - to ensure that staff (new and experienced) home - and out-based are kept updated with respect to competence building; and thirdly (c) exchange of knowledge and dissemination of information. In practice, special development can be set up in several ways (workshops, special projects, network collaboration, evaluations, development of methodology and tools, etc.).

Every year a number of topics are selected for a specific focus throughout the year. For the period 2007 - 2008, the planned priorities in the field of innovative activities are: Gender dimension in BN supported activities, HIV/AIDS (finalised) and cooperation between State and civil society in the field of health and education (as thematic evaluations) and development of indicators for result estimation.

As for the 'updating or maintenance' activities, three topics have been identified: (1) Consolidation and solidarity; (2) the position in the public of development work of missionary organisations in Norway; thematic and country-groups (country plans) and (3) Tools for professional revision and updating (e.g. "How to assess NGO capacity" and others). Furthermore, a number of activities have been selected in the category of 'exchange of knowledge/dissemination of information' such as in the field of rights-approaches and thematic evaluations.

Other activities

Assessment and documentation of results are another important activity which was launched in 2006 as a result of the increasing demand from Norad and others for being able to document results¹⁰. A working group composed of BN staff is currently working on developing tools.

Among other initiatives launched by BN in order to get a common platform of understanding between members and BN, the work related to quality in the development work should be mentioned¹¹. This initiative was launched in 2004 and the final document is a comprehensive tool which goes through different aspects of the project work and presents a definition of quality and the challenges members are facing when dealing with quality. Examples of tools that can be used by the members are given for further follow-up activities on projects.

Besides the capacity building activities organised by BN, some members also develop their own activities for internal use with their own funding. The team is not in possession of capacity building plans of the members and is therefore not able to assess this aspect further. Also, members can apply for funding from BN to capacity building within their own organisation or in co-operation with partners in the recipient country as long as they are in compliance with BN's criteria. One important criteria is that the activity should be in line with the overall objective of BN and its members and that it should be relevant to the project portfolio of BN and present an added value to other members/organisations and their activities.

FU is the cornerstone of the capacity development and evaluation/learning activities by BN. The team acknowledges that FU is an important tool for BN and that the organisation strives to work professionally with the selected activities. FU could be qualified as a 'think tank' for BN or the development laboratory

¹⁰ "Resultatmåling av misjonsorganisationernes utviklingsarbeid. Bistandsnemndas metoder for måling av resultater og bruk af statistik", Erik Whist, Scanteam, februar 2006.

¹¹ "Kvalitet i bistand", Jan Heitmann, BN, 2006

within the organisation because it represents one of the fundamental reasons for BN's existence - to contribute to capacity building of its members.

BN makes an effort to include member organisations in the implementation of these activities, not only to acquire new knowledge via the process but also as a resource to use, for those which have an in-depth experience in the relevant field. External consultants are included when appropriate.

However, within the cases reviewed, the team did not find any evidence that members will, or can, take on board the knowledge and it also questions how much of the acquired knowledge will actually be transferred to partners in the field. BN has no means as such, to force capacity building on members and from members to their partners. Also, it does not make any sense to force all members to go through the same range of training because of their different needs for capacity building. BN may, therefore, need a more appropriate tool to ensure that the members have sufficient capacity.

BN has launched a pilot activity for the purpose of evaluating three member organisations. These evaluations could be a useful tool for needs assessments of organisations - they should better identify what has been useful and what is still needed in terms of capacity building and on this basis set up an agreement between the member and BN on which training courses to follow to meet the standard set by BN as a performing organisation.

Networking and experience sharing

One of the three intermediary goals of the BN strategy is focusing on networking and sharing of experiences. The initiatives taken and the tools available in BN are a step towards achieving this goal. BN and members wish to be a strong and professional organisation in order to be recognised publicly not only for their administrative and managerial capacity but also as a trustworthy partner and voice with respect to the actual development agenda. For example, BN would like to contribute with inputs to public debates and documents on development issues. FU contributes to strengthening BN and its members and seminars and meetings are important tools in this respect.

Besides the annual meetings between BN and members in Norway, regional meetings are organised once a year to gather staff and partners working abroad for exchange and learning on one or more topics. The meetings are normally scheduled alternately between the African Region (shift between West and East Africa) and the Asian or Latin American region. According to the strategy for 2007-2011, more meetings are planned to take place and not only for members and partners but also for likeminded organisations either in Norway or in the recipient countries.

Country forums established by BN - China Forum and Congo Forum - are elements which should be seen as initiatives in the networking strategy. Also the coming country programmes are a step in this direction where a higher degree of coordination and exchange among members and partners would be among the results.

In the strategy 2007-11, BN has launched additional initiatives to strengthen networking. Members have committed themselves to elaborate some 'promising practices' with respect to main areas of action as well as focus areas. To complement this, BN is supposed to develop networks for information and learning for members and their partners to develop further their capacity.

Although BN presently has some tools to promote networking and share experiences within the Secretariat and among members and partners, the team questions if these are sufficient to achieve the intermediate goal related to networking throughout all levels of BN. Based on interviews with BN staff and members, it does not seem to be an easy task for BN to promote all elements in the idea of networking. In general, members have a positive attitude towards seminars and meetings on knowledge sharing but seem to be more reluctant if they should be more strongly connected to each other. The team was told that the forum groups (Congo and China) work well in Norway but that it becomes more difficult in the field due to the geographical sitting of the different projects and thus partners - but also because partners and members in the field are not always interested in being identified with other organisations.

The team has limited information on the initiatives within the member organisations but a general observation is that BN still needs to get acceptance from members regarding strengthened networking.

Criteria for development activities/Crosscutting issues

BN has elaborated criteria which are used in the evaluation of project proposals. Basic criteria include: the need for quality in development activities, sustainability, partnership and good relations to local authorities. Others are categorised as cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality and environment/natural resource management. Furthermore, criteria have also been set up for 'specific project types' such as HIV-AIDS, education, indigenous people and microfinance. BN does not have strategies for all topics referred to in the document on criteria for support¹² but has frameworks indicating the scope for support.

WEGE

BN pays attention to gender mainstreaming in the project activities of the member organisations and strives to include the concept in a more systematic way via a better understanding of gender equality among members. One of the four technical advisors in the Secretariat is designated as a gender focal point and supposed to support other advisors in this respect. BN has recently initiated a three year Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) development activity with three member organisations (NMS, NMA and NLM) included in the programme. Other member organisations have also had the opportunity to participate in some of the meetings and workshops. Project teams from six projects (in Madagascar, Ethiopia, Bolivia and Ecuador) are involved in the process and one of the results should be that the three member organisations will develop their own WEGE strategy. One of the first activities has been to elaborate a baseline giving an overview of how member organisations are presently working with WEGE. The overall goal is that BN in the end should de-

¹² 'Støtteformer og kriterier', Norsk Misjons Bistandsnemnd, July 2007.

velop its own WEGE strategy or guidelines to inspire the members to then develop their own strategies.

The team finds that the BN Secretariat, for the time being, has inadequate tools to screen projects (proposals as well as on-going) with respect to gender mainstreaming. It is surprising that the gender concept has not been more developed as a development and analytical tool in BN given the importance BN itself and Norad - as well as other donors and NGOs - places on this aspect. Some members have already initiated activities in this field; however, the majority do not have an articulated approach to gender equality. Some of these are dealing with the concept of 'Women in Development' (WID). In the case of China, the team also did not find much evidence with respect to strategies on how to mainstream gender equality in their activities. Focus was rather on women and that they should be a part of the target group. However, the team recognizes that there was one exception to this as the local section of Women's Federation had been selected as partner in one of the projects. This may be an opportunity to launch a more strategic way of working with gender equality in China.

The recruitment of a technical advisor with strong gender competences in the Secretariat is however an important and promising step forward and should put gender higher on the agenda - along with the recently initiated WEGE project. This project is justified and will contribute to get improved tools for gender mainstreaming at all levels. However, strategies and guidelines are not sufficient to promote gender equality - intensive training should accompany the WEGE-initiative at all levels.

RBA

A right's based approach (RBA) is considered as one of the guiding criteria for BN when approving development activities and this aspect should also be reflected in the projects of the member organisations. Though the overall objective in the 2007-2011 strategy is focused on poverty reduction and empowerment of marginalised populations, their rights and the strengthening of these, BN has not yet developed any detailed guidelines on how to work more specifically with RBA. The team is also not in possession of information to determine if members are dealing differently with RBA. The WEGE initiative, however, could be considered as a contribution to an improved RBA focus once it is finalised.

The team finds that guiding tools on RBA are very limited which seem also to limit BN and members to work professionally with this approach. The team has not studied this particular issue in depth but like to point out one of the recommendations of the recent finalised review of BN's work with indigenous people. It states that: *"BN should seek to address the general weakness in terms of knowledge of rights-based approaches among its members, with a specific focus on indigenous rights"*. The team encourages BN to elaborate a set of RBA guidelines for use by the Secretariat and members.

Conflict sensitivity

Peace building, peace and reconciliation will have a stronger focus by the members in the coming project period. Some BN member organisations already implement projects in this field (e.g. peace and reconciliation in Burundi and Palestine) funded by Norad, and another member gets funding from the Minis

try of Foreign Affairs to similar projects in DRC. An important approach to this kind of work is oriented towards reconciliation and awareness of circumstances that may contribute to an outbreak of a conflict. BN wants to follow the principles of 'Do no harm' but development of capacity and guidelines to BN staff and members have not yet been initiated. According to information given by BN, this activity is scheduled to be undertaken later in 2008.

The review team was told that BN needs to build up capacity among the designated focal points in the Secretariat relating to conflict sensitivity before they can initiate and propose any capacity building activities to members. The fact that BN and its members have initiated activities in areas where knowledge about conflict sensitivity seems to be a prerequisite may therefore be risky and a weakness not only for members but also for partners and finally also to BN where it is to assess the quality of the activities carried out in the field.

Information

As a link to the overall five-year strategy, BN has also developed an information strategy. This is intended to be a plan for communication among different stakeholders via different channels and clarifies who are the stakeholders, which channels should be used and which message to deliver when BN communicates. It is also a management instrument for BN and thus a guiding tool with respect to information activities and contact with the media and the public opinion, to decision makers and to member organisations.

In the view of the team, the information strategy is a useful and practical guiding tool for BN and members and it is adapted to the size of the organisation. However, being an umbrella organisation and not directly involved in implementing activities, it may be difficult for BN to influence the actual development debate in the media or in development fora without approval from members. Most of the member organisations interviewed by the team prefer that focus should be on them rather than BN for the same reason. As long as BN does not have a clear mandate with respect to lobbying for the member organisations, or is more visible in the media on their behalf, it seems difficult to promote BN in this way.

During interviews with the Secretariat, the team was told that BN would like to get a mandate from members to represent them more independently. At present, BN tends to act as the 'fireman' in cases where controversial stories concerning member organisations appear in the media. If BN should be able to achieve the goals in the strategy, it seems crucial that members delegate responsibility to BN to let the organisation take advantage of presenting some of the results on the ground and not just let members get all the credit. BN already employs an information advisor and it seems obvious to the team that this person be used to do more information and 'lobby' work in the future.

Tools for monitoring and evaluation to deliver on mandate

In terms of being able to monitor and report to the Committee of Representatives and Norad on achievements of goals, BN uses an extensive range of tools and procedures.

The Technical and Financial report

The most important are the technical reports, whether annual or completion reports, which give an overview of the performance in each country and for all programmes. The Secretariat receives reports from all member organisations who again have received the reports from their offices or partners in the field. It appears that the member organisations in Norway do not alter many aspects of the reports before they are forwarded to the Secretariat. This is made possible by the fact that there is a specific report template based on the requirements of Norad and BN. The template consists of questions to be answered regarding goals and priorities, whether things have proceeded as planned, if results were achieved, programmes changed, issues on sustainability, and follow-up on recommendations from BN. There are also questions of a more strategic nature linked to relevance of programmes to national and Norwegian policies and the strengthening of civil society. The questions are all very relevant and the answers should provide a wealth of information. The challenge is rather that it becomes voluminous, very detailed and project orientated and that the organisations often answer very differently in terms of detail and analytical level. What one is missing in the reports are some overall strategic considerations.

