



TRACKING IMPACT

An exploratory study of the wider effects of Norwegian civil society support to countries in the South

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Panel members

Agnes Abuom

Kidist Alemu

Ivar Evensmo

Emmy Hafild

Stein-Erik Kruse

Roger C Riddell

Preface

Real partnerships for effective development cooperation can only be achieved when people, organisations and nations agree to work together. The 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in Korea was the latest in a series of efforts to deepen such partnerships.

But global solidarity and justice are also advanced through the many small practical steps taken every day by development practitioners. This study undertakes an overall informed judgement about what we know and what we need to know about the wider effects of development support through Norwegian Civil Society. Norad uses many different instruments such as research, evaluations and periodic reviews to tell us if we are on the right track to reach our ambitious goals. When we lack the information to form judgements based on robust and objective information, we also need to use more creative approaches such as those presented to us by Norad's Civil Society Panel.

It is Norad's hope that this report carries several important messages, not only to Norwegian policy makers, but to the international development community at large. Civil Society Organisations have many important tasks, such as improving the quality of life for individuals and communities, giving voice to the poor, promoting the interests of people who are oppressed and marginalised, and pushing and challenging governments for more openness and effectiveness in channelling public resources. This report also argues that the wider impact of civil society can be significantly enhanced if the current fragmentation of individual efforts is replaced by more strategic analysis and wider planning approaches.

I want to thank the Panel members for their exploratory work and for their willingness to draw conclusions and to make recommendations even if not all the evidence has been available. I also want to thank the Norwegian CSO community for the participation and interest in this exercise, the contributions many organisations have made by willingly sharing information with the Panel and for facilitating the Panel's interaction and engagement with their southern partners. Bringing people together for such study and to reflect on how common goals might be achieved is a very practical way to demonstrating how the ideas and values agreed to in Busan can be promoted.

I hope the report will encourage more efforts to collect better information on aggregated results and stimulate discussion on how to improve our methods in tracking impact.

Villa Kulild
Director General Norad

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Acronyms

ACCP	African Civil Society Platform on Principled Partnerships
AWSD	Association for Women's Sanctuary and Development
CHAM	Christian Health Association of Malawi
CRDA	Christian Relief and Development Agency
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CONGOMA	Council of Non-Governmental Organisations of Malawi
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CS	Civil Society
CSP	Civil Society Panel
CZOP	Children as Zones of Peace
DDP	Dutch Development Partner
DF	Development Fund
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
EC	European Commission
ED	Executive Director
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FBO	Faith Based Organisation
FEDOMA	Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi
FFAV	Football for All in Vietnam
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
MCTU	Malawi Congress of Trade Unions
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
OD	Organisational Development
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PADev	Participatory Assessment of Development
PB	Peace Building
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
RBM	Results Based Management
SADEV	Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SCJ	Save the Children Japan
SCN	Save the Children Norway
SCUS	Save the Children United States
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SZP	Schools as Zones of Peace
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
UMN	United Mission to Nepal

SUMMARY

Background and purpose

In 2010, Norwegian total support to civil society organisations (CSOs)¹ amounted to 3.6 billion NOK. Almost 1.7 billion NOK, or 46% of this total amount, was channelled through different budget lines managed by Norad². Evaluation reports overwhelmingly focus on discrete projects and often show that short-term objectives have been achieved with positive results. Much less is known about the long-term impact and the wider effects of CSO development interventions beyond the often limited number of beneficiaries directly assisted. Yet, there are questions about the wider and overall impact of CSOs that are increasingly being asked.

The demand for more information about the wider effects provides the backdrop for creating the Civil Society (CS) Panel. The purpose was to establish a Panel with members from the North and the South – comprising people with in-depth knowledge of and experience working within and with CSOs - that could break new ground in assessing the wider and long term effects of civil society interventions.

Recruitment of Panel members was partly motivated by a wish for continuity and for people who had been involved in making the “Principles for Norad’s Support to Civil Society in the South” (published in May 2009). Kidist Alemu from Ethiopia and Ivar Evensmo from Norad were therefore selected. Then, partly because one wanted to involve a person with in-depth knowledge of evaluation work among Norwegian CSOs, Stein-Erik Kruse was selected. And finally three more people who were intimately familiar with northern and southern perspectives on Civil Society’s contribution to development, democracy and redistribution of power (Norad Principle Two), one selected Agnes Abuom from Kenya, Emmy Hafild from Indonesia and Roger C Riddell from UK.

The Panel was asked by Norad to provide an overall assessment of informed judgements about Norwegian CSO performance based on its insights and experiences, its careful review of the wider literature and especially through its visits to four selected countries: Ethiopia, Malawi, Vietnam and Nepal. The reasons for selecting these countries were a mix of the following criteria: geographical and socio-political diversity, substantial support from Norwegian CSOs and documented interventions shedding light on potential wider and longer-term effects. Most weight was given to the third criteria – the potential wider and longer-term effects of CSO interventions. The Panel was also asked to be daring and avoid the usual excuses from evaluators that time was insufficient and data too incomplete to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

1 This report uses the broader term Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) which include Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) focusing on humanitarian and development work and other formal and informal voluntary organisations and associations.
2 The largest one is “Support to civil society and democratisation in the South”, managed by Norad’s Civil Society Department. It provided in 2010 more than 1.2 billion NOK to Norwegian CSOs and their national partners in 74 countries for long-term development projects.

The work of the Panel was not meant to produce an independent evaluation of impact, nor to replace the need for more in-depth, better or rigorous research or evaluation in the future. Rather, it was to provide a different and hopefully fresh perspective on an important, yet difficult subject.

Thus, the Panel sees its work as an exploratory initiative and appropriate for addressing a set of complex issues and questions.

The Panel has performed the following tasks:

- (a) Synthesised what we know about results based on a rapid review of existing studies and evaluations, and identified gaps in data and information.
- (b) Explored and discussed the wider effects of Norwegian civil society interventions in the four case-study countries.
- (c) Reflected on the lessons learnt and made a series of recommendations to Norad and the CSOs on the wider and longer-term impact of CSO interventions.

The primary users of the report are Norad and the Norwegian CSOs, which will use it to support better and more systematic planning for and reporting of wider results. It seeks also to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the future role of civil society in Norwegian development cooperation.

This summary highlights the main findings of the CS Panel's work and can be read independently from the rest of the report. First, the conclusions from the four country case-studies (Ethiopia, Malawi, Vietnam and Nepal) with regard to short-term results, wider impact and civil society strengthening, are presented. This is followed by a summary of some of the findings from the more recent wider literature on the key questions that the Panel was asked to address. Finally, the summary presents the main lessons that the Panel believe have been learnt from the whole exercise, focusing especially on those that are of most relevance to Norad.

However, the rest of the report comprises three parts which provide much more information. Part A presents the background, purpose, questions and methods used in our study. The next two parts explain in further detail the approaches used and how and why we drew the conclusions we did. Part B presents the key findings from the four case-study countries and Part C summarises what we know about results from the more recent wider literature.

Each country visit lasted one week. It involved meetings and interviews with Norwegian CSOs and their partners, with government representatives, independent researchers and journalists, and with other International NGOs (INGOs) and other donors. The country work also involved reviewing documents, reports, studies and evaluations, especially those shedding light on the wider and long-term

impact questions. Workshops with key local CSOs also took place, where the relevance and validity of the proposed hypotheses were discussed.

Thus, it needs to be stressed that the findings and conclusions in the summary are generalisations made from four countries visited, the documents read and the people interviewed by the Panel, most of whom were in these four countries. As our work was not based on a representative sample, we cannot ascertain the extent to which our findings and conclusions apply more widely and more generally to all Norwegian CSOs.

Finally, it should be emphasised that since this is an international panel, members will have different perceptions of and opinions on many issues. This was certainly true in our case. At the end of the study, Panel members still have somewhat differing views. However, the purpose was not to create consensus. Rather, we believe it gives added value that the report presents informed judgements agreed upon by the whole Panel. In that sense we hope our findings and lessons learnt carry more credibility and legitimacy than if they had been written by people with the same geographical background, education and institutional positions.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Short-term project results

1. Improved quality of life for individuals and communities

Significant and tangible results of projects funded by Norwegian CSOs are documented at the individual and community level. Broadly speaking, the Panel's review of documents and its discussion with key staff confirm that projects are implemented according to the plans drawn up, and the projects' short-term objectives are overwhelmingly achieved. This is consistent with findings from the wider literature. In other words, individuals and communities benefit from direct and indirect support in areas such as health, education, micro-credit and agriculture. More widely, the Panel was also able to confirm that civil society has provided and continues to provide social services (especially in health and education) to significant numbers of people.

However, the data are weak in terms of the numbers of people assisted by the projects. We are not able to judge precisely *how many* people benefit from the projects, because it has not been a priority for the organisations to gather such data in a robust form. In our view and notwithstanding some exceptions, the numbers assisted are not particularly large: for most projects we are talking of a few hundred people (sometimes fewer), not tens of thousands of direct beneficiaries. There are examples of large projects with more extensive coverage, but most of the interventions are relatively small. Likewise, the project information

collected generally tells us little about the scale or relative importance of the results achieved – how significant a project is in addressing the most important needs of the beneficiaries.

2. Efficient use of financial resources, but transactions costs are often high

Norwegian CSOs and their partners are committed to and driven by values of solidarity and justice. The Panel was not able to undertake a rigorous cost-effectiveness assessment. However, from what we saw, the majority of Norwegian CSOs and their partners are prudent and use available funds efficiently and resourcefully.

Nonetheless, their transaction costs are often high, partly because of several “administrative layers” between the receipt of funds from Norad by the Norwegian CSO in Norway, passing through the CSO’s “country office”, on to the local partner, and then on to the ultimate beneficiaries.

Sometimes there are good reasons why costs are high, especially when an organisation is trying to assist marginal and more distant communities, and when the quality of the support given would suffer unduly if costs were trimmed further. Some local offices seem modest, others more affluent, resourced with some of the latest and most up-to-date equipment. We noticed that the remuneration of International NGO (INGO) staff tends to be far higher than that of local partner CSOs. On the other hand, it is still an open question whether there are better and more cost-effective alternatives to the current partnership model.

3. Corruption is a challenge, but not a large systemic problem

In developing countries, corruption is often a national country-wide problem. An increasing number of specific instances have been brought to light in the activities supported by Norwegian CSOs and their partners. However, it is our impression (we were not tasked with undertaking a rigorous assessment) that within the CSOs we encountered, incidents of corruption remain very low compared to total funds outlaid, with only a small number of serious cases recorded over a number of years. If and when they occur, they appear to be dealt with effectively by the Norwegian CSOs. Most of the cases are related to corrupt individuals: corruption is not a large systemic problem involving entire organisations.

4. Projects reach the poor, but not necessarily the poorest of the poor

The majority of projects are explicitly targeted to poor regions and poor people. Norwegian CSOs provide support to marginal and hard-to-reach areas and to vulnerable populations, including women and children, people with disabilities, marginalised minorities, members of different ethnic groups and small farmers. Health (including HIV/AIDS) and education are the two prominent sectors, while

micro-credit and agriculture are targeted by a few specialised Norwegian CSOs. However, we found little evidence to suggest that Norwegian projects are successful in reaching and assisting the very “poorest of the poor”, and few CSOs conduct rigorous socio-economic surveys to pinpoint who are the most vulnerable within the particular communities they work with, and target them. On the other hand, we came across no instances of projects benefiting significant groups of people who had no need of support.

5. Complex initiatives are riskier and require more time to make a lasting impact

Broadly speaking, Norwegian CSOs understand and welcome the emphasis now placed on impact and results. However, there is concern about what is often perceived as an over-emphasis placed on *short-term* results. A number of projects funded are attempting to achieve complex processes of change, and some (like stopping female genital mutilation in Ethiopia, addressing domestic violence in Vietnam, or violence prevention/peace-building in western Nepal) challenge long-held and deeply-held beliefs. These projects are unlikely to achieve tangible and sustainable impacts in the short-term, and some may not have an impact for a number of years.

This has two important implications. The first relates to expectations. Neither CSO supporters nor Norad should necessarily expect – and look for – short-term results, especially in the case of complex interventions involving challenging processes of social change. The second relates to funding. Funders and supporters need not only to be aware that some project interventions will take some time to produce positive results (and in some cases things could get worse before they get better), but they need to consciously encourage CSOs to continue to look for and champion complex projects. Funding only those projects whose benefits will be seen in a few months’ time, entail a risk of profoundly distorting development processes, narrow the range of initiatives that CSOs support and reduce those that are innovative and risky.

Examples of wider effects

6. Ample evidence of wider effects

In spite of the lack of robust and easily accessible documentation on wider effects, the Panel was able to find plenty of examples of the wider effects that some projects were having, and this evidence was found in every one of the four case-study countries. Specific examples of wider effects encompassed each of the following areas: (a) replicated, scaled-up and innovative initiatives; (b) the monitoring of government programmes in order to hold the government accountable; and (c) influencing legislation and changing policy processes. Importantly, too, as noted above, CSOs continue to have a wider impact through

the significant contribution they make to the overall provision of especially health and educational services in many countries.

However, in part because CSOs were not often asked or challenged to analyse the wider impact of their work, robust and systematic evidence was hard to find. What is more, we found numerous instances where CSOs gave examples of changes in laws or policies in areas where they had done advocacy, but they were unable to explain precisely what effect *their* activities and actions had had on the changes that had occurred. Most examples found are in the area of replication and issue-based policy advocacy; CSOs involved in preparing a new national policy on disability, child rights and HIV/AIDS either by being members of working groups or advocating for change from the outside.

Though we found examples of innovation and replication, *the innovative profile was relatively weak*: most projects used well-known approaches and technologies and what was perceived as innovative had often been tried out elsewhere.

Our assessment of the nature of impact is broadly consistent with the recent CIVICUS survey, namely that civil society achieves the highest level of impact in the social sector, but less political impact, including influence on policy making (see CIVICUS 2011:36).

7. Increased interest in results and impact, but the perspective is narrow

The Panel confirmed the growing interest in assessing, measuring and documenting results and in shifting the focus from outputs to outcomes. This more intense focus on results is part of a global trend driven by donors, leading to new reporting practices and requirements which have shifted from Norad to Norwegian CSOs and down to local partners. However, these changes have been focused almost exclusively on changes at the project level. CSOs have devoted very little time, and donors have not particularly urged them, to look beyond the project or beyond the more immediate short-term results.

Very little attention is given to the wider (horizontal or vertical) or long-term effects of projects or to framing decisions and making choices about interventions from a wider perspective. Most evaluations and assessments that are carried out concern discrete projects, usually driven by or undertaken as part of formal reporting requirements. As a result, there also seems to be a stronger focus on documenting results in order to meet requirements from donors than on using the information obtained for strategic planning and lesson-learning purposes.

8. Potential for far wider effects

The Panel found that the CSOs took considerable interest in our questions about the wider impact of their work. For some, this line of questioning seemed quite liberating, as they felt the narrow focus on discrete projects and immediate results restricted them and might distort their focus on what they were trying to do. For others, the discussion of “wider effects” was so novel that a fair proportion of people didn’t understand what we meant by “looking beyond the project” even after spending some time explaining the concept.

The Panel found examples of projects having a wider impact which the Norwegian CSO was not fully aware of – for instance, that the Ministry of Education in Vietnam was trying to apply and raise funds for replicating the “Football for All” model in many other districts in Vietnam. One clear conclusion the Panel drew from these experiences, is that the funds used by Norwegian CSOs have the potential for a far wider and more long-term impact than is currently the case, and this could happen quite easily - if CSOs were encouraged and challenged to explain how the strategic choices they make on what to do, is informed by considering more explicitly and directly the wider impact their interventions are expected to have. Questions about “what to do” need to be complemented by questions about “how best to do it”, undertaking a more robust strategic analysis of the context and planning for intervention approaches with wider effects.

9. Increased focus on political advocacy

Most of the larger Norwegian CSOs have articulated a rights-based approach to their development work: they combine service delivery with capacity building and advocacy work, and argue that the three approaches are both complementary and necessary. However, the extent to which the focus on advocacy issues and processes is concretised in practice varies from country to country and from agency to agency.

In Ethiopia, the potential for advocacy and for having a wider impact was dramatically curtailed following the introduction of the new civil society law, and CSOs have all but abandoned their rights- based language.

In Malawi, the space for national advocacy has also become more restricted following the 2009 elections.

For its part, Vietnam has not yet seen the evolution and emergence of effective civil society groups that act as watchdogs to expose corruption by party cadres and government officials. On the other hand, there is evidence that CSOs have been allowed to play a role in advocacy on particular issues – as long as they avoid sensitive political areas like multi-party democracy and human rights. Given the nature of civil society in Vietnam, however, there is a flourishing and growing web of more informal civil society networks whose growth has been assisted by social networking. These networks have become especially effective in providing a “citizens voice”, particularly on local issues.

In Nepal, there are plenty of examples of CSOs involved in advocacy activities and lobbying, but it is not so clear how effective and influential they have been in contributing to the changes in policies which have occurred. The fact that many CSOs tend to be politically aligned, often constrains their credibility and legitimacy.

10. Higher tensions between governments and civil society

The interaction between governments and civil society determines both the operating space for civil society and its potential for creating a wider impact. We found that the interaction between governments and civil society has become increasingly tense and challenging in all four countries, though there are sharp and important differences between the countries in relation to what they are able to do and how they can do it.

In Ethiopia, the interaction between CSOs and government is particularly strained and tense at present, following the passing of new legislation that severely restricts activities in the areas of national advocacy and in relation to the work of human rights-based organisations. The situation in Malawi is also problematic, but different. Here, there is still space for a critical CSO voice. There are more restrictions since the 2009 elections, though the situation remains fluid and open to further change. Civil society and in particular the churches have been replacing and have partially filled the gap left by a non-functional political opposition.

Moving to Asia, many studies and informants agree that until quite recently, the rules, regulations and the general political environment in Vietnam greatly restricted a great many civil society activities. In recent years, the overall political and legal environment has become more hospitable to a wider range of civil society-state interactions, and CSOs and parts of civil society have rapidly and creatively filled the new space offered to them. Nonetheless, there are conflicting views as to whether this represents a real shift towards democracy, since severe restrictions remain on activities perceived to be a threat to the dominance of the ruling party at national and district levels.

In the case of Nepal, the democratic freedoms achieved in 1990 provided the backdrop and opportunity for the rapid growth of non-governmental organisations, funded by international donors seeking to build the civil society. While the legal framework does not seem to have constrained the operational space of CSOs, the growing and complex links between many CSOs and the main political parties and members of parliament, mean that in practice there is a less clear-cut difference between party politics and independent civil society action. The government has in practice an almost “laissez faire” attitude towards civil society. Though many rules and regulations are restrictive, they are often not implemented, and thus their impact is less severe in practice than in theory.

11. Weak coordination and aid effectiveness

The issue of enhanced effectiveness comprises a number of different dimensions. The overall coordination between international and national CSOs and their integration in national frameworks is variable, but generally weak. Norwegian embassies meet with Norwegian CSOs for information sharing, but do not play any active role in strategic planning and coordination. Some embassies (such as in Nepal) appear to be keener on trying to create synergy and consistency between their activities, local CSOs and the activities of Norwegian CSOs funded by Norad, without challenging the independent decisions made by individual Norwegian CSOs. Others are far less pro-active.

Coordination between CSOs and government line ministries has never been strong, but in some cases it has become weaker. Especially, where the donor-driven aid effectiveness agenda has led to the formation of sector-wide approaches (SWAs), civil society has often become more marginalised, either because it has not been given a “seat at the table” or because its contribution seems less relevant to the larger donors. National ownership often means government ownership. The opportunities for CSOs to engage with the government and contribute to policy dialogue depend on their perceived credibility and legitimacy. As suggested above, the space for them to do so seems to have narrowed in different ways in all four case-study countries. Governments raise questions about the legitimacy of CSOs as representatives of public interests, arguing that most CSOs and their leaders are not elected and not accountable to any constituency.

The lack of coordination and high level of fragmentation is part of a broader systemic problem in the development sector. In each of the four case-study countries, the Norwegian Government assists civil society mainly through two funding routes: from Norad through the long-term assistance channelled to Norwegian CSOs which is then passed on to local partners and in some cases used to fund local in-country offices of Norwegian CSOs; and from funds provided by the embassy to local CSOs. Each funding channel follows its own rules and regulations, and both Norad and the local Norwegian embassies state that the funding of Norwegian CSOs and their activities is based on decisions made by the respective Norwegian CSOs.

The decisions that some Norwegian embassies make about the local CSOs they fund directly, is partly informed by what they know about the CSOs assisted by Norwegian CSOs. However, the two funding channels are kept quite distinct (Norad and the Norwegian MFA also support global and regional CSOs with country-specific activities and national CSOs working for the UN system, which makes the whole system even more complex). In particular, no explicit and formal attempt is made either to ensure harmony and consistency between the channels or to develop a more strategic or holistic approach in the respective countries.

Strengthening organisational capacity

12. The value of international partnerships

Our discussions with local partners overwhelmingly confirmed the belief that partnerships with Norwegian CSOs are highly appreciated. The relationships are described as flexible and friendly and they are reinforced by the manner in which Norad historically has supported them: predictably and within a long-term framework. Most southern CSOs we met, clearly valued their relationship with Norwegian CSOs for reasons other than access to financial resources. The additional benefits include: (a) access to support for enhancing skills and building their own capacity; (b) opportunities for international exposure, networking and dialogue; (c) access to specific competencies and information; (d) bonds of solidarity; (e) moral and political support; and (f) the benefits of stability that long-term and durable partnerships bring. However, it is also widely acknowledged that the nature of the partnership, built as it is on a flow of funds from North to South, results in a partnership under-pinned by a degree of dependence and sometimes overdependence which necessarily colours the relationship.

13. Collaboration with existing local CSOs/CBOs

Most partnerships are based on “like-mindedness” – meaning that Norwegian CSOs select partners based on shared thematic interests and religious/ideological frameworks and beliefs, although this does not restrict or limit their approach to development. This means that certain parts of civil society are included, while various traditional and more informal organisations are excluded.

This is more a limitation than a weakness in the partnership model as such. Such a model may need to be modified and broadened in order to encourage a more extended reach to other and more informal parts of civil society.

14. Strengthened capacities, but for what purpose?

Recent years have seen not only an increasing focus on capacity building, but more funds channelled into capacity building efforts. This has helped individual organisations respond better to the growing demands placed on them by Norwegian CSOs and by Norad in terms of specifying their plans more clearly and responding to new reporting requirements. Indeed, most support for capacity development has been focused on building capacity to respond better to these new and more taxing demands. Whether it has helped strengthen their overall capacity to make a more effective development impact is more difficult to determine.

The CS Panel found that strengthening local organisations is not the prime aim of most capacity building efforts, so it can be assumed that where institutional strengthening has taken place, it was more a secondary than a primary outcome. But the Panel also found a number of instances where the primary focus of Norwegian CSOs’ capacity building efforts are focused on helping strengthen local organisations to enable them to stand on their own feet without external support. Examples include institutional support to the headquarters of the

Vietnamese Red Cross and the capacity building work of UMN in Nepal, which focused on assisting existing local organisations in a range of different districts across the country to function effectively without external assistance.

15. The lack of a strategic framework for country support

There is no strategic framework for Norwegian civil society support at country level – nor any overall assessment of needs and opportunities as a basis for making strategic choices and securing optimal impact. The civil society portfolio in each country is highly fragmented between the respective Norwegian CSOs and between the CSOs and the embassies, as already discussed. The whole is the sum of all the independent and often isolated parts.

16. The challenges of “strengthening civil society”

To the extent that Norwegian CSOs have helped to build the capacities of local organisations, they have contributed to a “strengthening of civil society”. However, the Panel found that few if any Norwegian CSOs undertake their capacity building (or in some cases their institutional strengthening) efforts within the context of contributing to a broader aim of “strengthening civil society”. At best, it could be argued that they hope that by strengthening their particular local partners they contribute to the wider objective.