The BN documentation reviewed by the team does not make much reference to baseline studies, which on the other hand are needed in order to measure progress and document results. However, the team was told that BN will emphasize the importance of these studies in the new revision of criteria for support. Objectives are also to a large extent quite output oriented and related to the individual projects. It is difficult to develop indicators for more strategic elements like empowerment of partners and women or a strengthened civil society. But it is nevertheless something BN ought to develop to ensure the strategic level is also reflected in the reports. The team expects the working group on indicators and results to look into this. The group seems to be at an early stage of its work and the team has not been able to get an impression of what will be developed. The task is important and it is good that BN has taken the initiative to act on the challenge. More overall focus on indicators and results linked up the overall objectives of BN would also facilitate the more programmatic reporting that Norad wants and could also be a basis for the country programmes where it is not really relevant to enter into too many project details but rather to focus on the more strategic level and link it to the overall development objectives of BN.

In terms of financial reporting there is an intensification of reporting from Norway to country and programme level. The partners implementing programmes have to report up to four times a year to the BN member organisations and, in most cases, the release of funds is tied to the submission of financial reports. This system is similar to other NGOs and seems to function well from what the team observed in China. Here Shincon would receive financial reports on a quarterly basis. Reports are forwarded to the Secretariat twice a year. As such, there is more transaction costs related to preparing reports for the local partners than for BN itself. This is however explained as being necessary in order to have as much control as possible with the use of funds at field level. The team is not in a position to give a full assessment of the procedures in place in the various country offices and programmes. Tools to prevent misuse of funds at programme level are, for example, linked to not having unspecified budget

lines and ensuring that there is a system for spending funds at programme level involving at least two persons.

Audits

Preventing misuse is anyhow extremely difficult. A good tracking method can discover the misuse of funds as early as possible. If the chances of being caught are perceived as high, they could prevent staff from attempting to divert funds for personal gain. Audits are the most common tracking and control tool used in this respect. And BN is making extensive use of audits from programme level to Oslo. Accounts are being audited three times, at field level, at member level in Norway and at BN level also in Norway.

The system of many audits is not preventing misuse per se, but provides a tool to identify any misuse as early as possible. It is important that BN is assured that the audits at programme or project level are undertaken by certified accountants, that the TOR for the auditor are extensive enough to be able to fulfil the needs of BN, and that the accepted level of irregularities found is not unreasonably high so that the judgement of the auditor could be questioned. The audits at field level are thus important, and some of the members have a practice of inviting Norwegian auditors to visit programmes in the field once in a while to get a closer look at programme accounts and audits. This is a good practice, though probably expensive, but it seems worth-while for benchmarks like mid term reviews and completion for larger programmes.

Field visits

The advisors in the BN Secretariat undertake field visits to the programme countries, but due to the large portfolio they are not able to visit countries on a regular basis. The financial management staffs also undertake field visits, however less frequently. The field visits both serve as an opportunity for Norway based staff to see how local offices are operating but also to exchange on procedures and tools. Apart from monitoring project activities and exchange with staff in member and partner organisations, the technical and financial advisors have the obligation to organise workshops or seminars for members and partners on selected topics.

Field visits are planned¹³ and approved by the Secretariat and Board some six months before they actually take place and are therefore not very spontaneous from the perspective of control. This is also why BN staff always travel with representatives from the member organisations to make the visit constructive and progress-oriented rather than an element of control. The member organisations undertake regular field visits and each project is supposed to be visited once a year or every 1½ years.

Field reports from both member representative and BN advisor are exchanged and given feed-back to agree on the final conclusions. The reports are filed and included in the annual meetings between members and BN. According to BN's strategy for evaluation, field visits are not evaluations, though they can include

¹³ BN has set up a number of criteria for motivating and undertaking field trips such as: Follow-up upon an evaluation, acute situations, control, discussion of progress or new initiatives, networking and other input from advisers.

elements of evaluation. Also, field visits should be prioritised in order to visit projects which are planned to be evaluated or where an evaluation just have been carried out.

Although both members and BN staff visit projects in the field, the team questions if their frequency allows for a solid monitoring enabling the quality of results achieved in the field to be determined. Visits in the field are certainly useful to get a more broad idea of projects, to meet project staff and partners as well as local authorities. But it is questionable if they represent a valid monitoring tool. For BN staff in particular, field visits may not be more than an appetizer since they have to visit projects operating in a given country with a limited time for concentration on each project.

Reviews & evaluations Norad, BN's Secretariat, members and partners are all involved and responsible for reviews and evaluations. All project plans include agreements on reviews and evaluations to be undertaken. Both mid-term reviews and final evaluations are planned for large projects. Only final evaluations are in general undertaken for small projects. Reviews and evaluations are normally to be initiated by members and their partners, meaning they are responsible for elaborating terms of reference (TOR). Midterm reviews and final evaluations can be undertaken by local consultants or in combination between local and international consultants. The purpose is to encourage the local partner to be responsible for the reviews and evaluations although the Norwegian member and BN are responsible for commenting on the TOR. In case of major evaluations, BN has the obligation to approve the TOR.

BN has defined other types of reviews and evaluations such as organisational reviews (both in Norway and abroad), country evaluations, administrative, thematic and/or strategic reviews. BN is responsible for quality assurance and approval.

The team recognises that the range of review and evaluation tools is varied and provides good opportunities for partners, members and BN to monitor the activities in the field and for BN in particular to contribute to assure the quality. According to discussions with members and partners (Shincon), reviews and evaluations are very useful tools which are used proactively. Since BN only has limited opportunities to visits projects in the field, the fact that reviews and evaluations are prioritised and undertaken in the organisation can definitely contribute to get a more nuanced picture of activities in the field. BN and members have been very open and interested in sharing information and results of the reviews/evaluations when discussing this issue with the team.

Monitoring on results and quality

Different monitoring tools have already been presented in the above sections. Reports and field visits are particularly relevant when discussing results and quality. As a part of the demands for reporting, members and partners communicate results, however the information is in general based on quantitative results. The members and partners recognize that a more developed indicator system to document qualitative results is needed. In connection to this, it seems as if the members and partners do not systematically elaborate a baseline prior to project start which otherwise would be a first step in establishing better tools to

monitor and evaluate against. Interviews in focus group, case-stories or more in-depth studies could also be used to contribute to better to document impact.

BN is aware that the organisation needs to develop tools in order to improve the documentation with respect to results. A working group in BN has been established to develop indicators tools but the team does not have any information on the results so far. Field visits also contribute to get a more in-depth information on projects and results because of direct interaction with the beneficiaries. Information from such meetings be included in the documentation of results and impact. For BN staff, it seems to be difficult however to take advantage of field visits for this purpose because of the tight programme and the demand for undertaking other activities during the visit.

Information from other organisations, partners, etc.

Information concerning performance and results can also be achieved via other organisations or be passed directly from partners in the field to the BN Secretariat. According the discussion with BN staff and members/partners in the field (China), BN staff tries to get complementary information during field visits when meeting with partners and authorities. The team only has limited information on this aspect but it seems as if advisors on field trips do not systematically pay visits to other organisations (e.g. NGOs) based in the same locality. Meetings with organisations working in the same field as BN members could contribute to more informal information on results and could provide a hint on how the activities implemented by members and partners are perceived.

3.2 Country Programmes

Norad has had a focus on modernising the support provided through civil society. This support is meant to complement the bilateral and multilateral support and has until now been characterised by flexibility concerning thematic and geographic focus, cooperation with other NGOs and coordination with national strategies. There is however a shift in the policy towards civil society support and expectations that Norwegian NGOs will accommodate their support to be more in line with the Norwegian development policy and priorities. This includes moving away from the more piecemeal project approach to a more comprehensive programme approach with clearer references to the partner country strategies and more thematic and geographic concentration.

BN and its members have prepared a few country plans. At the outset they decided to pilot the exercise for three countries, China, Ethiopia and Mali. Programmes are at present available for Ethiopia and Mali after the plan for China was with-drawn. Many resources and much time have been spent on trying to come up with an interpretation of what should constitute a country programme. It can be argued that the present result does not seem to be worth the amount of input. The process and output need to be assessed and the purpose of the programmes reconsidered before the concept is expanded and time and money spent to pre-prepare more programmes.

No doubt that the process of preparing the first drafts of these programmes has provided a good opportunity for BN to familiarise itself with the concept and

start thinking more holistically. The challenge is to combine the overall programme level with the individual organisation's programme level. It does not seem plausible that they will merge, though there are common points of entry and common overall objectives. It would be useful to get a clearer picture of how the BN members perceive their role and opportunities for influence or change in the various countries.

Being motivated by solidarity and wanting to improve living conditions in areas of acute poverty is a good thing. But it should be expected that the organisations move beyond being "good Samaritans" to analysing more thoroughly why they are working in the various countries and what they could hope to achieve beyond support to meet the more immediate needs of the target groups. Historic references alone seem a bit weak as an explanation for presence. There ought to be a more analytical consideration of why the organisation considers it important to work in a particular country and region, with particular partners and on specific programmes. This means the country plan would be more focused on the rationale for being there and on the value added by the organisation, and less focused on trying to combine the programme of each organisation at an overall country level, which has been the attempt so far.

The assistance of the member organisations is limited and will usually not influence on the national or regional statistics. It is more interesting to know what specific and more strategic contributions the organisation can offer and how they envisage doing it. This kind of analysis would assist in developing a more strategic direction to the BN portfolio as a whole. The programme level may subsequently be adjusted over time if deemed necessary. It is not recommended to change the ongoing agreements. Strategic reorientations of the portfolio are best done when entering into new agreements or new agreement periods.

This strategic consideration would also facilitate the process of achieving more thematic and especially geographic concentration, which the team recommends BN to consider. The members work in 42 countries which poses important challenges in terms of monitoring and quality assurance. It is difficult for the BN secretariat to keep abreast of the political, economic and social contexts, not to mention the civil society context, in so many countries. The political economy aspect and knowledge about potential change agents and various interest groups are important elements in the planning and implementation of programmes, especially in view of the increasing focus on results. It is also logistically difficult and expensive to do regular field visits to such an extensive number of countries. When adding to this picture the fact that in 22 of these countries there is only one member organisation present¹⁴, it further accentuates the need to consider geographic concentration to avoid spreading the resources too thinly. The rather ambitious development strategy of BN depends on the synergies of having several member organisations and their partners working towards the same overall objectives. With only one member organisation working in a country, the overall objectives of BN seem overly ambitious, or even unrealistic. With the development objectives in mind it would seem natural that

¹⁴ Based on the list of projects in the Annual Plan 2007 submitted together with the Land-programplaner 2007-2011 to Norad on 16.10.06.

BN strategically concentrated its work with funding from Norad in those countries where there is a more substantial presence of member organisations. The members could still choose to continue working in other countries with other sources of funding.

Please refer to appendix 7 for a more detailed assessment of the BN country plans.

3.3 Partner strategy

The partner programmes concept is included as a separate point in Annex 1 to the agreement between BN and Norad of 08.02.07 for the period 2007-2011. Members have been working with and through partners for a long time but mainly in a project approach. In the next five year period, BN plans to expand the partnership concept into a programme approach. Working via partners is not a new feature in BN; in fact, it has been one of the guiding principles in the development work for many years in the member organisations and is strongly promoted by BN. The categories of partners working with the member organisations are typically local churches, grass-roots organisation and more established NGOs but also local authorities (e.g. the case in China).

The partner programme concept entails that partners are to be strengthened in a way that enables them to control their own development programs. BN has developed guidelines and strategies to assist member organisations with respect to partner based development¹⁵ but in general, BN does not interfere in the selection of partner organisations by the member organisations. The role of the BN secretariat in terms of assisting with capacity building seems logical and is mainly taking place during field visits and regional cluster meetings. A more systematic or institutionalised process of capacity building of partners could be envisaged within the partner programme.

Networking at all levels is an important tool in this respect since a central idea behind partner programmes - as well as country programmes - is a stronger co-ordination and synergies among members and partners. This may result in fewer but stronger partners being able to develop their own projects. Ideally it also means less administrative work for members and BN. BN will be responsible for identifying partner programmes via the members and partners, and give professional and financial support to these programmes. BN is furthermore responsible for stabling meeting places for dissemination and discussions of experiences in this respect. BN is aware that working via partners is resource demanding because intensive capacity building of members and partners are a prerequisite but estimate it to be cost-efficient in the long view.