Yet, when the Panel explored this question, further questions were raised to challenge such assumptions. Firstly, the country-case study evidence suggests that it cannot always be assumed that simply having more CSOs will necessarily strengthen civil society, partly because easy access to funding easily creates artificial and illegitimate organisations. The example of Nepal was cited, suggesting that in recent years the growth in the number of CSOs coincide with an overall weakening of civil society. Secondly, the success that Norwegian CSOs and INGOs have in helping to strengthen particular partner organisations, risks widening the gap between the capacities and competencies of those local organisations that benefit from such capacity building, and those that do not, because they do not have supportive links to external CSOs. The outcome is likely to be an even more lopsided local civil society. And thirdly, as was evident from discussions especially in Vietnam, but also in Ethiopia, civil society comprises far more than the sum of formally constituted civil society organisations. It includes informal organisations, networks and often temporary coalitions of formal and informal groups, citizens’ groups and individuals brought together to lobby and campaign on specific issues. Strengthening these important groupings will often not be achieved by focusing solely on strengthening formal civil society organisations.

17. CSOs organisationally stronger, but financial sustainability still weak

Norad's funding arrangements compare favourably with other donor programmes in that a larger share of funding to Norwegian CSOs is provided on a multi-annual basis, and this, in turn, allows Norwegian CSOs to commit funds to local partners for periods longer than a year. However, the prospects for financial sustainability of most local CSOs in Ethiopia, Malawi and Nepal are extremely weak, partly because the potential for local fund raising is bleak. Being a middle income country, the prospects are brighter for mobilising local resources in Vietnam. There is a sense amongst CSOs that the financial climate has worsened and that CSOs are increasingly vulnerable to greater volatility in funding levels. There are several reasons for such uncertainty: higher risks of cuts in funding from international CSOs to local partners; reduced levels of direct funding from embassies; and, last but not least, a shift to more "pooled programme funding" – where several donors establish programmes/funds to which local organisations can apply.

Evidence from the wider literature

18. Explosion of impact assessments at the project level

Over the last 10 to 15 years, more and larger CSOs have seen the value of evaluating and assessing the impact of their work, and most are now undertaking their own evaluations. Although this has led to an explosion of CSO impact assessments, the work is still dominated by evaluations at the project level.

19. Lack of country studies focusing on wider impacts

The impact assessments conducted are still largely output focused and to some extent outcome focused, and even recent assessments that are termed "country studies", turn out to be predominantly a clustering together of the results of individual project assessments, with evaluators reluctant to make judgements about wider impact. At the same time, increasing attention is given to examining the impact of some CSO activities beyond the project, trying to assess, for example, the lobbying, advocacy, campaigning, and policy work of CSOs. Yet these assessments, too, have tended to focus on discrete interventions and have not been used to make judgements about the wider impact of CSO interventions in these types of activities.

20. What civil society contributes to wider development

There are numerous examples of particular CSO interventions that have achieved their immediate objectives. The literature suggests that when CSOs engage in efforts to shape and influence development processes or to change policies, it is critically important for them to have a *theory of change* to contextualise their interventions – a clear plan that articulates what they intend to do. This should not only explain the causal linkages more narrowly, between inputs and activities,

but should also explain, more widely, how their interventions contribute to anticipated outcomes and to wider impact. Failures and weaknesses of CSOs' development interventions have been found to be in part due to the absence of such analytical frameworks. The evidence suggests that CSOs have greater success in achieving tangible gains in relation to social issues than they have in relation to key policy issues. However, there is also evidence of CSO successes in the policy arena as well as CSO successes in changing policies and practices even in politically difficult contexts.

The evidence from some studies questions the widespread belief that a stronger civil society is necessarily "good for democracy" and that, in turn, democracy is always "good for development". One practical problem is that in spite of high donor expectation concerning the potential of CSOs to promote democratisation, there is still no consensus on the precise role that civil society is expected to play in strengthening democracy.

The recent literature provides ample evidence to confirm that CSOs continue to play an important development role by piloting innovation. Once a project has been found to be successful in one place, it is sometimes taken up and replicated by other CSOs or by governments, leading to their wider impact. But there are also many well documented examples of failure to replicate or scale-up projects that could have had a wider impact.

21. What civil society contributes to conflict resolution and peace building

Some recent studies support the generally-held view that there is a good potential for CSOs to exert influence in post-conflict societies and that CSO efforts in the area of peace-building have been particularly beneficial. Other studies suggest a more mixed and nuanced view on their impact. For example, a recent study of CSO peace-building activities in 13 countries found that there were ample tangible achievements in terms of protecting civilians, monitoring cease fires, peace agreements and human rights violations, advocacy and facilitation, but that, contrary to widespread belief, other efforts, such as building "social cohesion" through dialogue activities, people-to-people projects and campaigns to change people's attitudes in general, were less effective.

22. Gaps in the literature

There have not been any recent stand-alone country studies which have tried to assess the overall impact and influence of CSOs, or civil society more generally on development and poverty reduction.

The recent wider literature on development highlights the importance of working against poverty at the local level with specific marginalised and vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. At the same time it is necessary to work both at the national and local levels with the issue of inequalities. Thus, a key question that needs to be addressed when assessing

the wider impact of CSOs on development processes and outcomes, concerns the priorities that CSOs give to these issues and what impact they have had.

Another under-researched area relates to the systemic problems that arise especially when there is growth in the number of agencies undertaking development activities, in particular when they are working in similar or overlapping areas and with the same communities in the same localities. Since at least the mid-1990s and most notably since the signing of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, it has been widely accepted that the overall impact of official aid has been significantly reduced because of a range of key systemic problems: too many donors, too many projects, with the work of individual agencies insufficiently harmonised or coordinated, and insufficiently aligned to and integrated with host country development strategies. It is likely that similar sorts of adverse systemic effects apply to the world of CSO aid, reducing the potential overall impact of CSO development efforts. Yet little research has been undertaken to assess this.

LESSONS LEARNT

The Panel has been able to draw a number of important conclusions. They are based largely on the country case studies, but refined by juxtaposing these with the ongoing findings of the wider literature.

23. Context, culture and history matter

There are few general insights on impact and approaches that can or ought to be applied from one setting to another. The Panel's work leads it to confirm the view of the wider literature, that context matters greatly. But it would also add that history and culture matter, too. What has happened in one country at one point of time is not necessarily a good guide to what will happen in another country, or even in the same country in the years ahead. This underlines the need to have an in-depth understanding of each country, the nature of civil society, how it has evolved and how it is perceived by different stakeholders. This provides the backdrop for understanding where civil society might best contribute to development, poverty alleviation and peace building, how best it might help to monitor the actions of agovernment and its agencies, how best it might help to monitor human rights abuses and work for the fulfilment of basic rights or how civil society might be strengthened and what the implications might be for the wider civil society when assistance is provided to particular CSOs or groups of CSOs.

24. Civil society's contribution to poverty reduction makes a difference...

The question has been asked: can civil society play a major role in delivering the world's biggest promise, i.e. poverty reduction? CSOs can promote poverty reduction by pushing for macro-level structural changes through advocacy, by

lobbying governments for policy change and directly providing effective services to the poor at the grassroots level.

Civil society can make a contribution – often a small, but none the less important contribution. It makes little sense to make civil society accountable for reducing or not being able to reduce poverty. There is a strong poverty orientation in most CSO projects, although the leverage is likely to be small, due to the limited scale of work, and the final impact depends on a number of external factors.

However, though countries such as Vietnam and Ethiopia achieve poverty reduction in a context where state-imposed limitations severely restrict the work and influence of civil society organisations, there is no doubt that CSOs continue to play a key role in poverty reduction. One way they do this is by *reaching out directly* to poor, marginalised and excluded groups who would otherwise not be assisted. Another way is through *advocacy and lobbying* (sometimes necessarily behind closed doors) or by campaigning to create awareness of the needs and rights of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups in order to influence policy or legislative change to incorporate their needs or the fulfilment of their core rights into the main stream. A third related way is to help such groups *find their voice* in order to address the general society's blindness to their needs and core rights. Understanding the context should help temper expectations as to what is realistic and possible.

25. But keep expectations realistic

There is much information on the positive effects which particular CSOs and civil society more generally are having on development results, but there is also plenty of information on failures, weaknesses and set-backs. It is important to have realistic expectations of what is possible. There is a widespread assumption that development interventions lead to linear incremental and always positive results, but development processes often work in different and more complex ways: short-term setbacks do not always indicate long-term failures. Yet, the evidence also indicates that tangible gains can occur in very inhospitable contexts – confirming the need to have an in-depth understanding of the country context if one wants to make a long-term sustainable difference.

Similarly, while the CS Panel's work certainly leads it to conclude that Norwegian CSOs have contributed to important wider and long-term development effects in each of the case-study countries, it would also emphasise the need for modesty in expectations. Norwegian CSOs form only part of the overall efforts of CSOs, and CSOs, for their part, are often not the main immediate cause of development occurring and poverty falling.

26. Too much fragmentation

In general, it can safely be concluded that CSO interventions have made a distinctive contribution to addressing immediate needs and to ongoing public debates about many critical development policy issues. However, it can also be

argued that projects are too scattered across different localities and different target groups to have a really strong wider impact - although, in aggregate, the CSOs' contribution to sector development is certainly significant, as in the cases of Malawi and Nepal, for instance in the areas of health and education. The Panel found that the selection of partners and projects is usually not *strategic* in terms of achieving wider effects: it is not sufficiently based on an overall analysis of needs and an assessment of tangible and realistic opportunities in a country. What this means is that the actual overall effects and wider impact of CSO development interventions are almost certainly far less than they could be.

27. Civil society a value in itself

Results and short-term impact should not be the sole criteria upon which the contribution of CSOs is judged. It is increasingly widely agreed that civil society has a value "in itself". This in turn has been the basis for arguing that civil society should be strengthened. Civil society has been accused of being a fuzzy concept, but it is still important: it is an arena which provides a political space where different actors can criticise social problems and address them in practical terms. "Civil society is our species' response to the basic human need to come together in pursuit of common goals and transcend individual interests" (CIVICUS 2011: 4).

The recent literature indicates that many attempts to strengthen civil society and build the capacities of local organisations have fallen well short of expectations because of a succession of failures: for example, insufficient understanding of the local context; insufficient understanding of precisely what needed to be strengthened; not having the necessary skills to help; not understanding the effect that single or narrow efforts were likely to have on the wider civil society; and not understanding the importance of working with others.

The lesson to be drawn from the uncovering of this type of weaknesses is not to back away from institutional strengthening, but to approach it with more modesty and professionalism, and to understand that what one is proposing to do, will influence and be influenced by others working in what is often a very congested field.

28. Scope for addressing the lack of information on wider effects

There is a lot of information "out there" on results, but a lack of information about the overall and wider impact of CSOs in the development process. The failure to examine and give prominence to the issue of overall impact means that key issues about impact tend to be overlooked: self-evidently the important role CSOs have in many areas of development, notably service delivery, but also the systemic problems and inefficiencies that can arise when organisations are focused predominantly on their own activities and not so much on the wider context in which they operate. This makes it even more important to undertake studies that assess the broader, including the country-wide, impact that CSOs and civil society have on development outcomes. What is more: as the findings

suggest, if the issue of wider impact is given more prominence in the choices CSOs make about how best to intervene, they are likely to develop projects programmes and processes that have a larger and wider impact. Both Norad and Norwegian CSOs have critical, though different, roles to play here.

29. Methods and approaches to assess wider impacts

There is no agreed way of assessing the wider effects of development through CSOs, and all methods have their strengths and drawbacks.

In our view, the approach the Panel used had value for the following reasons:

- It was able to show that CSO interventions have had a wider impact.
- It helped to raise awareness of the importance of wider and long-term issues.
- It provided a catalyst for CSOs to think more strategically about the way they intervene to contribute to poverty eradication.
- It drew attention to the complexities of “strengthening civil society”.
- It could help contribute to a more “balanced” debate about expectations concerning the contributions that CSOs might realistically make to development, poverty reduction and peace building.

Further debate needs to be engaged on the merits of using the same sort of approach again. An initial view of the Panel is that while there is great merit in undertaking an extremely rapid assessment focusing on wider impacts such as our exploratory study, more “added value” might be obtained by having a slightly longer-term and thus more in-depth assessments of specific countries rather than more short-term cross-country studies, especially if the purpose is to learn more about how to make civil society contributions effective.

Three clusters of changes seem likely to be particularly beneficial:

- Firstly, if there was more time to undertake a more systematic analysis of the project documentation and a more in-depth and wide-ranging review of the relevant literature.
- Secondly, if the country visits were longer, in order to have more in-depth discussions with different stakeholders and with more beneficiaries, and to clarify and assess the different and at times conflicting views on CSO impact, outcomes and attribution.
- Thirdly, if such a Panel included experienced evaluators and informed nationals from the countries in question, whose current and historical knowledge would contribute significantly to understanding, assessing and judging the wider and longer-term impact of CSOs at the country level.

30. A debate is needed in Norway on how to deploy resources so that CSOs achieve a wider impact in partner countries

One of the drawbacks of the current system is that potential synergies and complementarities between the methods of supporting civil society in-country are not pursued. This could mean that taxpayers' funds are used less cost-effectively than they might be if a more "integrated" approach were adopted, resulting in more effective assistance to civil society organisations and an overall stronger civil society.

The work of the CS Panel adds some new or different contributions to these dilemmas. Thus, to the extent Norwegian CSOs start to focus more beyond the narrower confines of their "own" partners and their "own" projects and try to assess how they can make a more lasting wider and long-term impact, they should be more concerned with finding ways to build upon and complement the work being undertaken and planned by other agencies, and especially by other Norwegian stakeholders –Norwegian CSOs and local CSOs funded by the embassy. In other words, it is of increasing mutual interest for both Norwegian CSOs and the Norwegian embassies to see a value in and have an interest in working more closely together.

The key question, then, is precisely how this should happen – clearly in a manner in which the interests and independence of each is not compromised and without adding more bureaucratic structures. The Panel's work suggests that this issue should be addressed in a systematic manner rather than continuing in the current rather ad hoc way.

The Busan partnership for effective Development Co-operation – supported by heads of state and government ministers from around the globe, endorsed in its final statement 1 December 2011 that CSOs play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting right-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation.

We need a debate on how to implement these aspirations, and what to do in countries where governments make few or no serious attempts to live up to what they signed in Bhutan:

"a) Implement fully our respective commitments to enable CSOs to exercise their roles as independent development actors, with a particular focus on an enabling environment, consistent with agreed international rights, that maximises the contributions of CSOs to development.

b) Encourage CSOs to implement practices that strengthen their accountability and their contribution to development effectiveness, guided by the Istanbul Principles and the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness."

The Istanbul principles and the International Framework referred to above, were agreed upon by 170 CSO representatives from 82 countries gathered in Istanbul in September 2010 and adopted in June 2011 at the Second Global Assembly in Siem Reap, Cambodia after a global process among CSOs. But the realities both for governments and CSOs are far away from these aspirations.

MAIN REPORT

PART A: INTRODUCTION

1. Why a Civil Society Panel

For more than 50 years, the Norwegian Government has collaborated with civil society organisations (CSOs) in development cooperation. From the modest start in the 1960s, the support to CSOs expanded strongly in the late 1980s, flattened out around 1990 and has since then remained stable at around 22-25% of the total Norwegian ODA.

In 2010, Norwegian total support to CSOs was 3.6 billion NOK. 47% of this was channelled through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and 7% through the Norwegian embassies. The rest, 46% or close to 1.7 billion NOK was channelled through different budget lines managed by Norad. The single largest budget line - called "Support to Civil Society and Democratisation in the South" channelled in 2010 slightly more than 1.2 billion NOK and is administered by Norad's Civil Society Department. This department also manages a budget line to International NGOs (INGOs), with a 2010 volume of 172.5 million NOK. The remaining eight smaller budget lines for CSO support are managed by other Norad departments. Geographically, Africa was by far the continent that received most of these funds. In terms of thematic sectors, most money was channelled to governance-related activities.³

Few people in Norway question the moral imperative of providing support to people and countries in need. There is strong support for the principle that those who can, should help those who are much worse off. Nonetheless, critical questions are increasingly raised by politicians, journalists, researchers and an increasingly well-informed public about what development aid achieves in practice. There is a growing demand for more and better information on results and achievements. What do Norwegian CSOs deliver? What have they achieved? Has the large volume of money to CSOs made a significant and lasting difference to poor people and countries? Could the same, or even more, be achieved by different means or through other channels?

There is a changing climate for civil society. Over the last twenty years and in particular during the 1990s, the profile, number and budgets of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or later CSOs expanded dramatically – based on the notion that the value of their interventions was different from that of governments – their engagement was people-centred, participative and built on partnerships. Yet studies of CSO performance gave rise to increasing scepticism about their added value and their assumed comparative advantages. By the end of the twentieth century, robust and conclusive evidence was simply not available to

³ For more details, see Part A, Section 4 and Annex 5 Statistics.

unequivocally confirm this proposition and the high expectations that the CSOs' unique contribution to development and poverty reduction was being realised in practice.

Evaluations and progress reports often show that short-term project objectives have been achieved with positive, but often scattered micro-results. Yet, these studies have repeatedly told us little beyond the more immediate effects. In spite of a growth in the number of impact studies conducted, much less is known about the long-term impact and the wider effects of CSO development interventions beyond these projects and their direct and often limited effects on the beneficiaries who were assisted directly. What are and what have been the wider effects of CSO interventions at the local and national level? Have Norwegian CSOs been a catalyst for far-reaching social changes; have their interventions in service delivery, e.g. in health and education, been innovative and replicated by others, including by mainstream government agencies? Have their advocacy initiatives been effective in shaping, influencing or altering policies, and have these new and different policies, in turn, been implemented and made a tangible difference to people's lives? Have their efforts at capacity building resulted in viable and sustainable local organisations? Have their efforts led to the development of a stronger civil society and has this, in turn, contributed to faster development and deeper cuts in poverty? Finally, is it possible to say something about the overall value of providing so much support through Norwegian CSOs?

2. The role of the Civil Society Panel

This is an exploratory study and an approach appropriate for addressing a set of complex issues and questions. The primary users of the report are Norad and the Norwegian CSOs to support better and more systematic planning for and reporting of wider results. It seeks also to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the future roles of civil society in Norwegian development cooperation.

The reasons for selecting four countries were determined by a mix of the following criteria:

- Geographical and socio-political diversity.
- Substantial support from Norwegian CSOs.
- Documented interventions shedding light on potential wider and longer-term effects.

Most weight was given to the third criteria – the potential wider and longer-term effects of CSO interventions. Less weight was given to the volume of Norad support and total number of Norwegian organisations operating in each country.

Purpose and set-up

The demand for more robust information about results provides the backdrop for the establishment of the Civil Society Panel (CSP). Such a panel cannot fill all the gaps in information and provide all the answers, but the work of the Panel provides an important learning tool and a building block in the ongoing search for more and better knowledge about results.

The initiative to establish the CS Panel came from the Civil Society Department in Norad. The purpose was to establish a panel with members from the North and the South – comprising people with in-depth knowledge of and experience of working within and with CSOs - that could break new ground in assessing the wider and long term effects of CSO interventions.

The Panel should be made up of six members – two from Africa, one from Asia and three from Europe, including one from Norad - all with in-depth CSO experience and background. It should be gender balanced, and no one on the Panel should be a CSO representative or a spokesperson for any particular CSO interests.

An eight-person Advisory Group for the Panel's work should also be established. This was eventually made up of four members from Norwegian CSOs, two researchers and two representatives from Norad⁴.

Below is a short presentation of the Panel members and how they were selected:

Ivar Evensmo, senior advisor to Norad's Civil Society Department, took the first initiative to do this study in January 2011. He later became the team leader when the Panel was organised as a project⁵ under the head of the Civil Society Department. *Stein-Erik Kruse* from Nordic Consulting Group was number two to come on board, first as a sparring partner when the ideas were still at the initial stage, and later as a co-writer of the mandate draft and eventually as a co-chair of the Panel once it was constituted in the end of August. *Kidist Alemu*, a legal professional from Ethiopia, who had been much involved in commenting on the principles for Norad's support to civil society in the South in 2008 and 2009, and *Roger C Riddell*, a British development specialist, were consulted about the concept as it emerged and were invited to become members of the Panel once the mandate was finalised 7 July 2011. The two remaining Panel members, *Agnes Abuom*, a Kenyan historian and development specialist, and *Emmy Hafild*, an Indonesian environmental specialist, were recruited after an international process involving more than a dozen Norwegian embassies in Africa and Asia, as well as consultations with international NGO resource centres, key civil society people in the World Bank and independent CS scholars/resource persons.

4 Members of the Advisory Group were Gweneth Berge (Norwegian Church Aid), Lill-Ann Medina Bjaarstad (Norad's Department for Methods and Results), Kaja Borchgrevink (International Peace Research Institute Oslo), Beate Bull (Norad's Evaluation Department), Dag Albert Baarnes (Caritas), Tina Hageberg (UNDP), Sigurd Johns (Save the Children Norway), Pia Reiersen (independent consultant, partly) and Eiling N. Tjønneland (Christian Michelsens Institute).

5 Other members of the Project Group in Norad have been Rikke Horn-Hanssen and Vibeke Sørum. Their tasks have been to give administrative support to the Panel's work, assist the Panel in finding documentation and statistical information, organise the international travel and arrange the meetings for the Panel in Oslo.

This process was completed in a remarkably short time, and the whole team met for the first time in Oslo for three days at the end of August. The Panel elected Agnes Abuom as its second co-chair. While in Oslo the panel members also had the opportunity to introduce themselves and present the mandate and work plan to the Norwegian CS development community in a well-attended meeting on 31 August. At this point four country planning groups were formed, consisting of Norwegian CSOs which had activities in the four countries that had been selected by the Panel for visits later in October and November. Their task was to help the Panel prepare the visits, provide information on their activities and plan a half day workshop with national partners in each country.

Agnes Abuom is a Kenyan historian and development specialist with particular experience in Organizational Development (OD), Peace Building (PB) and mediation for faith based and development organizations in Kenya and internationally. She was affiliated to Taabco Research and Development Consultants as Executive Director (ED) until 2006 and since then as ecumenical accompanier for the All African Conference of Churches.

Kidist Alemu is a legal professional with specialization in international human rights law. She has worked for and with CSOs in Ethiopia in the areas of human rights and governance as well as in the design, implementation and evaluation of development programmes.

Ivar Evensmo is a Norwegian social anthropologist working as a senior advisor in the Section for Development Initiatives in Norad's Civil Society Department. He has specialized in issues related to NGOs and civil society; media, democracy and conflict resolution, both programmatically and within evaluations.

Emmy Hafild is an Indonesian environmental specialist, working on economic and environmental governance reform programmes. She has broad experience from the Indonesian civil society movement and has won international recognition as a leading world campaigner for environmental protection.

Stein-Erik Kruse is a Norwegian sociologist presently working with Nordic Consulting Group in Norway. He has lived in East Africa and been involved in several studies and evaluations of civil society organisations for Norad and other bilateral and multilateral organisations.

Roger C Riddell is a British development specialist with some 40 years experience. He has lived in southern Africa for 12 years and has undertaken a succession of studies on CSO/NGO impact evaluation in the past 15-20 years. From 1999 to 2004, he was the International Director of the UK's largest faith-based development agency, Christian Aid.