The review team finds the concept of partner programmes to be relevant and forums and meeting places for exchange of experience and practices should be seen as a part of the coordination and networking strategy of BN. In the view of the team, the partner programme is well linked up to existing and newly initi-

¹⁵ Partnership in Development, Niels Atle Krokeide, Jethro Consult/BN, Oslo 2005.

ated activities and seems to be a natural and necessary development of the partnership principle.

The review team suggests that BN should analyse the process and the experience acquired during the country programme process and include this in the partner programme work. Besides the fact that guidelines from Norad were not clear or well articulated and thus hampered the process, the team was made aware that some members were questioning the use of programmes and the idea of harmonisation and coordination. One of the reasons for this is the fact that members have very different geographical conditions (great distances as in DRC), another is that they work with different partners and a third is that the programme area of intervention are different. For some it seemed more natural to work with other non-BN organisations where there was a common thematic interest or location. Also, it was the impression of the team that some members simply want to continue to work on their own and in accordance with their identity. This attitude may also influence the development of the partner programme. BN needs to get the commitment of all members to be sure to achieve the goal.

The partner programme strives to give more responsibility to partners in the field and ensure activities are being locally anchored. This requires more intense capacity building of member and partners as foreseen by BN. The team supports suggests that BN takes the opportunity to do more targeted and differentiated capacity building of members to ensure that they have the right tools to train their partners, and to consider including a more institutionalised approach to capacity building of the partners by BN itself. The team has only limited information on partnership relations from the field and it is thus difficult to assess the general capacity levels and if the partner programme is realistic. Based on the experiences from China, however, partners are in need of strategic support and capacity building.

There is also scope for alignment and harmonisation to the partner strategies and systems through the partner and country programme approach. The agreement with Norad is focused on the strategic level rather than on individual projects. This gives BN more leverage in terms of reporting formats and allows BN to be more flexible with the reporting formats required from partners and makes it easier to accept the partner's formats and systems. The capacity development foreseen in the partner programme would entail that BN also supported the development and strengthening of these reporting formats and routines to ensure an acceptable level of quality and reliability so that they are accepted by international NGOs. This could contribute to reduced transaction costs for the partners who often have many reports to prepare for various donors.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

The overall conclusion of the review of BN is that it is a well functioning and competent organisation, with good procedures and committed and qualified staff. Despite the rather complex position of BN, the review team finds the organisation to be updated on the development agenda and active with respect to capacity development of members and needed tools. However, the team also finds areas which need to be modified to meet the mandate of BN and fulfil its obligations towards Norad.

At the outset, the review team formulated seven hypotheses based on some assumptions about BN and the challenges the organisation faces as an umbrella organisation for 18 rather different members (please refer to chapter 1.6.). The following paragraphs integrate the hypotheses in the conclusions and recommendations.

a) A key question for the organisational performance review was to assess if BN as an umbrella organisation is able to achieve its own objectives; to administer the agreement with Norad and provide quality control of programmes; to provide advisory services and guidelines to members; to organise and provide technical and thematic capacity building and to facilitate networking, share information, and do lobby work. A second parameter was also the relevance to member organisations, their local partners and target groups.

The team examined the tools and procedures of BN and found that the BN Secretariat generally has adequate tools and procedures in place which are well functioning - both at the administrative/financial level as well as at the programme level. Members have their internal systems but are reporting according to templates provided by BN.

The Secretariat strives to improve existing tools and be more professional in the field of capacity building. FU is the cornerstone of capacity building in BN and the team finds the activities to be of high relevance. However, to ensure that members get training in fields where they lack capacity, the team suggests that training needs assessment of the member organisations are systematically undertaken to promote a more targeted and differentiated capacity development.

The team finds that BN has the capacity to fulfil the role as a think tank and also carries out 'think tank activities' such as annual and thematic meetings and other FU activities. However, there are limits. As BN acts as a kind of 'buffet'

served to the members where they can choose between the different plates and only take the appetizing and digestible parts, it has no means to enforce member organisations to participate in discussions and take onboard new knowledge. In some organisations, capacity development therefore can be sporadic. BN has also limited means to force members to transfer capacity building activities to partners in the field.

During the review, the member organisations expressed satisfaction regarding the capacity building activities of BN and that being a member of BN provides influence in a positive way. With the limitations of this review, it is difficult for the team to document if there has been an increase in the level of technical competences amongst the members. However, based on the interviews with BN staff, members and other stakeholders and via reviewing reports, it seems capacity has increased although the actual impact at the organisational level may vary according to the existing capacity level of each member organisation.

BN carries out regular evaluations of member organisations and project activities and share results with member organisations and partners. Networking and exchange of experiences are important tools for BN. The team found that networking between members in Norway generally are working well (e.g. China Forum, DR Congo Forum, Bistandstorget) whereas it seems to be more difficult in the field because of geographical distances, differences in activities and identities of the members. The team found that it is difficult for the BN Secretariat to implement the network strategy without a full commitment from members.

In summary, with the present umbrella structure it is difficult for BN to ensure that all procedures are communicated from members in Norway to partners in the field. BN is dealing with a rather inhomogeneous member-group with different needs and capacities. BN has limited possibilities to know exactly when members fail to fulfil their obligations towards BN and partners and have limited options for sanctions. This is very fundamental as it influences BN's ability to fulfil its mandate and its capacity to administer the Norad agreement at least outside Norway and in particular to ensure the results and quality in the field.

Recommendations:

- BN depends on its members to deliver on its mandate and objectives. BN should thus be able to demand full commitment from the member organisations in order to be able to achieve its objectives;
- BN Secretariat should consider undertaking a training needs assessment of the members to elaborate more differentiated capacity building;
- BN Secretariat should emphasize the need for networking and the programme concept to the members at all levels;
- BN Secretariat should continue capacity building with respect to cross-cutting issues and include competent members and partners as resources.

b) The review also entailed assessing whether BN is able to secure good results and cost-efficient use of funds in line with Norwegian political priorities.

A large portion of the BN portfolio is concentrated on service delivery, and here the results in terms of tangible outputs are quite clear. Physical improvements, schools, sanitation facilities, bio gas installations and water cellars etc. are built and where relevant training is provided in usage and maintenance. In terms of results relating to the more overall development objectives of BN, reducing poverty and empowering the vulnerable and civil society the concrete results are not as easily identified. This is in part related to the time aspect as capacity building and change in behaviour, notions and customs take time to manifest themselves, and in part related to the fact that the design and monitoring of the programmes are not geared for the type of result focus which is in demand at the moment. It is recommended that BN focuses more on baseline studies in the beginning of a new programme to uncover not only quantitative aspects but also more qualitative aspects which can be used to monitor progress on the advocacy and capacity building components of the programmes. The "reporting on results" project should also be finalised.

The umbrella model is efficient in terms of reduced transactions costs for the involved parties. It was found that the cost of BN is not excessive taken into consideration the mandate of, and the number of tasks undertaken by the organisation. In an alternative set-up where Norad would carry out what BN is actually doing, the transaction costs most likely would be higher. It can also be questioned if Norad has sufficient resources to let their staff carry out what BN does within its mandate.

In general, the team finds the activities carried out by member organisations and partners to be relevant to the overall focus of Norwegian development priorities and the guidelines for grants to civil society. BN has a strong poverty profile and emphasises local ownership and capacity building. There are however elements of the BN overall programme that are less in line with the Norwegian priorities, especially what concerns thematic and geographic concentration. BN is working in 42 countries, though in over half of these there is only one member organisation present. The portfolio is still dominated by projects though the Norwegian policy favours a programmatic approach. BN has however started this process through the development of three pilot country programmes, though work still remains to be done by BN in this respect.

Recommendations:

- BN should focus more on baseline studies in the beginning of a new programme to uncover not only quantitative aspects but also more qualitative aspects which can be used to monitor progress on the advocacy and capacity building components of the programmes;
- BN should continue its focus on ensuring relevance with Norwegian policies and strategies. This would entail working strategically towards more thematic and especially geographic concentration. The members work in 42 countries, which poses important challenges for BN in terms of monitoring and quality assurance.

c) Lastly, the review team was to consider the country programme approach as well as the partner programme concept of BN.

With respect to the country programme process, it is the opinion of the team that the exercise has been cumbersome but also fruitful for BN and the members. It has forced them to start thinking in terms of programmes rather than projects and also consider their common points of entry, the strategic direction of the portfolio, and possible synergies between the members present in a country. The process has only started but it seems as if BN and the majority of the members are willing to strive for more cooperation.

The partner programme also seems like a relevant development of the BN programme - strengthening local organisations and civil society organisations to promote ownership and a stronger sustainability. The implementation of the partnership will require more intense capacity training of members and partners of which BN will be in charge. The team is of the opinion that the recommendation regarding more targeted capacity training of the members in general should also apply for partners. The further strengthening of local partners is necessary in terms of achieving the overall objectives of BN. Networking at all levels and a stronger coordination to achieve more synergies among members and partners will contribute to the potential for impact of the BN programmes. The goal is stronger partners that are able to take charge of their own development. Ideally it would also mean less administrative work for partners if their formats could be strengthened and thus accepted by BN.

Recommendations:

- BN should pursue the country programme planning together with the member organisation and identify areas of strategic harmonisation and more practical coordination, e.g. sharing premises and logistical tools;
- The country plans should contain a more analytical consideration of why the organisation considers it important to work in a particular country and region, with particular partners and on specific programmes. More focus on what the rationale is for being there and on the value added by the organisation is, and less focus on trying to combine the programmes or projects of each organisation at an overall country level. What specific and more strategic contributions can the organisation offer and how do they envisage doing it? This kind of analysis would assist in developing a more strategic direction to the BN portfolio;
- The review team suggests that BN should analyse the process and the experiences acquired regarding the country programme and include this in the partner programme work;
- The team suggests that BN takes the opportunity to do more targeted and differentiated capacity building of members to ensure that they have the right tools to train their partners, and to consider including a

more institutionalised approach to capacity building of the partners by BN itself;

- BN should work towards more alignment and harmonisation to the partner strategies to reduce their transaction costs. The way forward lies in the country and partner programme approach, as strengthening the capacities and the quality of the partner management system will allow BN, and potentially other donors, to align to these systems.

Appendix 1: Terms of reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR)
Performance Organisational Review of
The Norwegian Missions in Development (BN)
2007/2008
Consultant: COWI

Background

The Norwegian Missions in Development (BN) is an umbrella organisation (consortium) of 18 member organisations, all faith-based and Christian Mission Organisations. The two main roles of BN are: administration of the framework agreement and competence building of member organisations and how these two roles could be developed further in a future BN.

BN was created in an understanding between Norwegian Mission Council and Norad in 1983. The main purpose of BN is the capacity-building and coordination function in the member organisations' contact with Norad and their use of funds for development work. The member organisations have experiences in development work alongside their evangelical work – some more than 100 years - others have started their diaconal work more recently. All members have their roots in a protestant evangelical tradition. An important task for BN is to ensure that the member organisations use Norad funds for development work, and not evangelisation.