The working process

The Panel was asked by Norad to provide an informed assessment of Norwegian CSO performance based on three knowledge components: a) its insights and experiences, b) its careful review of the wider literature and c) its visits to four selected countries: Ethiopia, Malawi, Vietnam and Nepal. It was also asked to be daring and draw conclusions and make recommendation even if all the supporting evidence was not available. The work of the Panel was not in any way meant to

replace the need for more in-depth, better or rigorous research or evaluation in the future, but rather to provide a different, and hopefully fresh perspective on an important, yet difficult subject.

The Panel should perform the following tasks:

- a) Synthesise what we know about results, based on a rapid review of existing studies and evaluations and identified gaps in data and information.
- b) Explore and discuss the wider effects of Norwegian civil society interventions in the four case-study countries.
- c) Reflect on the lessons learnt and make a series of recommendations to Norad and the CSOs on the wider and longer-term impact of CSO interventions.

During the first Panel meeting in August 2011, the mandate and initial work plan were discussed in detail and agreed upon. Several initial interviews with Norwegian CSOs, Norad and other stakeholders were also conducted. After that, initial literature reviews were undertaken. Then in October and November, members of the Panel visited two countries in Africa (Ethiopia and Malawi) followed by two in Asia (Vietnam and Nepal).

Each country visit lasted one week. It involved meetings and interviews with Norwegian CSOs and their partners, with government representatives, independent researchers and journalists, International NGOs (INGOs) and other donors. The country work also involved reviewing documents, reports, studies and evaluations, especially those shedding light on the wider and long-term impact questions. Workshops with key local CSOs also took place, where one discussed the relevance and validity of the proposed hypotheses that the Panel drew up to guide and provide a common framework for its analysis of the key issues to be addressed.

Country notes were written in early December, and the first draft synthesis report was completed towards the end of December. This was followed by the second meeting of the Panel in Oslo in January 2012, when the country notes and synthesis draft were further discussed and the Panel finalised its main conclusions, crystallised the lessons learned and agreed on its key recommendations. A consolidated draft was circulated for comments to the Advisory Group at the end of January, and the final draft completed by mid February.

3. What do we want to know?

Most of the Norwegian CSOs that work in the four case-study countries and receive support from Norad, are involved in both long-term development and humanitarian/emergency work. The focus of the Panel's work has been on the impact and results of their development activities. When trying to answer the question "Do Norwegian CSOs make a difference?", it is necessary to understand the nature and range of development activities that CSOs promote, support and fund. This is far from simple, since the CSOs are not united in their analysis of

development and how best to provide support and fight poverty. There have also been important changes over the last 10-15 years to the way that Norwegian CSOs engage in the development process. Many have moved from providing direct services to people in need, to working with and through southern partners and building their capacities, and to supporting initiatives which aim to influence and change policies through advocacy, campaigning and lobbying. Some are involved in monitoring the impact and effectiveness of other service providers, especially government agencies. An increasing number of Norwegian CSOs has adopted a rights-based approach to their work, and some support human rights monitoring and documentation work. There is thus a rich and diversified tapestry of CSO engagement in development and poverty-reducing activities.

To provide a clearer framework for our analysis of wider and longer-term impact, the Panel agreed to group “development results” into three different categories:

- (a) *Improved quality of life for people and communities* as a result of:
 - Providing cash or other assets directly to individuals and families.
 - Training and providing know-how to people and communities.
 - Providing services such as in health and education.

- (b) *Strengthened organisational capacity* as a result of:
 - Strengthening individual organisations
 - Increasing democratic space and organisational pluralism (building civil society).

- (c) *Contributions to wider and long-term effects* as a result of:
 - Replication and scaling up of small-scale, pilot and innovative projects (horizontal effects).
 - Pro-poor advocacy and lobbying for and contributing to policy changes (vertical effects).
 - Monitoring implementation of national policies in order to hold governments more accountable (vertical effects).

The Panel’s work involved trying to locate and gather evidence to help address the issues in each of these different categories of “engagement”. However, its main focus has been on the last two: organisational capacity and wider and long-term effects. Norad’s publication, *Principles for Norad’s Support to Civil Society in the South* (May 2009) – in particular Principle no 2 “strengthen civil society actors working to achieve development, democracy and a redistribution of power” - has been a key reference and point of departure for the Panel’s work.

Working hypotheses

The Panel needed a unifying framework to guide its analysis. An important building-block was the construction of key hypotheses which the Panel used as a basis for its assessment of performance and progress. These hypotheses comprised working assumptions about expected results in different areas or fields of activity. They were based on what we know or what we think we know about CSO results. The Panel used the hypotheses as the backdrop for the

questions asked during the country visits, and then used the answers to assess and judge the relevance and validity of these research questions. Different overarching hypotheses were drawn up for each of the three categories of results listed above, and these in turn were informed by more detailed and specific questions. The full list of hypotheses and guiding questions can be found in Annex 4. However, the approach used was not to try to obtain detailed answers to each and every question (there was not enough time to undertake such an exercise). Rather, the focus was more on the wide-ranging effects of CSOs in one or more thematic areas – using the answers to specific questions to give more of a birds-eye view or overall picture of the extent to which CSOs have made a more lasting or wider contribution beyond the project - to capacity building, to innovation, to scaling-up and to policy change etc.

4. What is the focus of our study?

As a directorate under the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norad is responsible for the technical backing of Norwegian development cooperation, for quality assurance and for evaluation. It also manages funding allocated for long-term strengthening of civil society in the South through its Civil Society Department. This long-term funding through Norwegian CSOs is the main focus of the Panel's study.

In order to put this perspective on CSO long-term development results into the broader frame of Norwegian development cooperation, this section provides some more general information on the growth in Norwegian funding volume and changes in policy, thematic orientation and geographical priorities that have occurred over the last ten years.

The Norwegian ODA profile

The total volume of Norwegian development assistance (ODA) has risen continuously since the 1960s. In 2010, the level had reached almost 27.7 billion NOK (1.1% of GNP – the highest of all donor countries). Of this amount approximately 5% goes to administration, 21% to multilateral aid and 74% to bilateral assistance. The latter can be further subdivided into bilateral and multi-bilateral assistance.

The financial assistance increased more than double from 12.1 billion NOK in 2001. However, in per cent the support to different thematic areas remained fairly constant, except for the environment and energy (up from 11% to 22%) and health (down from 17% to 10%) during the last ten years. CSO-support followed the same trend and increased from 2.8 billion NOK in 2001 to 5.6 billion NOK in 2010.

Core support to multilateral organisations (UN and regional development banks) was reduced in per cent between 2000 and 2010 and changed to more earmarked support. Bilateral support increased in the same period (Africa on top with 28%), but a major part of it cannot be traced to specific regions, since some educational and emergency funds cover several regions. For instance, if Norway's considerable

support to addressing the problems of climate change and forest protection is broken down regionally, Brazil – otherwise an insignificant partner in Norwegian development cooperation - emerges as the biggest recipient of Norwegian ODA. The share of ODA to global funds rose to 4% from 2001, while the share to UN organisations fell to 4% in the same period.

Financial allocations rose considerably to countries in conflict and those emerging from recent conflicts or still facing significant risks of the recurrence of conflict. Out of the ten biggest recipients of Norwegian assistance in 2010, five were countries in conflict: Afghanistan, Sudan, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan and Uganda. This reflects the current strong links between conflict and under-development in Norwegian development priorities.

More emphasis is given to problems like corruption, conflicts, climate change and to results- based approaches and economic development (White Paper no 13, 2008-2009 and White Paper no 15, 2008-2009). With these new policy priorities very prominent in the media and a constantly growing development budget, it is not surprising that the public interest in development results has increased as well. Better documentation of results is now being mainstreamed in all channels and activities.⁶

Trends and levels in Norwegian CSO funding

The OECD-DAC Secretariat estimated in 2006 that CSOs globally spent 14.7 billion USD from their own resources on development work. They also acted as channels for approximately 10% of official aid flows, estimated to totally 104 billion USD (WP-EFF/AG-CS Report p. 1, 2008). This means that the CSOs together and globally spent approximately 25 billion USD from their own and ODA resources, or about 21 per cent of total private and public resources available for development.

It is worth noting that while the total volume in Norway has been rising constantly, the level of matching funds has fallen significantly, from 50/50 as the ratio for CSOs/government funding at the beginning of the 1960s, to 20/80 from 1979 and to 10/90 after 2001. There are also numerous exceptions to matching grants in the support system, reducing development CSOs' own funds to well below 10%.

The figures and graphs in Annex 5 show that Norwegian CSOs in 2001 received 79% of Norwegian ODA to CSOs, while international CSOs got 10% and national CSOs 12%. Ten years later, in 2010, their relative shares had changed considerably. Norwegian CSOs received relatively less (down from 79% to 65%), international CSOs significantly more (up from 10% to 21%), while national CSOs had a small increase from 12% to 15%.

The figures and graphs also show that the percentage of total Norwegian support to CSOs fell from 23.6% to 20.2% between 2001 and 2010. However, in actual

⁶ Resultatrapport 2011, Norad.

figures all three categories increased with almost 100% more funds for development work (this does not include humanitarian aid, which had a similar growth in the period), making these ten years a period of unprecedented growth.

Norwegian support through CSOs is provided for three different purposes: long term development goals, transitional goals and humanitarian assistance. The Rattsø Report (2006) observed that Norway's support through CSOs for development was high compared to other European countries. It was estimated that 76% of Norwegian development support to CSOs went to Norwegian CSOs, 8% directly to local CSOs, 2% directly to regional CSOs and 7% to international NGOs, with the remaining 7% going through Nordic research institutions.

Chapter 160.70 Support to civil society and democratization

The largest single grant support line to CSOs managed by Norad is Chapter 160.70.

From this chapter in 2010, Norad's Civil Society Department channelled 1.234 billion NOK to 105 Norwegian development CSOs and their national partners in 74 countries. More than 90 per cent of it was channelled to 29 Norwegian organisations through multi-year agreements. The rest was allocated to 76 smaller organisations through one-year or multi-year project agreements.

The purpose of this global support line to civil society and democratisation is to strengthen CSOs as civic actors and change agents for more open and democratic societies, and to assist in reaching national and international development goals. How they do it, is left to the organisations themselves to decide when they apply for support, provided their activities remain within the broad thematic priority areas defined by the government and ratified by the annual budget allocations in the parliament. There is no sharp division between support for service delivery, capacity building and advocacy work, and most organisations tend to include “a little bit of everything”, depending on the working context. The rights-based language now completely dominates development discourse when it comes to justifying development support.

An important criterion for the long term support to Norwegian CSOs is that there is cooperation (a ‘partnership’) between the Norwegian organisation and one or more partners in the South.

When looking for impact it was therefore most natural to concentrate on activities funded from this budget line, mainly because it is by far the largest financial source for Norwegian CSOs' funding of development activities, but also because this activity area has focused on documenting results for the longest period of time. The Panel paid less attention to Norwegian CSOs' partnering with government programmes like the REDD+ initiative, Oil for Development, Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative and Capital Flight and Just Tax Initiative. To a large extent it also omitted organizations that provide humanitarian assistance and those that are supported by budget lines managed by the different “thematic sections”

in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as the Section for Human Rights and Democracy and the Section for Peace and Reconciliation.

However, during the country visits it was difficult in practice to distinguish between activities funded by separate budget lines, because many organizations supported by Norad's Civil Society Department also receive support from other thematic budget lines managed by Norad or the MFA.

Principles for CSO assistance

Norad's *Principles for Support to Civil Society in the South*. They represented a watershed in Norad's thinking on how to build civil society, with the outspoken ambition of contributing to a gradual transformation of civil society support to the South through voluntary sector Norwegian development actors and other NGO channels.

The principles call for more efforts in mobilizing Civil Society in the struggle against poverty and oppression through better poverty analyses and more thorough and concrete analyses of civil society at country level. The role of Norwegian CSOs is to strengthen their civil society partners that struggle to achieve development, democracy and a redistribution of power.

Principle no 4 focuses in particular on ensuring better documentation of and reporting on results: "The demands on each organization in terms of documenting roles, relations and results (i.e. their total added value) will be sharpened. As for service delivery, documenting knock-on effects beyond service delivered will constitute an important part of the total reporting requirement."