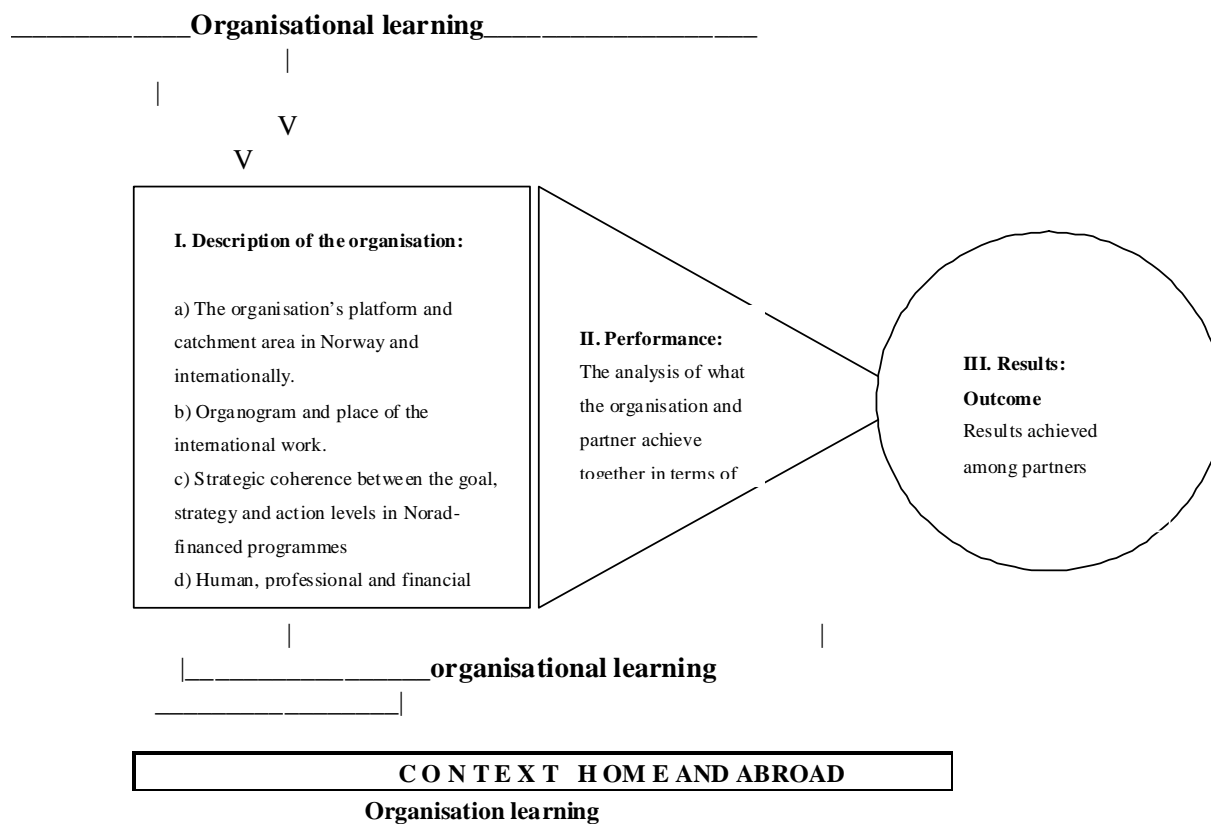
BN has a board that decides strategies and approves the annual portfolio, presented as an aggregated program/request for funds to Norad. BN has a secretariat that performs the quality control and the coordination of the development activities and results of the member organisations. The member organisations are responsible for their local partners' planning and implementation. They shall also monitor local partners' programmes and results.

The support to BN is organised through a multiyear agreement.

Purpose

Norad has decided to carry out performance organisational reviews regularly with all its partners – preferably every fourth year or when entering into a new agreement phase. The purpose is to learn from experiences and be able to prepare programmes with high quality and excellent results. This shall be done by looking into;

- ability to achieve own objectives,
- examine relevance to local partners and target groups,
- secure good results and cost-efficient use of funds in line with Norwegian political priorities.



The model above forms a visual description of the review criteria which will be substantiated in the text below:

The review shall be based on the following reference material:

- policy and strategy for long term development work, re-views, annual reports, website and applications, as well as research-based literature aimed in particular to the sectors where the organisation has interventions, and documents with reference to 'best practices'
- Applicable guidelines for grants to civil society (2001)
- White paper no 35 (2003-2004)
- Agreement Norad-BN 2007-2011 and annex for 2007
- The grant letter for the year 1
- Norad's strategy towards 2010
- Other relevant documents (e.g. Rattsø-report)

Description of the organisation (I – square)

The review shall give a clear description of BN

- organisational structure and working methods,
- the information flow within the umbrella and how decisions are made and discussions are disseminated among the members and their local partners, and within BN's secretariat and board.
- The review shall also look into the system for partnership and competence development for members and partners and how learning and experiences are used in their strategic and programming processes.
- The review shall also look into the BN's accounting systems and assess BN's routines and control mechanism to prevent corruption.
- Gender issues and conflict sensitivity should be addressed to during the analyses.

Performance analysis (II - arrow)

The review shall analyse how BN transfer policy, strategy and programme-tools into good results and user-effects, in accordance with the BN tools and in relations to member-organisations. Planning processes, use of indicators, re-reporting practices and dialogue performances shall be assessed. Capacity and competence development among members and how this is operated towards the local partners shall be a part of the review. Gender dimensions and conflict sensitivity at the various stages should be included.

Results and learning among partners (II – ball)

During field-visits, learning and competence development among the local partners, and to what degree results achieved may be traced back to the BN performance, should be in focus.

The role of the member organisations and their partners and the effects for target groups and the local civil society in whole should be analysed. The review team should analyse the planning and decision processes and how priority issues were linked to local or national priorities. (China – Kenya). However, in China, all projects concerning Tibet or Tibetan people are excluded from the review.

Assessment of the umbrella structure in the light of new country programme approach

During all parts of the review, the team shall assess the feasibility of comprehensive country programmes for several partners in the relative near future. Several BN member organisations and their partners in development are operating in the two countries selected for the review.

The team shall discuss the draft country plan for China which are parts of BN's pilot project on country planning and make recommendations for further development of such plans.

The team shall furthermore look into the new "partner programmes" concept which BN is pursuing in Annex 1 of the 2007-2011 framework agreement.

Implementation of the review

The review shall be based of

- document studies – in Norad, at BN, among members and partners,
- interviews (based on an interview guide) to assist the team in the preparatory phase.

An inception report shall be presented to Norad and BN and this report shall contain

- the team's interpretation of the ToR given for this review –
- key questions (hypothesis) to be tested
- look at risk factors
- how the work in the team will be organised – distribution of tasks and responsibility
- Methods used, included the interview-guide used with the member organisations.
- a preliminary report/impression from interviews and document-studies in BN, Norad and among member organisations in Norway.
- Detailed plan for the field visits, including anticipated results.
- Job descriptions for local consultants

The team:

The firm selected for the work, COWI, Danish partner to CMI in a frame agreement for consultancy works for Norad.

Team leader: Susanne Vedsted COWI

Team consultant: Kristin Skov-Spilling COWI

Quality assurance for the team: Elsebeth Krogh COWI

Senior Adviser Marit Berggrav, Norad (enter after inception report)

Local consultant in each country (COWI)

Translator in China(COWI)

Resource persons for the review: Secretary General, Oddvar Espegren- BN, Senior Adviser Eli Sletten-Norad, Senior Adviser Inge Herman Rydland- Norad and Senior Adviser Marit Lillejordet Karlsen (prime contact for the team and resource persons), Norwegian Embassy China, Embassy Secretary Monica Thowsen, Norwegian Embassy, Kenya, contact person is not yet appointed.

Time schedule:

1. The work starts 20th September 2007 with team visiting Oslo
2. Team visit to Norway early October
3. The inception report shall be presented 15th October 2007
4. Field work China: week 44 and 45
5. Field work Kenya: approximately week 5 and 6, 2008
6. Draft report 1st March 2008
7. Final report 1st May 2008

Report

The report is the sole responsibility of the COWI consultants. The report shall not exceed 40 pages and be written in English. The report shall be organised in accordance with this TOR. The report shall contain:

0. Executive summary – 2 pages
1. Conclusions and recommendations – 2 pages
2. Organisational performance analysis – 20 pages
3. Field visits – 8 pages each

The report shall be sent to Norad electronically. Draft report shall be presented to BN and Norad by the team leader or the consultant. The final report shall be presented in a workshop for BN, members and Norad shortly after the report is completed.

BN and Norad should be given all rights to presenting the material including the power point presentations as a contribution to organisational learning. COWI should upon request (outside the contract) be willing to participate in learning sessions for the parties.

Appendix 2: Persons met

List of persons met:**Oslo:**Members of the reference group:

Marit Lillejordet Karlsen, Senior adviser, Dept. for civil society (Norad)

Inge Herman Rydland, Senior adviser (Norad)

Eli Kofoed Sletten, Senior adviser (Norad)

Marit Berggrav, Senior adviser (Norad)

Oddvar Espegren, Secretary General (BN)

Employees in the BN secretariat:

Arne Kjell Raustøl, Adviser

Kristian Larsen, Adviser

Heidi Holt Zachariassen, Adviser

Jan Eivind Viumdal, Information Adviser

Vigleik Winje, Consultant

John Olav Konstad, Financial chief

Astrid Vaaler Lundstrøm, Financial and administrative consultant

Jørn Lemvik, Consultant in BN (now General Secretary)

Areopagos:

Kari Harbakk, Project Co-ordinator

Ernst Harbakk, Asia Secretary

NMA:

Arnt H. Jerpstad, General Secretary

Jørgen Haug, Regionleder for Latinamerika

Tone Lindheim, Utenlandssjef

Hanne Holmberg Chávez, Regionleder for Asia,

NLM:

Ola Tulluan, General Secretary

Hjalmar Bo, Director for China, Central-Asia and Mongolia

Elin Vannes, Bistandskonsulent

Marianne Skaiaa, Rådgiver NLM Bistand

PYM:

Gaute Hetland, Adviser

Eli Bjørnebråten, Adviser

Salvation Army:

Major Eli Nodland Hagen, Seksjonsleder - m.ansvar for Latinamerika og Kari-bien

Norwegian Church Aid:

Kari Øyen, Regional Programme Coordinator, Eastern Africa

Elie Storesletten, Advisor, Thematic Advisory Divison

Fokus:

Martha Rubiano Skretteberg, Director

Mette Moberg, Deputy Director.

Atlas Alliansen:

Rikke Bækkevold, General Manager

Trine Riis-Hansen, Development Advisor

NUPI

Axel Borchgrevink, Senior researcher

Øyvind Eggen, Research fellow

Stavanger

NMS:

Kjetil Aano, General Secretary

Anne Karin Kristensen, Program Director

Jacob Veia, Programleder

BN Board:

Preben Lindøe, Chairperson, elected in spring 2007.

Shincon - Stavanger:

Per Inge Langeland, General Manager

China

Norwegian Embassy in Beijing:

Monika P. Thowsen, 1st Secretary

Jo Inge Bekkevold, 1st Secretary

Per W. Schive, Environmental Counsellor

Ola Breidal, Cultural Attaché

Kjell Tormod Pettersen, Minister Counsellor

Embassy of Sweden, Beijing/SIDA:

Annika Siwertz, Counsellor, Development Cooperation

Beijing Cultural Communication Center for Facilitators:

Li Tao, Chief Director

Amity Foundation:

Ruhong Liu, Director

Qui Zhonghui, General Secretary

Zhang Liwei, Associate General Secretary

Xie Ying (Sandra), Project Coordinator

NMS:

Ole Jacob Groenvold, representative for NMS in Hong Kong

Shincon office - Kunming:

Wang Qingsong, Managing Director

Zhao Bin, Project Manager
Li Enlin, Director of Program Department
Jan Dalhaug, Project manager and NLM representative
Espen Angermo, Project manager and NMA representative

Salvation Army project office:

Lucas Deng, Regional Coordinator
Zhao Juan, HomeAIDS - HIV/AIDS Consultation and Service Center.

Café Nordica -Kunming:

Helen Wu, General Manager

Persons met during visit to Liangshan:

The staff of the project office:

Mr. Gao Jianzhong , the director of the project office
Mr. Sun Anquan, doctor
Mr. Pu Houjun, teacher
Ms. Ma Baoyang, accountant
Mr. Dai Chunsheng, driver

At Ta Er Ti Village (Leprosy) in Yousuo Township of Yanyuan County:

Mr. Wang Changsheng, the head of the village
Mr. Luo Zhengbing, the teacher you talked with
Mr. Li Jinhua, another teacher

A meeting with the County Government Leading Group for NMA' Aiding Project at the Yanyuan county government office:

Ms. Luo Chaorong, the deputy chief of the county government
Mr. Chen Yongxiang, the director of county government office
Mr. Yuan Renjiu, the deputy director of the county government office
Mr. Nin Jianguo, the director of the county financial bureau
Mr. Lin Tingshou, the director of the county development and reform bureau
Mr. Mao Adu, the vice director of the county PAO
Mr. Xiu Xiong, the director of the county education bureau
Mr. Li Waidu, the vice director of the county health bureau
Mr. Jin Kaida, the director of the county civil affairs bureau
Mr. Li Hua, the director of the county water conservancy
Mr. Xu Wenbin, the director of the county agriculture bureau
Mr. Ma Fuzhi, the director of the county husbandry bureau
Mr. Zhang Yunhua, the director of the county forestry bureau
Mr. Gao Dengyun, the director of the county industry & commerce bureau
Mr. Hu Dekang, the deputy director of the county publicity department

A meeting at hotel in Xichang:

Mr. Yao Yuncheng, vice director of Foreign Affairs & Overseas Chinese Office, the People's Government of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture
Ms. Yang Dongmei, section chief of Foreign Affairs & Overseas Chinese Office

At dinner in Xichang:

Mr. Zhang Jianhua, the director of CDC of Liangshan Prefecture

Visit to Mangshe:

Mr. Dao Xiaofa, director of Yingjiang Nationality and Religious Bureau

Mr. Shi Hong, vice director of Yingjiang Educational Bureau

Ms. Dao Baolian, party secretary of Yingjiang Health Bureau

Mr. Ma Jiageng, party secretary of Shangri Township

Mr. Yan Ziming, party secretary of Puguan Village

Mr. Jiang Jialiu, vice mayor of Zhanxi Townhsip

Mr. Zhu Nianfeng, principle of Zhangxi Central School

Mr. Li Wei, director of People's Congress of Zhanxi Township

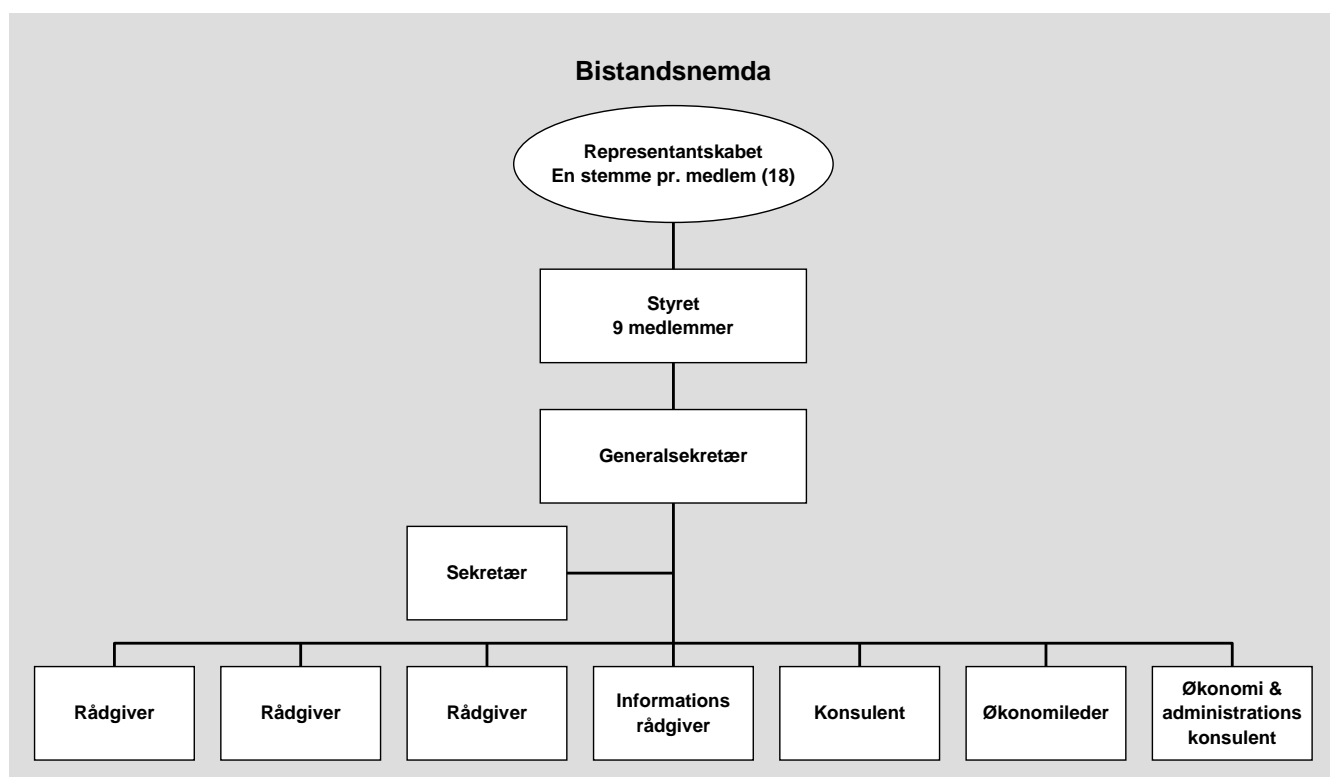
Mr. Yin Youshan, mayor of Mangzhang Township

Ms. Dong Huifang, vice mayor of Mangzhang Township

Mr. Lei Zhenhai, party secretary of Zhangdao Village

Appendix 3: Organigramme for BN

Organigramme for BN



Appendix 4: Members and countries

Afrika**ORGANISASJON**

Areopagos	Nettside E-post	23 33 17 00	23 33 17 99
De Frie Evangeliske Forsamlinger	Nettside E-post	23 35 47 50	23 35 47 51
De Norske Pinsemenigheters Ytteremisjon	Nettside E-post	22 75 91 20	22 75 91 21
Den Evangelisk Lutherske Frikirke	Nettside E-post	22 74 86 00	22 74 86 01
Den norske Misjonsallianse	Nettside E-post	22 94 26 00	22 94 26 01
Den Norske Tibetmisjon	Nettside E-post	22 76 90 10	22 76 90 11
Det Norske Baptistsamfunn	Nettside E-post	67 10 35 60	67 10 35 69
Det Norske Misjonsforbund	Nettside E-post	23 32 57 50	23 32 57 60
Det Norske Misjonsselskap	Nettside E-post	51 51 61 00	51 51 61 61
Frelsesarmeen	Nettside E-post	22 99 85 00	22 20 84 49
Kristen Muslimmisjon	Nettside E-post	91 15 03 44	38 11 82 11
Metodistkirkens Misjonsselskap	Nettside E-post	23 33 27 00	23 33 27 01
Mission Aviation Fellowship Norway	Nettside E-post	33 48 07 80	33 48 07 81
Normisjon	Nettside E-post	23 30 10 00	23 30 10 01
Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband	Nettside E-post	22 00 72 00	22 00 72 03
Norsk Misjon i Øst	Nettside E-post	22 38 05 13	22 38 24 06
Ungdom i Oppdrag	Nettside E-post	62 57 43 00	62 57 43 01
Wycliffe	Nettside E-post	22 98 04 60	22 98 04 61

BN supports projects of the member organisations in the following countries:

Angola
Burundi
Kamerun
Kongo, Den Demokratiske Republikken
Kongo (Brazzaville)
Etiochia
Kenya
Liberia
Madagaskar
Mali
Mosambik
Niger
Sør-Afrika
Rwanda
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Swaziland
Uganda
Zimbabwe

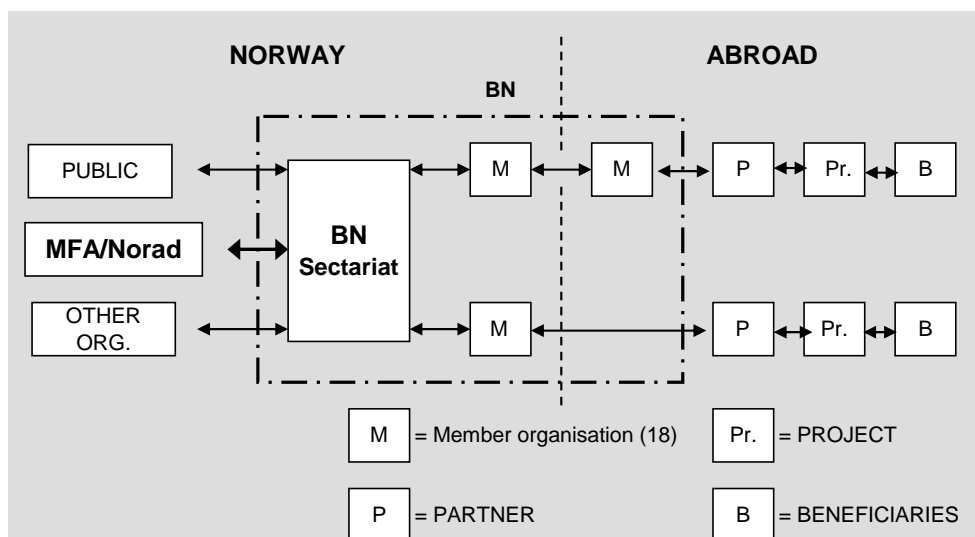
Asia

Afghanistan
Aserbajdsjan
Bangladesh
Bhutan
Burma
Kina
India
Indonesia
Kambodsja
Nord-Korea
Mongolia
Nepal
Pakistan
Palestinsk adm. omr.
Filippinene
Vietnam

Latin-Amerika

Bolivia
Colombia
Ecuador
Guatemala
Haiti
Peru
Paraguay

Appendix 5: The context of BN

The context of BN (from the inception report):

Appendix 6: Presentation of 6 member organisations

Presentations of six member organisations

NLM - The Norwegian Lutheran Mission

NLM is one of the largest of the BN member organisations with an annual turnover of well over NOK 800 million. Most activities take place in Norway and are linked to different congregational activities and social services like running schools and day care centres. International development cooperation constitutes about NOK 70 to 80 million. Of these only about 25% are funding from Norad, the remaining part is voluntary contributions and funds collected by congregations around the country. In the budget for 2007 BN had calculated with NOK 20.8 million to NLM. NLM is working in 13 countries and Norad provides funding for programmes in 7 of these countries (Bolivia, China, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mongolia, Peru, Tanzania).

The high level of self financing makes NLM less dependent on Norad funds compared to many other organisations and allows NLM to pursue projects otherwise rejected by BN or Norad. The need or willingness to change the direction of the development interventions to be more in line with the political directives from Norad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seem less apparent. The allegiance could be said to be more to the core funders in the congregations where references to historic ties and continuity resonate better than changing political directives from the Ministry. NLM has also noted the increased emphasis on the political aspects of development cooperation. NLM sees it as a shift away from focus on the recipient policies to more focus on the donor policies. The organisation is not always satisfied with what this entails in terms of sharing Norwegian values and norms.

NLM is well aware of its position as one of the large players within the BN umbrella, but considers BN a good platform for sharing information and knowledge and building competencies. There is, however, a distinct feeling that BN should not develop into an independent organisation competing for funding in the Norwegian NGO market.

NMA - The Norwegian Mission Alliance

NMA is the largest of the BN member organisations and the only one confined to doing diaconal work only. It is an independent organisation based on donations and voluntary contributions. The annual programme budget is close to NOK 90 million of which the funding from Norad only constitutes about 30%. In the budget for 2007 BN had foreseen NOK 30.7 million to NMA. The programmes funded by Norad are concentrated in 4 countries, Bolivia, China, Ecuador and Vietnam.

A large part of the NMA development programme is thus independent of Norad funding and leaves NMA in a position similar to that of NLM. The organisation is able to implement programmes irrespective of Norad and BN support.

NMA does not have any members and there are no churches or congregations collecting funds on a general basis. Resources are generated from fund-raising, most often targeted for specific activities or projects. By not having a member base but relying on donations the loyalty of the contributors is not so strong, but

the situation opens up for more flexibility. NMA considers it can more easily accommodate the changing needs than if the organisation was member based. Though less dependent on Norad funding, the fund-raising for a specific cause could imply a certain rigidity in terms of the content and direction of the portfolio. Donations for a specific purpose can not easily be used for a different purpose to suit a changing political agenda.

NMA is positive towards the contribution of BN and sees concrete benefits from being part of the umbrella organisation. All members have benefited from increased professionalism and the relationship with the BN Secretariat is closer than what would most likely have been the case in a direct MNA-Norad relationship. What NMA has opposed though is the inherent organisational tendency to develop into something more than being a facilitator and competency builder. NMA feels there has been an attempt by the Secretariat to develop into an organisation in its own right, and that has not been perceived as desirable or in line with the intentions when creating BN. BN is not meant to be an implementing or a fund-raising organisation. All member organisations are depending on raising funds and on maintaining their own identities. BN should not seek to merge the various identities into one common BN organisation.

NMS - The Norwegian Mission Society

NMS is a membership-based organisation with an annual turnover of over NOK 200 million. NMS is the oldest missionary organisation in Norway and has ongoing activities in Norway as well as a long tradition for diaconal work abroad. It is a medium-sized organisation within the BN umbrella and the proposed budget from BN for 2007 is NOK 11.9 million. The organisation works in 13 countries but the funding from Norad only covers work in 7 (China, Ethiopia, Laos, Madagascar, Mali and South Africa).