"Organizations shall report on the long-term effects of their development efforts, and of their collaboration with other actors. What matters is the accumulated effect of the total development assistance, not just the outcomes of Norwegian support to single projects or program components."(op. cit. p 15)

The principles also pose a challenge when it comes to "documenting added value of the co-operation between Norwegian actors and their southern partners. A key goal is to enable southern civil society actors to take the lead in these partnerships" (op. cit. p 2).

5. What are the limitations

Almost all of those who have tried to examine and assess the wider impact of CSOs on development and poverty eradication, have concluded that inadequate and incomplete data and limited sources of information have left them unable to draw up any or more than a few firm and robust conclusions on wider and longer-term impact. These kinds of limitations will be discussed later in the report. They certainly explain why it has not been easy to provide clear, convincing and unambiguous answers to the "big" questions about CSO impact.

However, in the Panel's view, the challenges are no excuse for not trying to offer better and clearer answers than before. Researchers and evaluators have repeatedly been hesitant to draw firm conclusions about wider and longer-term effects because of insufficient evidence. The Panel has tried to adopt a more exploratory and open approach, which is not afraid to draw conclusions on the basis of judgements formed and shaped not only by hard evidence (which it repeatedly tried to find), but also by the analysis and by tapping into the insights of informed and experienced individuals working at the "coalface" of development.

The Panel visited four countries, undertaking relatively short visits to each. The report should be seen as "initial" assessments. Its strength lies particularly in the comparisons the Panel was able to make across countries – in some cases seeing similarities, and in others sharp differences, but it was of course able to fill all the gaps in information.

The Panel has tried to assess aspects of the wider and longer-term effects of CSO support at country level, aware that the answers found comprise only some elements of a more complete picture. The focus has been on trying to assess to what degree CSOs have contributed to what kind of change.

The Panel believes it has gathered sufficient data and information to draw some valid and important conclusions about wider and long-term results and impact. The hope is that this work will help to draw greater attention to the issues of wider and longer-term impact – and its importance – and also contribute to the important debate about how best to undertake such assessments of wider and longer-term impact.

PART B: WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS FROM THE COUNTRIES

6. Overview

The Panel visited four countries – Ethiopia and Malawi in Africa, and Vietnam and Nepal in Asia. Although this is only four out of 74 countries benefiting from support from Norwegian CSOs, these four countries comprise an important sample of countries where Norwegian organisations have invested significant funds over many years with the potential to produce wider effects. They also represent considerable diversity: Ethiopia and Nepal are “old” partner countries where some Norwegian organisations started to work more than 30 years ago, while the cooperation with Vietnam and Malawi is more recent. Notwithstanding recent developments, Nepal and Malawi have traditionally provided a supportive environment for civil society. In Ethiopia, government/civil society relationships have been more strained, while in Vietnam they have been exceedingly complex.

Table B1 summarises the data for 2010 in terms of the number of Norwegian CSOs and the amounts invested in the four countries in 2010 from the Civil Society Department in Norad.

Countries	No. of Norwegian CSOs	No. CSOs ≥ 2 Mill	Total (Mill NOK)
Ethiopia	14	8	108.4
Malawi	14	8	77.7
Nepal	23	6	38.4
Vietnam	15	5	22.9
Total	66	27	247.5

Source: Norad PTA

As Table B1 shows, a total of 66 Norwegian CSOs supported activities in the four countries in 2010. However, between five and eight organisations in each country accounted for 60-80% of the total funds spent. This suggests that a large group of CSOs support their local partners with relatively small amounts of money. The focus of the Panel’s work has been on the larger recipients.

In terms of total funds deployed, Ethiopia comprises the largest of the four programmes, accounting for more than 108 million NOK, followed by Malawi, with far fewer funds going to Nepal and Vietnam – reflecting the priority on Africa in Norwegian development cooperation. The total annual investment in 2010 to all four countries was nearly 250 million NOK. As the annual flow of funds has remained relatively stable over time, the Panel estimate that Norwegian CSOs have probably spent around 1.25 billion NOK in these four countries over the last five years (2005-2010) - a significant amount of money. However, when divided up among the four countries, and distributed among different organisations and

a multitude of partners, the annual amounts channelled to different projects are relatively small.

It is also important to keep in mind that the amounts provided are small when compared to the total ODA received by these countries and to the overall support provided to and through CSOs. This is illustrated by the data in Table B2.

Countries	ODA⁷ (Mill USD) 2010	CSOs (Mill USD) 2010⁸	% of total ODA to CSO assistance	Norwegian ODA (Mill USD) 2010	Norwegian CSO (Mill USD) 2010	% of total ODA
Ethiopia	3506	576	16.4	33	18	0.5
Malawi	1026	162	15.7	65	13	1.2
Vietnam	3476	113	3.2	20	4	0.1
Nepal	949	131	13.8	47	6	0.6
Total	8957	982	10.9	165	41	0.4

Source: Norad PTA

The figures in Table B2 show that Norwegian CSO support to the four countries is small – very small – as a share of total ODA provided and also compared to the total Norwegian bilateral support to the respective countries. This suggests that one should not have too high expectations of the wider and long-term impact of Norwegian CSO interventions on overall development and poverty reduction, beyond its role and impact for individual communities and organisations. As seen below, however, the Panel did find a number of examples of interventions which seem to have had quite a significant wider impact.

Notwithstanding these expectations, the core questions are still valid: what has been the wider and long-term impact of an annual investment of some 250 million NOK; and what overall difference has such a contribution made? As discussed above, there is no simple answer to such questions. But based on the testing of the original hypotheses, the Panel was able to begin an exploration and have searched for answers in the progress reports and evaluations reviewed and through more than 150 interviews and meetings conducted during the country visits. The findings represent preliminary and partial answers which will require further systematic research and assessments if they are to be more robustly validated. Before discussing the assessment of the wider effects and the outcome of capacity strengthening, the report starts by summarising the findings in relation to short-term project results and impact at the individual and community-based level.

⁷ OECD (2010) Statistics on Resource Flows to Developing Countries Development Co-operation Directorate.

⁸ Source for the other columns: Norad Statistical Unit, 2012.

7. Improving the quality of life for people and communities

Individual and community level results

Hypothesis: Significant results can be found and documented at the individual and community-based level, but the number of people reached is limited.

The first hypothesis was confirmed in all the four countries. The Panel neither had the time to visit individual projects nor to review all project documentation. The sample of project documents reviewed provided a clear and consistent picture, namely that the projects supported through Norwegian CSOs were implemented according to the plans submitted, that the funds were utilised in the manner intended and the immediate short-term objectives were broadly achieved. This finding is consistent with the wider literature (Part C). In other words, individuals and communities benefit from direct and indirect support in a range of areas, such as health, education, micro-credit and agriculture.

However, the available data reviewed did not enable the team to judge precisely how many people benefit from these projects, how many people have been reached, nor how cost-effective such interventions were. In other words, we know that the projects have an effect and that short-term results can be documented, but we don't know the scale of the impact on the lives of those assisted. We certainly found a large number of smaller "micro-successes", but we also found some examples of larger-scale and more extensive results, such as Norwegian Church Aid's (NCA's) support to training of nurses through CHAM in Malawi and the Save the Children's (SCF's) outreach programmes to children in many districts of Nepal.

However, perhaps a more important finding of the Panel was that very little data seem to be collected which can shed light on the number of people assisted, how important these projects have been to the beneficiaries and the extent to which they are likely to be (financially) sustainable. There are huge gaps in monitoring reports, evaluations and overall assessments.

In summary, the Panel found:

There were few major deviations from original plans. Projects and activities are to large extent implemented as anticipated, with relatively small adjustments made as a result of a combination of fairly minor changes to either internal or external factors.

Most of the project evaluations confirm that project objectives and immediate short-term results are achieved despite the fact that few "robust" assessment of results are carried out (with experimental or quasi-experimental designs).⁹

⁹ See list of evaluations reviewed in Annex 2. This is only a sample, but other meta-evaluations confirm the same (Riddell 2009 and Kruse 1999).

Hence, assessments are mostly based on qualitative judgments and secondary information.

Most data and information still focus on activities and reporting on outputs. However, there is growing recognition of the need to focus on results at the level of outcomes (changes in knowledge*, attitudes and behaviour). For example, NCA's biogas project in Vietnam is trying to extend analysis beyond the provision of electricity using biogas to understand better what the wider effects are on the different project beneficiaries.

There is limited systematic information upon which to form firm views about long-term impact, often because CSOs argue that it is too early to expect and actually measure impact. The Panel believes that in some cases project results are underreported, while in others they are inflated. Interestingly, in both Nepal and Vietnam. The team was told about more complex projects (peace-building efforts by UMN in Nepal and NCA's gender-based violence programmes in Vietnam) where the immediate impact was or was likely to be less positive than the medium-term to long-term results, challenging a simplistic assumption that interventions will always result in immediate benefits to those being assisted. This finding is also consistent with some of the wider literature (Part C).

There is also little information on whether the people assisted with funds from Norwegian CSOs are also assisted by other agencies, and other projects, or how the assistance provided is harmonised and aligned to local development plans – even though a large number of partners of Norwegian CSOs also have other international donors. We were certainly told of local areas in Nepal where CSOs have tried to complement rather than compete with other service providers, but also of areas where too little effort seems to be made for co-operation.

CSOs play a significant role in service delivery in both Ethiopia and Malawi, mainly in rural areas. In Ethiopia, it is estimated that civil society constitutes as much as 25% of the “service delivery budget” (NCG, Thematic Evaluation of Support by Danish NGOs to Civil Society, Ethiopia Country Report, 2009: 19). In Malawi, close to 40% of all health services are provided by civil society. In Nepal, a senior government official told us that in his view between 10 and 15% of all educational services today were provided by CSOs, while during the recent period of political unrest, civil society was responsible for service provision in whole regions where the government was prevented from operating. We would estimate that the figure will probably be much lower for Vietnam, though neither Nepal nor Vietnam had any official figures. Many CSOs in Vietnam are mainly involved in service delivery, but overall coverage is low. Significant though some of these figures are, we are not in a position to judge more accurately what contribution Norwegian CSOs and the projects they support make to the overall aggregate CSO inputs: how many people have been reached with what services in any of the four countries. Nevertheless, we do know that the investments have been significant and long-term, particularly in Ethiopia and Nepal.

Target groups and outreach

Hypothesis: The projects reach poor people, but not the poorest of the poor.

This hypothesis was also mostly confirmed. The Panel found that:

The majority of projects target poor regions and poor people. Norwegian CSOs provide support to marginal and hard-to-reach areas in Ethiopia and Malawi, and to vulnerable populations like children, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and small-scale farmers. The same is true for Vietnam (e.g. HIV/AIDS victims in prisons, marginal or small-scale farmers) and for Dalits and those who live in the more remote west of Nepal. There is also evidence of CSOs (such as the Nepal Red Cross) learning from past experiences and focusing more sharply on more vulnerable groups (Høybye, 2010: 2-3).

On the other hand, we were not in a position to judge with any precision to what extent the projects reached the poorest of the poor. We discussed this issue with many CSOs in our interviews and believe that most projects probably did not reach the very poorest within particular poor communities. This is not only because the poorest are among the least organised and, as such, hard to reach through existing structures and organisations. We also found little evidence of CSOs undertaking socio-economic and other surveys to determine who precisely are the poorest in particular localities and to ensure that these people are targeted, though some CSOs have undertaken surveys which could be used as a basis for more narrow targeting to those most in need. On the other hand, we did not find examples of projects benefitting groups of people not in need of support.