The headquarters of NMS is placed in Stavanger where one also finds the School of Mission and Theology which is owned by NMS. This school educates a substantial share of the staff sent abroad by many of the BN member organisations. The school organises together with BN ~~BN Secretariat is facilitating~~ a five to six weeks course in development cooperation (at the school) every year. This training is a good opportunity for BN to reach out beyond the desk officers in the member organisations to the actual field workers with messages on guidelines from Norad, strategic orientation, crosscutting issues and general development theory.

In the view of NMS it is a challenge to define the role of BN in relation to the role and identity of the member organisations. The members do not want BN itself to outgrow the members or challenge the identity of the individual organisation. NMS is quite clear on this issue as the organisation sees the role of BN to be a mediator between Norad and the members and a spokes-organ on issues linked to the interface between diaconal and missionary work.

SA - The Salvation Army, Norwegian Chapter

The Salvation Army is a medium-sized organisation in the BN context, with a planned budget from BN of NOK 12 million for 2007. This budget covers work in 11 countries (Bangladesh, Burma, China, Congo DR, Philippines, India,

Haiti, Mozambique, Nigeria, Swaziland, South Africa), but SA is involved in programmes in many more countries, but then without support from Norad.

SA is somewhat of an outsider though in the BN group as the organisation is a Norwegian chapter of a much larger international network with an international project support office placed in London. It will be hard to recognise the Norwegian part of SA in the various countries as the SA offices are national chapters or project offices with funding from various sources. The SA staff responsible for the cooperation through BN is, however, very appreciative of BN as a resource and competence centre on development issues.

PYM - The Norwegian Pentecostal Mission

PYM has a large diaconal programme and is the second largest recipient of funding from the allocation administered by BN. In 2007 the organisation was foreseen to receive NOK 28.4 million from Norad. PYM receives Norad support to undertake work in 10 countries (Bolivia, Congo DR, Guatemala, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, Somalia, Swaziland, Paraguay, and Uganda). In addition the organisation receives funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for humanitarian assistance. In 2007 this funding amounted to about NOK 15.7 million for programmes in mainly Congo DR and Rwanda.

PYM generates a certain share of the overall income but about 70% of the programmes are funded by Norad. The organisation is as such less flexible and independent than some of the other members. On the other hand, PYM is characterised by having decentralised much of the decision making to programme level to increase programmatic flexibility.

AR - Areopagos

AR is one of the smaller organisations in the BN network. It is also a more recent addition as AR became a member about 10 years ago. AR is registered as a foundation but functions as a membership organisation with around 800 members in Norway and Denmark. The organisation distinguishes itself from many of the other member organisations by being financed by a capital fund from which the annual dividends are large enough to sustain the running of the organisation. They have an annual turnover of around NOK 26 million which are shared between Asia and Scandinavia. The organisation emphasises dialogue and cultural exchange and the approach differs somewhat from the more traditional mission organisations. The main work is concentrated on the three pillars of religious/cultural dialogue, studies and spirituality. The centre in Hong Kong has contact and cooperation with all major universities in China. The diaconal work **is based on** the programme in China which has an annual budget of about NOK 2.6 million of which 90% are contribution from Norad. Areopagos also has a foster children programme for orphans and provides scholarships in China without Norad support. There are no immediate plans or management capacity to expand the diaconal work to other countries in the region. The work in China seems very dependent on persons rather than on an institutional arrangement within AR. It is at present questionable whether the organisation would be able to continue the programmes without the presence of certain staff.

AR considers it a great benefit to be member of the BN umbrella. One thing is the access to funding from Norad which allows them work they would otherwise not have undertaken, another is the expanded network they access through BN, and the last is the capacity development they have been able to experience through courses, training and other dialogue. AR recognises that BN has helped improve the competencies on development work and it is appreciated that BN focuses on the developmental and managerial aspects and not on the evangelical part.

Appendix 7: Country programmes

Country programmes

Background

Norwegian bilateral development cooperation has had an increasing focus on partner country ownership and alignment of donor assistance to national strategies and programmes. In line with this development, there has also been a focus on modernising the support provided through civil society. This support is meant to complement the bilateral and multilateral support and has until now been characterised by flexibility concerning thematic and geographic focus, cooperation with other NGOs and coordination with national plans. There is, however, a shift in the policy towards civil society support and expectations that Norwegian NGOs will accommodate their support to be more in line with the Norwegian development policy and priorities. This includes moving away from the more piecemeal project approach to a more comprehensive programme approach with clearer references to the partner country strategies and more thematic and geographic concentration.

One way of creating more focus on the overall strategy of an organisation is to ask for programme descriptions rather than project documents. This is what Norad has done when entering into new framework agreements with various Norwegian NGOs. Focus is shifted from the rather detailed project level to a more strategic programme level and places the cooperation in a broader development picture.

What is a country programme?

Norad has requested the organisations to develop strategic plans at a geographic level - country programmes. This enables the organisations to place their programme, whether small or large, within a wider national context. Projects or programmes should not be conceived and implemented in isolation from other initiatives and national policies. It seems that many of the large organisations with framework agreements with Norad have taken on this approach and are developing country specific programmes. The plans are a first step towards a more programme-oriented approach.

Umbrella organisations, on the other hand, seem to face special challenges when attempting to develop country programmes. Three such organisations receive funding from Norad and they have all been requested to develop country programmes. This has been difficult. The many member organisations with different profiles and programmes have made it more complicated to develop one comprehensive country programme which would be representative of all organisations working in the respective country. One problem relates to the fact that BN and the members do not feel that they have received enough guidance on what the country programme should constitute. They miss a template from Norad which could guide the process and give indication of what is expected in terms of joint programming and joint financing. A second problem is that many of the programmes are funded by donations collected by congregations and members. The organisations are depending on being able to "recognise" their programmes for further funding purposes. A third challenge is the fact that

most of the member organisations have long-standing relationships with their local partners and they are adamant about the partner initiating the programme direction. It is therefore not just straightforward for the member organisation to decide to change the type of programmes or the geographic location of where to work in order to fit into an overall BN programme. In short, it is not in the interest of the BN member organisations to lose their individuality and identity and be merged into a larger programme in a particular country.

What has BN produced?

BN and its members have nevertheless taken on the challenge and prepared a few country plans. At the outset they decided to pilot the exercise for three countries, China, Ethiopia and Mali. Programmes are at present available for Ethiopia and Mali after the plan for China was withdrawn. Many resources and much time have been spent on trying to come up with an interpretation of what should constitute a country programme. It can be argued that the present result does not seem to be worth the amount of input. The process and output need to be assessed and the purpose of the programmes reconsidered before the concept is expanded and time and money spent to prepare more programmes.

With the help of a consultant BN has developed two country programmes with the following main features: introduction, presentation of the country, the context, the partners, the principles for the work and lastly a brief country focus overview. The Ethiopia plan has placed the country analysis and presentation of the international partners (the BN members) in two annexes rather than in the main programme report.

The country programmes as they are presented seem unfinished at several levels. Firstly, they are in need of final editing to avoid duplications, cut and paste errors and language mistakes. These details will not be dealt with further, suffice to say that the first impression of reading the plans is easily disturbed by unnecessary mistakes and it would pay to ensure that the easy part of the work is fulfilled. Secondly, the plans seem unfinished in terms of content. This is obviously linked to the uncertainty regarding the purpose of the plans. They are developed as a sort of desk exercise without the partners having a clear idea of what the plans are to be used for and who the main audience is. The member organisations have not by themselves seen the need to develop the plans and as such one cannot blame them for not having a clear stand on these questions. They could of course have suggested the parameters themselves to facilitate the process, and this would perhaps have given more focused country programmes. It has, however, not been done yet and the programmes are as such lacking an overall focus. They are descriptive rather than analytical concerning the country situation, the stakeholders and the programme. The descriptions are not particularly convincing in terms of providing information and displaying knowledge about the local context, e.g. the information on the role and scope for civil society is very limited.

What could be an alternative solution?

No doubt that the process of preparing the first drafts of these programmes has provided a good opportunity for BN to get used to the concept and start thinking more holistically. The challenge is to combine the overall programme level with the individual organisation's programme level. It does not seem plausible that they will merge, though there are common points of entry and common overall objectives.

As a first step towards country programmes it may not be necessary to focus so much on the programmes but rather to focus more on the strategic consideration of what the member organisations represent in terms of values, know-how and expertise, and what they can contribute to do, build or change by working in the country. Most NGO support is so limited that it becomes a theoretic exercise linking the efforts of the NGO to more overall sector development. It is, however, interesting to know how the NGO perceives the sector development and how it places its own work within the larger context of the sector. What aspects is it reasonable to expect one can influence, and how are these influenced in the most strategic way?

A key question to ask is what purpose the plan should have and who it is written for. It should not just be a more "reader friendly" way for Norad to get an overview of the programme portfolio. Nor should it be an exercise for the drawer, forgotten once it is produced and accepted. It is necessary to develop a product that catches the interest and serves a purpose for both Norad and BN. The purpose could be to provide a strategic overview of where the BN support places itself in the broader national context of civil society, service delivery, human rights, disadvantaged groups etc. To achieve this, the plans need to discuss in more detail the role and scope of civil society, foreign NGOs and not least the particular role of mission organisations.

It would be useful to get a clearer picture of how the BN members perceive their role and opportunities for influence or change in the various countries. BN members work in countries which are Christian (e.g. Ethiopia), Muslim (e.g. Mali) and where religion is forbidden (e.g. China). This poses certain challenges and questions regarding the scope of the programmes and the role of the BN members and their partners.

Being motivated by solidarity and wanting to improve living conditions in areas of acute poverty is a good thing. But it should be expected that the organisations move beyond being good Samaritans to analysing more thoroughly why they are working in the various countries and what they could hope to achieve beyond support to meet the more immediate needs of the target groups. Historic references alone seem a bit weak as an explanation for presence. There ought to be a more analytical consideration of why the organisation considers it important to work in a particular country and region, with particular partners and on specific programmes. This means the country plan would be more focused on the rationale for being there and on the value added by the organisation, and less focused on trying to combine the programme of each organisation at an overall country level, which has been the attempt so far.

In any case, the assistance is limited and will not influence on the national or regional statistics. It is more interesting to know what specific and more strategic contributions the organisation can offer and how they envisage doing it. This kind of analysis would assist in developing more strategic direction to the BN portfolio as a whole. The programme level may subsequently be adjusted over time if deemed necessary. It is not recommended to change the ongoing agreements. Strategic reorientations of the portfolio are best done when entering into new agreements or new agreement periods.

Appendix 8: China report

Report from the field visit to China

Introduction

The review team visited China in the period 29 October to 10 November 2007. This report gives a presentation of field visit and assessments made concerning some salient issues pertaining to partnerships, relevance, crosscutting issues, capacities and the role of BN and it sums up with a few recommendations

The team consisted of the two consultants from COWI, a representative from Norad, a local consultant and a local interpreter. The programme had been prepared in close collaboration with BN, the member organisations, their local Chinese partners and the Norwegian Embassy in Beijing. The team is grateful for all the assistance and help provided to us before and during the field visit.

The scope of the report

The purpose of the visit was to get a first hand impression of how the BN member organisations and their local partners work in the field. The focus was on processes, partnerships and relevance. The objective was thus not to undertake a more traditional programme review to assess achievement of objectives and results. The team should assess whether the member organisations are using the BN strategies and thematic guidelines and whether the programmes are in line with Norwegian political priorities, based on partnership and local ownership and relevant to the national and local context. The focus as mentioned in the TOR, on whether results in the field can be traced back to the BN performance, was agreed to be abolished as BN is not implementing any programmes itself. There would be an attribution problem if trying to trace results back to BN rather than to the member organisations.

China represents a special case relative to other BN programme countries. The conditions for international and local civil society organisations and especially the status of religion make the Chinese programmes less representative for the overall BN portfolio and the processes and partnerships difficult to compare with BN programmes in other countries. With this in mind we make no attempt at generalising the findings, though some of the examples from China may have some relevance elsewhere as well.

Partners and programmes visited

The visit started out by with representatives from the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Beijing. These meetings provided the team with more details on the Norwegian priorities for the cooperation with China and on the particular context and the challenges of working as an NGO in this country. The BN portfolio and the rationale for the BN member organisations to work in China were also discussed. To put their work into perspective the Embassy had organised a visit to the office of a Chinese NGO, the Culture and Communication Centre for Facilitators (CCCCF). The organisation is focusing on working conditions and rights of migrant workers.