Most of the clear results can be found from the delivery of services, an area where it is relatively easy to document tangible effects. It is also our impression that most of the funds from Norwegian CSOs are still channelled to service delivery, despite the increase in support for capacity building and advocacy. Health (including HIV/AIDS) and education are still the two most dominant sectors, while micro-credit and agriculture are targeted by a few specialised Norwegian CSOs. Nepal provides an example of a small Norwegian organisation (Himal Partner) playing a major and long-term role in the development of the energy/hydropower sector, including higher education and infrastructure development. The most important beneficiaries are children and women, vulnerable and marginalised groups and last, but not least, persons with disabilities (in particular in Malawi and Nepal). This finding from the Panel's work is consistent with the most recent international survey produced by CIVICUS:

“The findings suggest that it is easier for civil society to achieve impact in social areas –which may be those that are politically less contested, and which may play more to a service delivery role for CSOs which many governments tend to find more comfortable – than in policy making areas, which call for deeper engagement with often fraught political processes and more complex CSO

capacities. Many small-scale CSOs, able to achieve localised impact, simply do not attempt policy influence” (CIVICUS 2011: 37).

Relevance of projects

Hypothesis: The projects are relevant to the needs of people, but the interventions studied have not been subject to any systematic assessment of needs, priorities and broader context.

This hypothesis was to a large extent confirmed. The Panel found that:

Most projects are relevant in relation to addressing key needs in their broadest sense. However, such a general finding is not very informative except to confirm that the projects are in line with all perceived and actual needs in the target groups. However, we found fewer examples than we had expected of CSOs undertaking community-based participatory assessments with potential beneficiaries to ascertain or rank a hierarchy of needs, possibly because such exercises are known to be costly.

For most of the CSOs, however, the selection of partners and projects is not based on a broader assessment of the context, what the most important needs and strategic opportunities are – or, in other words, based on a systematic and deliberate planning in order to achieve optimal results.

Norad has asked Norwegian CSOs to undertake a wider analysis to assess the merits of the support they give to southern partners. The Principles for Norad’s Support to Civil Society in the South stipulate that “Norwegian organisations will have to increase their knowledge about how they may best contribute towards altering power relations, politics and achieve economic redistribution benefiting poor people” and that poverty analyses be undertaken which “must show who the poor are, why they are poor and how they can escape poverty” (Norad, 2009: 10 and 12)¹⁰.

In spite of the fact that these Principles have been in place since May 2009, we found no clear examples in the four countries of such “political” or power analyses having been undertaken or even being planned, in order to provide a firmer basis for understanding how interventions might make a more effective wider and strategic impact and taking into account the huge differences in country contexts. Many Norwegian CSOs certainly have broad overall strategic objectives, but when it comes to the “real” planning process, the focus is still very much on discrete projects and their immediate effects. There is no systematic planning for what we have called wider effects – replication of innovative approaches, scaling up and contributing to policy change.

¹⁰ A number of donor agencies are now demanding that CSOs that receive their aid funds provide such an analysis, and evaluations indicate that failures and weaknesses have been due, in part, to an absence of such an analysis (see Nordic Consulting Group, 2009: 11).

One often finds no or just superficially undertaken situation analyses and associated discussions on where and how the CSOs should invest their resources in order to achieve optimal impact. It seems the pattern for allocation of resources still remains to a large extent determined by traditional practices and (often short-term) donor priorities.

We have reviewed a sample of country programmes and project plans. The quality of the documents is generally good with sections covering issues such as objectives, targets, strategies, working methods, etc. However, there is frequently no analysis and discussion of the expected causal relationships between inputs and activities on the one hand, and short and long term impact on the other. In other words, a “theory of change” or explanation and justification of why the intended project will produce the expected results, is usually missing.

NEPAL

Country Strategy Plan for Save the Children Nepal

The Plan provides a structured presentation of the overall goals for the period, the focus, strategic intent and thematic priorities, programme coverage and target groups. There is also a general description of the country context and risks to success and sustainability. However, there is not much information about the work of other international organisations or national actors, very little analysis of the “political economy” of the programme context and no explicit “theory of change” – explaining the expected causal linkages and the likelihood that the results will be achieved with the given interventions (Source: Save the Children – Nepal and Bhutan Country Strategy Plan 2010-2013).

Use of financial resources and funding modalities

Hypothesis: Financial resources are used efficiently, but transaction costs are often high with several intermediaries reducing the resources reaching the ultimate beneficiaries.

This hypothesis is to a large extent confirmed. The Panel found that:

Norwegian CSOs and their partners are committed and driven by values of solidarity and justice. The majority of Norwegian CSOs and their partners are also prudent and use available resources efficiently (high outputs compared to inputs). There are examples of CSO staff being paid higher salaries than comparable government officers, but we saw no examples of conspicuous extravagance, seminars and workshops at expensive hotels. Some of the larger CSOs, such as SCF and Plan in Nepal, certainly have fleets of newish 4 x 4 vehicles, while others, such as UMN, seemed to manage large programmes with seemingly less costly overheads. However, our views were more impressionistic than based on an analysis of need. Certainly, it seems that multilateral and bilateral agencies and embassies are more exposed to such criticism. There is often a huge difference between international and national CSOs in terms of salaries, quality and cost of offices, cars, etc.

The transaction costs involved in implementing CSO projects are judged to be high. This is often due to the fact that there are commonly several intermediaries and administrative layers between the Norwegian CSO and the ultimate beneficiaries, but we have not been able to assess how high these costs are¹¹. Overhead costs are particularly high when the Norwegian organisations have representative in-country offices. However, this problem was not exclusively related to Norwegian CSOs. For instance, the 2010 Impact Evaluation Report of the Nepal Red Cross found that in terms of efficiency, the Community Development Programme (CDP) "has a very expensive set-up especially considering the relatively small number of beneficiaries, and it is advised to consider ways to channel more of the total budget into actual activities directly benefitting communities" (Høybye, 2010:3).

Much attention has recently been given to issues of corruption in Norwegian bilateral aid. There has also been an increasing number of cases of corruption reported to Norad by CSOs. Civil society is clearly not immune from corruption and financial management; however, it is still our impression from reviewing documents and interviewing people that the total funds affected by corruption are low compared to the total investments outlaid. We came across only exceptional examples of serious fraud¹² and financial irregularities, though we did not systematically pursue such questions, either. We were informed that few serious cases had been uncovered in the case-study countries, and when they come to light, they are dealt with effectively by the Norwegian CSOs and reported to Norad.¹³ In our view, the cases that have come to light represent one-off instances of corruption; we found no evidence that corruption is a large systemic problem where entire organisations are corrupt.

The majority of funds to Ethiopia and Malawi are channelled through partner CSOs, but the Norwegian embassies in Addis Ababa and Lilongwe also provide direct support to local CSOs. There is no active coordination between the two channels of support. Particularly in Malawi, there are increasing numbers of multi-donor funds and programmes offering support to civil society.¹⁴ Further studies would be required to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of such funding modalities.

11 This is discussed in the recent Norad evaluation from East Africa (Norad Evaluation Report 1/2011).

12 With serious corruption we mean systematic embezzlement of funds and not individual cases of staff claiming an extra day of per diem.

13 In its report to Norad for 2005-2010, NCA declares that "From 2008-2010, NCA has exposed and addressed 22 corruption cases. The majority of these cases are related to our cooperating partners, while 5 cases concern NCA representations" (NCA Report 03/2011).

14 There is for instance a new human rights and governance programme (2011- 2015) in Malawi supported by UK, EU and Norway.

8. Wider effects

Interest in results and impact

Hypothesis: There is an increasing interest among Norwegian CSOs and their partners in results and long-term impact.

This hypothesis is to a large extent confirmed, but with some modifications. The Panel found that:

There is an increased interest in assessing and documenting results among CSOs in all the four countries compared to a few years back. This stronger focus on results is part of a global trend driven predominantly by donors – first the donors to Northern CSOs (e.g. Norad) and then the Northern CSOs themselves. Such a focus and interest have also been translated into new reporting practices, which in turn has influenced and put increasing demands on local partners.

In a growing number of instances, baseline studies are carried out, monitoring systems are established and new types of result reports are prepared. However, the quality is variable. What is understood by baseline surveys and monitoring systems and processes varies. While most Norwegian CSOs have adopted the results on based management (RBM) terminology, they use the terms loosely. There are few examples of “rigorous” monitoring of performance and progress based on agreed standards and indicators, though a number of CSOs are keen to undertake more rigorous assessments, providing – a key caveat – they are not “too expensive”.

An increasing number of evaluations are being carried out. Both Norwegian and partner CSOs have designated M&E officers. Most of the CSOs were able to present the Panel with one or more evaluations undertaken of major projects – the larger Norwegian CSOs commonly use external consultants for these assessments, but they are still often implemented as “one-off” exercises and not undertaken as part of a systematic plan for evaluations.

However, the number and nature of evaluations undertaken remain variable, and a focus on wider (horizontal and vertical) effects and impacts is still limited. Most evaluations are still assessments of discrete projects, undertaken as part of a formal requirement for extending contracts – not covering wider effects and aggregate impact at district or national level. Few, if any, country programme evaluations have been undertaken which deliberately analyse and try to trace wider effects of CSO development activities, either because they are considered too difficult to carry out and/or because they are not a demand or a requirement from the donors.

A clear finding is that there is a stronger focus on documenting results to satisfy the requirements of donors, than in order to use the information gathered to learn lessons or to inform strategic planning processes. One of the purposes of results-based management is to generate and use performance information for

reporting; but an equally important objective is to inform internal management learning and decision-making. RBM is basically an approach to aid strategic planning and help inform choices on the allocation of scarce resources to ensure optimal results. It is much more than a measurement and reporting system. But this requires that the information sought and gathered concerning results is actively used to make strategic decisions (managing *for* results). Yet such proactive use

NCA

Working to Uphold Dignity. Final report 2005-2010

In 2011, NCA produced a report that “describes the results from NCA’s international work, as they relate to the organisation’s Global Strategic Plan for the period 2005 to 2010” (NCA Report 03/2011). The ambition was to assess these results in relation to the total resources available for global thematic priorities and all country programmes. In 2010, NCA received NOK 227 million from Norad to support 355 projects in 35 countries. The report reads well and provides a comprehensive overview and narrative of what the organisation does. However, despite the intention of being a report about results, it focuses far more on plans and intentions, context, activities and processes. The main achievements in East Africa are for instance said to be:

- The establishment of a new country programme in Tanzania, with local communities taking action to address injustice and poverty.
- The successful establishment of a programme to address climate change in Kenya.
- Change in approach in South Sudan from a conflict to a post-conflict situation.
- Support to community-based anti-piracy engagement in Somalia.
- Improved ecumenical cooperation in Darfur.
- The launch of a community development programme in Eritrea.

None of these achievements are strictly speaking results. They are processes and inputs into the long and difficult journey towards clear pinpointing and achieving of wider results. Another major limitation is the lack of numbers in the report. While financial contributions are recorded, there are no data on coverage and outreach. As a result, it is impossible for the reader to get a sense of “volume” and scale of impact. NCA is a major NGO; but this report portrays more an international mega-structure with global and country impact, presented with more self confidence than details of empirical evidence of impact. It is, for instance, surprising that such a report presents no examples of in-depth studies of selected interventions based on systematic data collection and analysis.

It is, of course, highly commendable that NCA seeks to report on global thematic priorities. This is a major advance. What is more, the problems encountered in undertaking “aggregate reporting” are acknowledged. The chapters are informative, but do they provide information on results? In the chapter on environment, the report concludes that “From 2007 to 2010 NCA has contributed to climate change mitigation through the introduction of sustainable renewable energy to poor countries in 10 countries”. The crucial question is whether this helps to understand the role of NCA and its actual achievements within this thematic area.

Looking ahead, the report notes that NCA intends to develop and collect annual data for one globally selected output indicator per thematic programme for the new programme period in order to strengthen “managing for results” (Report 03/2011:13). Such data are useful for monitoring global trends, but it remains to be seen precisely how the creation of such global aggregate indicators will add significant value in terms of understanding more precisely what NCA is achieving on the ground. (Source: Panel country notes).

of RBM still seems to be rare among Norwegian CSOs. The planning undertaken seems more often than not to be driven by the wish to ensure continued access to available financial resources.

The following text box may illustrate the increased interest in and focus on results reporting by one Norwegian CSO, but it also shows the methodological challenges involved.