The team further met with the Amity Foundation in Nanjing as well as the representative from Norsk Missionsselskab (NMS) based in Hong Kong. Amity is a large church-based Chinese NGO and the local partner for NMS with responsibility for implementing the NMS integrated rural development programmes in the Hunan province. NMS together with Areopagos (AR) are the only Norwegian NGO using Amity as their local partner. Areopagos has transferred a part of their projects to be administrated within Shincon a few years back but still considers Amity to be an important partner.

In Kunming, the team met with representatives from the Shincon office which is contracted to manage the programmes for Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband (NLM), Norsk Misjonsallianse (NMA) and AR. Shincon was instrumental in organising the programme visits and also accompanied the team to meet with local partners and visit the NLM, NMA and AR supported programmes.

The Salvation Army (SA) project office in Kunming and the Home Aids project supported by the SA Norway were also visited. Home Aids is trying to be recognised as a local NGO but the registration process is not completed yet. The SA office covering China is located in Hong Kong and the SA is only represented by project offices in China. The project office in Kunming has very little, if any, contact with Shincon. They cooperate with other organisations though, e.g. the Yunnan Red Cross which has worked for several years on HIV/AIDS issues. The organisation has close links to the government but this is not seen as a problem.

The following programme visits were subsequently undertaken:

1) The NLM supported *Zhaotong Community Development Project* in the northern part of Yunnan. The project aims at contributing to the reduction of poverty by improving the living conditions in the targeted areas.

The team visited the Ledegu village where NLM has supported the provision of biogas, water cellars, rehabilitation of the primary school, road maintenance and training in making compost. The team met with the main partner to the project, namely the Poverty Alleviation Office (PAO) in Zhaotong at prefecture, township and village level and the chair and vice-chair of the Women's Federation. The relationship between the partners and Shincon seemed very good with a high level of mutual respect and trust. The partners expressed much satisfaction with the participatory methodology they had acquired from working with Shincon.

2) The AR supported *"Wu Fu" Integrated Project (Mind and Body)* in the Mangshi prefecture near the border with Burma. The objective of the project is to contribute to reducing poverty through support to education, basic village health care, and women and by fronting values of human rights through focus on care for the elderly and the disabled.

AR had recently started the programme in this region but has successfully completed 60 similar programmes elsewhere. Two rather remote villages were visited. In the first one a school had been constructed and there were plans to build a village clinic as well as a community/women centre. In the second village a school was under construction, but a health clinic and a community centre had recently been completed. The team also met with various local partners and stakeholders. AR seems well connected and has good working relationships with the local authorities. The team met with the representatives from the Department of Religion and Minorities at county, township and village level. We further met with representatives from the Department for Education as well as for Health and Sanitation at Yingjiang county level.

The programme is in its initial phase and the team could as such only get a preliminary impression of what the programme will entail for the villages and how the partnership will develop. At present there was much focus on the buildings and not much on the training which is the most relevant in a rights perspective and in terms of sustainability. It was a brief visit, but the prevailing impression in the team was that the villages, though remote, were not the most destitute and the concrete outputs provided by the project not necessarily the most relevant. A community centre and clinic were built next door to a large and rather new local government building. In the view of the team, it seemed like a strange priority constructing another large building in the village. Schools and clinics are straightforward in terms of usage. Community centres are on the other hand less evident in terms of usage and outcomes. The project foresees women groups to use the centres and there will be training courses provided based on demands formulated by the locals. As this was the start-up phase of the projects in both villages it was not possible for the team to assess if and how the buildings were being used and what type of training that was provided. The team did, however, question whether such community centres were high on the locals' list of priorities. It may not be that all villages need all "five blessings" as the five components of the project are called. This was also confirmed by one of the local government officials who said the project should not be called five blessings because all five components were not always needed in a village.

3) The NMA supported *Liangshang Health and Development Project* in the Sichuan province. The overall objective of the project has been to contribute to development by providing the stakeholders with the means to develop and sustain themselves and to work for equal rights and opportunities for disadvantaged groups. Activities include helping leprosy patients, undertake training in villages on health and sanitation, sponsor children to attend school, construct buildings and initiate income generating activities, e.g. walnut tree planting.

The team first visited a former leprosy village in the Yanyuan county. The village is located in a very isolated area and NMA has built a school with a library and dormitory for the teachers. There has also been much focus on reducing the stigma of leprosy in the wider community. Many children from the village are sponsored to go to a boarding school in the county capital. The fact that the school principal has accepted the children to attend the school must be seen as a great success. From being unwanted in the school the children are now well

integrated and seem to be accepted and participate at the same level as other kids. When working on reducing stigma this particular intervention seems very relevant. The question is now rather what the future holds for these children once they finish their education. There are not many opportunities in the village they come from and living conditions are very harsh compared to what they experience while going to school. There seem to be an expectation that many will return to the village. Whether this is realistic remains to be seen. Several references were made to the fertile soil which would be able to sustain people and provide an income through cash crops. The team found this to be a bit optimistic as the lack of infrastructure and the sheer isolation represent rather serious limitations on the growth potential.

Shincon and NMA have developed an impressive network and good connections and working relationships at all levels in the Liangshang prefecture. The team met with the main project partner, the so-called "Leading group", which oversees the activities of the operational project team. The leading group has broad and relatively high level participation by representatives from all the line departments as well as the Women's Bureau and it is chaired by the County Governor. The project team manages the project on a daily basis and consists of 3 experts paid by the government and an accountant and a driver paid by NMA. Further, the team met with the vice director of the Foreign Affairs and Overseas Chinese Office in the Liangshang Prefecture.

Partnerships and Partners

China does not fit into the more traditional pattern of civil society partnerships where foreign NGOs work with national or locally based NGOs. The model often favoured by the BN members, working through church organisations and their social service offices, is not an option in China. The prevailing political conditions in China make it necessary for most international NGOs to operate through governmental bodies and mainly focus on social service delivery and advocacy linked and to social and economic rights. A good working relationship based on trust and mutual respect needs to be established with the authorities. It seems unlikely that any of the BN members could achieve this without the help of Chinese staff with good networks and a thorough understanding of the "Chinese way of thinking".

As it is difficult to register as a Norwegian NGO in China, the BN members are using Chinese-based organisations as "intermediaries" between themselves and the local authorities. They have two models; one is using the Chinese NGO Amity to be the partner and intermediary body, the other involves using Shincon, a consultancy firm with some Norwegian staff, as the intermediary. At present both NMS and Aeropagos are using Amity as their partner. However, to the team, it seems the organisations feel they have more influence and possibilities for follow-up and control when using Shincon as the partner.

The Amity Foundation

The Amity Foundation is also using local government as their implementing partners in the field. Amity is a fairly large and independent organisation with links to the Three Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council

(TSPM/CCC). There is no evangelisation and according to the director the Christian profile has become less distinct in the last couple of years. The organisation has a broad portfolio of projects within social services as well as bible printing. The bible printing is a joint venture between the Amity Foundation and the international protestant bible-transmission (formidling) society, United Bible Societies.

Since 1987, Amity has printed some 50 million bibles, of which 41 million in Chinese language and 9 million has been exported. Amity manages to print bibles in 80 languages. Apparently, this represents a good source of income. Amity appears to be a professional organisation with an extensive network and dedicated staff. They do, however, only work through local governments. There was also mention of Amity becoming more relief oriented and having less focus on more long term developmental aspects. The organisation has many funders who all fund different projects and use different modalities. Amity seems serious about responding to the various needs of the funders and the transaction costs are considerable.

It is not possible for the team to give a proper assessment of Amity as a partner organisation based only on this visit to their HQ and no visit to any of their projects. Amity does however seem to be a "natural" partner for the BN members, as it is a Chinese organisation with a Christian platform. Their office is however in Nanjing and the BN members are increasingly concentrating their work further south-west in the Yunnan province. Amity does not hire Norwegian staff and regular communication may be an issue for the BN members in Norway.

Shincon A/S

Shincon is a consultancy firm with both Chinese and Norwegian staff. Shincon has an office in Shanghai doing ordinary consultancy services and an office in Kunming overseeing and monitoring projects on behalf of three of the BN members. The BN members and Shincon have signed a contract describing the responsibilities of Shincon vis-a-vis the projects. Shincon acts as the intermediary between the BN members in Norway and the local partners in the field. The local partners are all local authorities and Shincon enters into contracts with them on behalf of the BN members. Shincon has contracted several Norwegian staff who are in fact representing two of the BN member organisations. One may say NLM and NMA have staff seconded¹⁶ to Shincon.

The review team is of the impression that Shincon offers a good opportunity for the Norwegian BN members to gain access to local authorities and maintain a good working relationship in the various local governments. It is a practical solution to a situation where it would be very time consuming and difficult for the BN members to establish their own offices and be present in the country.

¹⁶ The Norwegian staff is formally employed by Shincon but it still seems to represent their original organisation. For some of the staff there is still a strong connection and frequent communication with the head office in Norway. For others the head office is more distant and they relate more to Shincon in Stavanger for advice.

The Chinese staff takes care of the relationship building and creates contacts while the Norwegian staff maintains a closer relationship with the BN organisations in Norway. The practical arrangement seems to function relatively well and is adapted to the circumstances.

The cost element of using Shincon is probably not higher for the BN members than other alternative administrative solutions. Shincon A/S is a private company owned by a group of Norwegian shareholders with an interest in China and development work. Shincon has its head office in Stavanger and two sub-offices in China. The Yunnan office deals with development cooperation on behalf of the BN members while the Shanghai office is more business oriented. The Yunnan office aims at breaking even and is not profit oriented. So far they have been running with losses, though there is now an increased focus on breaking even to ensure sustainability. The BN members consider the administrative cost of using Shincon to be reasonable and probably lower than if they were to open up offices themselves. The cost is estimated from time used on each organisation's programmes. Amity charges a flat 10% in administrative fees. The team was not given exact figures for how much each organisation pays and they are negotiating new fees at the moment. There would be potential for economies of scale if more members were to use Shincon and the programme portfolio increased.

Relevance and impact

The projects are poverty oriented and mainly service delivery focused, and as such relevant for the local needs of people living in very poor areas. The Norwegian Government's Strategy for China emphasises environment and human rights as important areas of intervention for the Norwegian development cooperation with China. The project portfolio of the BN members has a much wider scope, but there is potential for increased focus on HR, especially the social and economic rights. Several of the projects have a rights-based approach as they in addition to service delivery also involve work with and advocacy for persons with special needs, such as handicapped, former leprosy patients, and the elderly. It seems that it is particularly in relation to the status and treatment of persons with special needs that the BN member organisations may have an added value. The United Nation Convention on the Social and Economic Human Rights has been ratified by China. From what the team observed it seems less controversial for an NGO to work with these types of rights. The BN members work at the practical level on rights for persons with special needs. More emphasis could also be paid to further develop a strategic way of addressing these rights and apply a rights-based approach to planning and programming.

The earlier mentioned CCCF could serve as an example of how an organisation can be working on issues of rights and addressing it at a practical or service-oriented level and at a more strategic level. The practical level entails assisting workers with counselling, prepare legal claims for re-compensation after injuries and visit injured workers in hospital. The more strategic level entails trying to influence the policies and practices on occupational safety and health by advocacy, using the media and informing the migrants of their rights. CCCF is e.g. conveying messages of workers rights through art in order to be able to reach the workers in their working environment where CCCF is otherwise not

welcomed by the employers. The organisation is also in dialogue with the authorities as well as with the large companies employing migrant workers. CCCF emphasised the importance of having a positive cooperation and not point fingers.

The team has no basis to assess whether the organisation is successful and achieves results, but their approach is relevant for the Chinese context and as such also relevant for the BN members who also attempt to work with a right-based approach. The BN members are service oriented and the rights perspective would gain momentum if they addressed the rights a bit more strategically. This could be done by thinking and planning more explicitly how the rights in question, e.g. women's rights, children's rights, vulnerable groups' rights, status or opportunities could be strengthened by working on opinions, perceptions etc. in addition to addressing their practical needs.

Participatory Methods and Rights

An interesting example concerning rights is the participatory approach methods that most of the projects have introduced. Initially the team found it difficult to assess what exactly constituted the participatory approach and what it meant in practice for the partners in local government other than that they were all very positive. It turned out it was basically the way of working and planning that impressed them. They were used to the Chinese tradition of a strict hierarchy and centralised decision making. The participatory processes represented a break from this tradition by allowing for discussions where people would speak irrespective of rank and position etc. One may say that participatory approaches are by nature a democratic way of working, and by applying these methods when working with local government there is a small element of democratisation through the introduction of more democratic ways of working for local government officials.

In the country plan for China it is recommended that Shincon and BN elaborate more on this issue to consider the potential for spreading the concept of using participatory methods in local planning. A small step when talking democratisation, but it is at least a step that is feasible for an NGO and apparently also acceptable for the local Chinese authorities. Shincon and BN can build on the processes they have already initiated.

NMA also has a good basis for expanding on the human rights perspective. This is part of the programme in Liangshang through the work on reducing stigma related to leprosy and the focus on rights and acceptance of a very vulnerable group, the former leprosy patients. The rights perspective could be made more central though by expanding further on activities advocating for the rights, status and opportunities of the disabled. This is acceptable to the Chinese government, and Shincon and NMA have even been approached by the Chinese Federation of Disabled Persons concerning a possible cooperation. There is scope for an interesting collaboration and expansion of the programme. It could also be an opportunity to expose the Federation to other ways

of working by e.g. introducing participatory approaches or just by being a practical example of how a Norwegian NGO operates.

AR is also working on rights through their work for the handicapped and the elderly. The approach is practical and oriented at treatment and methodology, though there is a strong normative and rights-based element in this. It seems that AR and NMA are already collaborating on some of the training elements and this should be encouraged. A key focus now is to work for further spreading of competencies and knowledge concerning the handicapped. These visions are not so much emphasised in the BN and AR documentation. Yes, there are plans to open up new projects in new areas, but there is little discussion of how the good results in one area could be spread not just horizontally but upwards in the system. Are there any direct or indirect ways that the BN members can contribute to this?

Crosscutting themes

Environment

There are some environmental aspects of the BN portfolio mostly in relation to the integrated rural development programmes. The projects are relatively small in scale and geographically limited. They meet some of the practical needs in the local communities (biogas, water cellars, compost) and the environmental impact of the interventions is as such practical and very local. The need for firewood is reduced, thus saving trees, and improved compost techniques promote the use of cheap, organic fertilising. Consequences are mostly related to the household level by reducing time spent on fetching clean water and firewood, though one may also say that the local environment is improved. There are, however, no actions or programmes oriented at environmental policies at local or regional level. As the BN organisations appear today this is neither what the programmes focus on nor where they have their capacity and technical strength or the local networks.

Gender

Gender is perceived to be a mainstreamed issue in all of BN's programmes. The focus is, however, very much on what activities or outputs are relevant and benefit women. Like with the environmental focus, main activities or outputs are of particular relief to women as it reduces time spent on fetching water and firewood, or it teaches women about health and sanitation or introduces small income generating activities. The interventions have a direct focus on some immediate and very relevant needs of the women, but there is less focus on trying to address the more strategic needs which would entail more focus on activities that could help strengthen the role of women, their opportunities and status in society. One may of course argue that making life easier for the women and by providing a source of income, one is also addressing their status and opportunities over time. That is also true, but if one is serious about the gender strategy such efforts ought to be complemented by efforts trying to address the legal or normative practices representing barriers for women. This kind of approach is not really being addressed in the portfolio. Though there is reason to believe this will change as BN is now emphasising gender and devel-

opment though the WEGE programme where the strategic dimension is important.

Conflict sensitivity

The BN organisations describe themselves and their programmes as being conflict sensitive. In the case of China there is not really a situation of post conflict or fragile state, though one may say that there is an issue of conflict sensitivity when working with minorities in a country like China. The team was, however, unable to find a concrete plan or strategy on the topic, neither in the field nor with the organisations or with BN in Oslo. Many Norwegian NGOs have adopted principles of "do no harm" which in a practical way describes the steps to take in order to be on the safe side in terms of reviving any local conflict or ending up creating a new conflict etc. in a programme area. BN has not done this yet, but is planning to strengthen their profile and strategy on conflict sensitivity.

Capacity and Performance, Learning and Competence Development

As mentioned before, Shincon has a valuable role as the creator and maintainer of networks and relationships. Shincon also undertakes many practical tasks related to funding and monitoring, which it seems to perform well. From a more strategic point of view Shincon should consider strengthening its competencies further within the field of development. Currently the office is preoccupied with relationship building, project monitoring and reporting, and less with strategic thinking on issues linked to the focus of the programmes, methodologies and impact reaching beyond the immediate project interventions. Focus is on the projects and the project activities and services, and less on the wider context in which the projects are placed and where they may have an impact which over time may reach further than the target village and local government office. Coordination and the use of staff capacities could also be improved. So far they have worked more vertically serving the different BN member organisations, but there is evidence that they will now work more horizontally to share experiences and draw on staff resources irrespective of their affiliation to one of the three BN member organisations.

In 2003 BN initiated the Organisational Development Programme and an extensive collection of material has been developed for this purpose. BN has good methods and practical experience with processes linked to organisational capacity assessment and institutional strengthening. BN should thus have both the competency and the tools to consider the institutional and especially the organisational aspects of Shincon to ensure this arrangement functions optimally for all parts and that the technical and strategic development competencies are optimised. The team would recommend that the OD strategy is considered used to assess Shincon.

The learning and competence building in the programme portfolio administered by Shincon are integrated by the projects having special budget lines designated for learning. From the resources available Shincon prepares an annual training plan indicating subjects, purpose and timing. This has resulted in many training courses being carried for both partners and target groups. The three organisations using Shincon as their intermediary organise many joint training sessions

as the training needs are similar. From what the team can assess, the training is practical and relevant for the stakeholders. Some of the training is directly linked to the interventions and include training in e.g biogas and water cellar construction. Other training is more oriented at capacity development in e.g. care for the handicapped or leadership. The stakeholders often propose training themselves and Shincon tries to accommodate the requests if deemed relevant. Both local and international (mostly Norwegian) external experts are used as trainers and facilitators.

Knowledge sharing within Shincon is facilitated by the monthly Development Coordination Committee meetings. Meetings between authorities and the members of other NGOs is facilitated by Shincon organising an annual NGO Forum. This is a good occasion for meeting the various stakeholders.

Planning and Decision Making and Compliance with Norwegian and Chinese Policies

The member organisations all emphasise local ownership and point to the fact that it should be the partners who decide what are their priorities and needs. In the case of China there are two levels of local partners; Amity and Shincon at one level in direct contact with the member organisations, and then the local government level in direct contact with Amity and Shincon. The initiation and planning of a new programme takes place at the level of local government who then approach e.g. Shincon with a request. Sometimes it is not much more elaborated than an invitation to "come and work in this village". The proposals often build on existing relationships and programmes so there is not an issue of which Norwegian organisation it is directed at. It is up to Shincon to consider whether a proposal is worth forwarding to Norway or not. A dialogue on the programme and a sanity check or quick needs assessment seem to be done in most cases to establish the relevance of the programme to the needs in the community. Shincon apparently has a fair bit of autonomy in assessing the programmes. There seem to be little censoring at the BN member level and the final decision on funding is at such taken by the BN secretariat.

This locally based planning and decision making processes do indeed promote ownership but it could be said that it is not always conducive to a more programmatic and strategic planning. Firstly, the local partner tends to be focused on concrete outputs. There are certain needs that the partner hopes to meet through the programme. It may often be some type of service delivery or a tangible product. No doubt that these outputs are needed and relevant for the situation. They do however need to be part of an overall strategy with a more strategic approach to the development problems. Shincon and the member organisations in Oslo have a role here in overseeing the direction of their portfolios. There is the strategic dimension linked to thematic and geographic focus where the focus on rights and also cross-cutting issues can be addressed practically by products or services and strategically by thinking of additional, more strategic target groups, partners, activities and messages. The geographic dimension would favour concentration rather than dispersion for small organisations with limited funds. From what the team observed, we did not find that this element is given too much weight. The programmes are dispersed and continue to be so with new programmes being planned in new areas and provinces. As a small

NGO working in a huge country it would seem more strategic to concentrate the programmes in a few areas in order to be able to contribute even the slightest towards the strategic goal of BN, which also applies for the organisations.

The BN portfolio of programmes in China is poverty oriented and complying with the Norwegian guidelines for NGO support. It is perhaps less in line with the overall China Strategy which the Norwegian Government has developed more recently, though the focus on rights of disadvantaged groups correspond well with the emphasis on human rights in the Strategy.

IN any case there is a limitation to how anyone can work with human rights in China and even more to what type of human rights one can address. In China the government expects NGOs to be service providers more than advocates of rights. The political and economic rights are however easier to advocate for as they are part of the notion of solidarity, which seems to be an acceptable and noble cause also for government. Solidarity with the poor or the disabled is not controversial or perceived as a challenge or threat to the authorities. It would therefore be the most logical for BN to continue the efforts in this field and aim to expand the level of cooperation to influence the system upwards rather than just spreading the projects to new areas or provinces.

The team found no evidence of the programmes trying to do more than the diaconal work and include evangelisation. Nor did the team find any evidence of the Christian platform of Shincon and BN representing a problem with their local partners in government. The organisations, through Shincon, seem to have good relationships with an open dialogue with many representatives at various levels of local government. China is a special case in this regard as evangelisation is forbidden. Shincon seemed very aware of this fact. On the other side, Shincon is also very open about the Christian platform of the BN members. The team found that we could ask direct questions on this issue to the local partners and the matter did not seem to be problematic. They had a pragmatic and practical approach to Christian NGOs. As long as there is no preaching there is not really a problem. The chair of the Women's Affair bureau said Shincon was showing solidarity with the poor people and solidarity was an integral part of communism and a "harmonious society".

The role of BN

The BN policies and guidelines of BN are not very visible at project level. BN is known at the level of Shincon and Amity, but is not seen as an authority which they should relate to regarding programmes. They relate to and liaise with the member organisations. The various local government partners are less clear on what BN is and what role it has, other than approving the programmes and reports.

BN visits the countries and programmes on a regular, though not frequent basis, and it seems certain that the portfolio would have benefited from more visits. But there is not enough time nor sufficient funds to cover all countries with regular visits. The field visits are appreciated by the members and their partners. They are also a valuable tool for BN to keep track with what is actually happening on the ground and be able to focus the guidance to areas where it is

perceived to be most needed. There is a role for BN in developing the organisational capacity of Shincon and there is a role for BN in urging the member organisations to participate in the WEGE project so that the programmes in the field can benefit from a more strategic intervention. But ultimately it is the challenge of BN to get their members to emphasise the policies and ensure that that these are addressed in the field.

Recommendations

The BN portfolio in China has a clear poverty focus and is mainly service delivery oriented. The programmes are as such relevant for the local needs in very poor areas. Several of the projects have a rights-based approach as they in addition to service delivery also involve work with and advocacy for the rights of persons with special needs. It is particularly in relation to the status and treatment of this group that the BN member organisations may have an added value.

The programmes of the various BN members working in China have many thematic and operational similarities but are geographically dispersed. The portfolio mirrors the fact that BN coordinates 18 different organisations who are not interested in becoming one organisation or being part of one BN programme. The unifying factors are linked to thematic orientations like gender and rights-based approaches and here there is scope for more cooperation and strategic planning.

- The BN members and Shincon have started cooperating and sharing information and lessons learned and this should be further encouraged and intensified.
- The China Forum in Oslo should establish links with other Norwegian NGOs working in China. The Norwegian Association for the Handicapped is working in China. Given the focus on handicapped in the programmes of the BN members it is almost surprising that contact has not yet been established to share experiences etc.
- The Social and Economic Rights are less controversial to work with in China. The BN members work at the practical level on rights for persons with special needs. More emphasis could be paid to further develop a strategic way of addressing these rights to ensure a wider reaching impact which goes beyond the boundaries of the actual project in each village.
- The Shincon staff seems genuinely interested in the work they are doing and in improving the welfare of their target communities. It would, however, benefit the organisation and the programmes to increase the strategic development competency. This can be done by hiring people with the required competencies or by using BN to further increase the capacities for the present staff through training.
- Shincon as an organisation would also benefit from an institutional assessment to consider the division of labour and responsibilities within the office and externally with partners. The organisational development programme that BN has developed is a natural and in-house method with relevant tools which could be used in this respect.

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