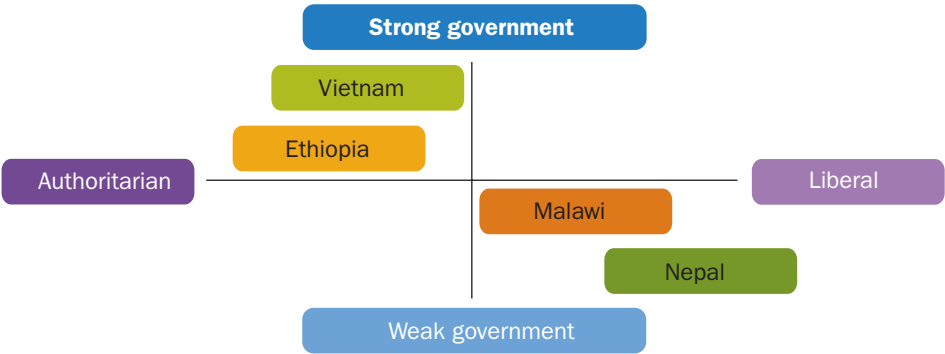
Interaction between governments and CSOs

Hypothesis: The interaction between governments and CSOs is increasingly tense due to controversial advocacy work.

The interaction and working environment between governments and civil society determine the operating space for civil society and its ability to engage, as well as its potential for creating wider impact. From the evidence gathered in our four case-study countries, this hypothesis is to a large extent confirmed despite important differences between the four countries.

A number of recent studies suggest that either an overt repression of civil society, or at least a narrowing of political space within which civil society operates, is on the rise in several developing countries.¹⁵ The volatile civil society space and difficult relations with the state is also confirmed in the most recent report from CIVICUS (Civil Society Index Summary Reports - 2008-2011:9). CSOs are increasingly facing threats, repression and reduced political space. There are (a) legislative threats involving the passage of new legislation or amendments to existing legislation; (b) judicial threats that impact through the legal system and law enforcement agencies; and (c) extra-legal threats or harassment that occur outside the legal system (Trocaire, Civil Society at Risk, 2011: 1). The threats are mostly targeted at particular types of CSOs and activities such as human rights monitoring, rights-related advocacy or “anything that is considered political”.

Besides the historical development and evolution of civil society, government/ civil society interaction is influenced by two particular factors: the strength of the government, and the extent to which it provides space for civil society to operate, flourish and expand. The situation in the four countries can be presented as follows:



¹⁵ The African Civil Society Platform on Principled Partnerships (ACPP) reports that 35 African governments have either passed or are advancing legislation that restricts the activities, funding and sometimes the very existence of CSOs (In Trocaire and Cafod 2011: 2)

The Panel found that:

In *Ethiopia*, the interaction between government and civil society is increasingly strained, mainly in regard to the work of advocacy and rights-based organisations, and this adversely affects the scope for their role in wider influencing initiatives. The new law for civil society has had a profound impact (see text box), narrowing the scope of CSO activities to service delivery and emergency relief. Foreign CSOs are forbidden to undertake advocacy and human-rights work, and local organisations are only allowed to do so if 90% of their funds come from local, domestic sources. The lack of local funds has resulted in several local CSOs having to close down; others have lost members and/or are having to reorient their work towards service delivery due to the new restrictions. Many are afraid to engage in policy or advocacy work and have stopped these kinds of activities altogether.¹⁶ The new law is justified by the Government as an effort to strengthen local ownership, reduce foreign influence and illegitimate “briefcase” CSOs. The dominant intent and effect are systematic control and censorship of CSOs in violation of current norms and international human rights standards – a situation overlooked by some embassies. None of the Norwegian CSOs have so far cut their funding to Ethiopia – even though all agree that they have had to adjust their approach and mode of operation. For instance, NCA reports that they even “had to stop a large programme on human rights and good governance as the Government passed a new NGO bill, which prevents organisations that work with advocacy from receiving foreign funding” (NCA Final Report 2005-10. 03/2011: 59).

ETHIOPIA

Charities and Societies Proclamation

A period of challenging relations between CSOs and the Ethiopian Government culminated in 2009 with the passage of the restrictive Charities and Societies Proclamation. The law requires all CSOs to register with the government and, crucially, prohibits any organisation which receives more than 10 per cent of its funding from foreign sources from engaging in work in the following areas: the advancement of human and democratic rights; the promotion of the equality of nations; nationalities and peoples, gender and religion; the promotion of the rights of disabled people and children; the promotion of conflict resolution or reconciliation; and the promotion of the efficiency of the justice and law enforcement services. (Source: Civil Society at Risk, 2010).

The situation in *Malawi* is different from Ethiopia. There is still space for a critical CSO voice, even if it has been constrained and if CSO activities have become more restricted since the 2009 elections.¹⁷ The government is much weaker in Malawi than in Ethiopia. Civil society, and in particular the churches, have in many ways replaced and certainly filled a gap left by an ineffective political opposition. A mixture of anger at the repressive nature of the present government and the still-present power of civil society groups in Malawi meant that civil society groups could take part in demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience earlier this year. The current situation remains fluid and complex: the current National

¹⁶ See Human Rights Watch, *Development without Freedom*, 2010, Human Rights Watch, *One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure*, 2010

¹⁷ Act Alliance, *Shrinking political space of civil society action*, 2011 and Karoline Caesar, *Civil Society and Good Governance in Malawi*, GIZ, 2011.

Dialogue between the Group of the President and CSO Team is not public, but taking place behind closed door: it has the potential to reduce “the culture of fear”.

MALAWI

Rapid descent into violence

In Malawi, civil society space has become increasingly restricted since the 2009 elections. Amendments to the Police Act granted new powers to search without a warrant, and the Penal Code was amended, allowing the Government to close down any media outlets publishing materials deemed to be against the public interest. Furthermore, civil society leaders are reporting increasing intimidation in recent months. This culminated in the deaths of 19 people in July last year when the Police opened fire on a civil society demonstration which called for changes to the government’s economic policies. The Government is specifically targeting CSOs and networks working on human rights and governance issues. The independent media and academics known to be critical to the Government have also been singled out. (Source: Panel country notes).

Many studies and informants agree that until recently, the rules, regulations and the general political environment *in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam* greatly restricted and often prevented organised activities of CSOs, other than those prescribed by the state. Consequently, the only organisations with a legal standing, with few exceptions, have been the Communist Party, mass organisations under the umbrella of the state-sponsored Fatherland Front and officially recognised religious organisations. Since the mid-1980s, however, the situation has changed in a positive direction. Now, Vietnam has numerous, legally recognised professional associations, research and training centres, CSOs and international CSOs (INGOs). There are also tens of thousands of informal, unregistered, and hence not officially recognised organisations (Wells-Dang, 2011). Many are loosely categorised as community-based organisations (CBOs). The engagement between civil society groups and state authorities has changed and, broadly, improved. The general political and legal environment has become more conducive to civil society/state interactions.

One major reason for the change in Vietnam’s landscape of organisations is that the state has been creating a more hospitable environment for citizen-initiated groups. The rules and regulations for establishing such organizations and for them having a legal standing have become more accommodating. The grassroots democracy policy has encouraged this process as well. Rather than being driven and determined by formal regulations and guidelines, “people can do whatever is not prohibited by law rather than what the law allows them to do” (VUFO 2008).

That said, it is important not to exaggerate these changes. Vietnam’ state is strong and the country is still ruled by the communist party. Activities which are perceived to threaten the hegemony of the party or which seek to promote a shift to more pluralistic multi-party democracy are still not tolerated.

In Nepal, the 1990 democratic freedoms that were won, provided the necessary space for and facilitated the rapid growth of non-governmental organisations

(NGOs). The role of international donors and international NGOs in this process was also important in helping to build civil society, and they are as important today as they ever were, not least because INGOs are not permitted to operate and run projects themselves: all funds from INGOs have to be channelled to local CSOs which run and manage all CSO projects across the country. Initially focused on service delivery, NGOs are now predominantly identified and see themselves as civil society organisations – they have turned their attention to more political endeavours, such as awareness-raising, public education and social mobilization. While the legal framework has not constrained the role of CSOs in undertaking social accountability work, the 1977 Institution Registration Act, which empowers Chief District Officers to register, guide, direct, control and supervise associational groups, reflects the Panchayat concern with controlling non-governmental organisations. Although these legal provisions have not been enforced in a repressive manner, that potential remains while the clauses remain on the books.

A key factor constraining the ability of civil society organisations in Nepal to monitor government/state activities effectively is the fact that their credibility in the public eye has, over the years, become suspect. While still recognized as positive alternatives to the state, more negative images of NGO and civil society culture currently dominate. Perhaps the key overarching problem is that most local CSOs are not seen as independent and separate from the political parties and party politics; rather, they are intertwined with them. So while, NGOs and CSOs are comparatively free from *de jure* control, in practice Nepal does not really have an independent civil society. CSO culture in Nepal is also still funding-driven. It has been described as “dollar farming,” a “begging and cheating bowl,” “slave of the foreigners,” “preventing revolution” and “family entrepreneurial endeavours”.

Expansion of social space for civil society

Hypothesis: CSOs have effectively expanded the social space of civil society and defended it against political attempts to limit its influence in society at large.

This hypothesis is not generally confirmed. The Panel found that the operating environment for civil society is increasingly constrained in all countries except Nepal. The question is to what extent CSOs have been able to counter and effectively challenge this trend, expanding the social space where CSOs operate and defend it against political attacks.

The hypothesis was clearly not confirmed for Ethiopia. On the contrary, the space has been narrowing markedly,¹⁸ and the CSOs have not been able to fight back effectively and defend themselves. Despite early attempts to defend social space, most organisations seem now to spend more energy embarking on “coping strategies” in order to try to bypass, circumvent and adjust to growing government restrictions. There are no open processes for most people or CSOs to voice their opinions and engage in dialogue with the government: only a few

18 When the Panel was in Ethiopia, the Government issued new regulations for CSOs – putting a limit on overhead costs – a rule favouring service delivery NGOs and further reducing the space for advocacy and capacity building.

regional/international CSOs have been exempted from the legislation through a special agreement to work on peace (NCA) and child rights. Overall, the space for dialogue is determined by the Government, leaving civil society defenceless as it tries to react to the regulations which severely limit its actions and activities in the fields of politics and human rights monitoring (NCG, Thematic Evaluation of Support by Danish NGOs to Civil Society, Ethiopia Country Report, 2009: 20).

The situation in Malawi is less clear-cut. Civil society has increasingly been attacked, but more in the form of harassment (extra-judicial threats) rather than through sophisticated restrictive legislation and regulations as is happening in Ethiopia. Civil society seeks to defend and protect its legitimacy, role and space, but, outside the churches, many CSOs are weak and have been further financially weakened in the last few years.

The situation in Vietnam is the most complex. There is far more “space” for civil society to operate than one would expect in a strong one-party state, but there were different opinions in the team about the significance of this. We found little evidence to suggest that civil society had played an active role in defending and widening the political space for itself – at least not the Norwegian CSOs and their partners.

In sharp contrast, the government in Nepal has in practice an almost “laissez faire” attitude towards civil society. Although some rules and regulations are potentially restrictive in theory, in practice they tend not to be implemented. Outside the area of human rights – where the rhetoric for the fulfilment of core rights is strongly articulated - we found little evidence to suggest that CSOs have worked to protect and widen their political space – to a large extent because it was not necessary.

It should be emphasised that there are significant differences in operational space for different types of CSOs in each of the four case-study countries: in many ways, the social space for civil society can really only be understood within the historical dynamic of each country. While in all countries, CSOs focusing on service delivery face fewer problems from the authorities, vocal rights-based organisations face an array of problems, different in nature and intensity in each country. The low key “non-confrontational” CSOs are more listened to by the Government, in particular those CSOs that present data and analysis based on solid homework and that are not considered as “only shouting from the sidelines” as indicated by a Government representative in Malawi.¹⁹

It should also be emphasised that CSO service delivery engagement in, for instance, Vietnam - the most robust form of engagement in the country - extends well beyond the simple “delivery of services”. It can often embrace multiple forms of engagement, from helping to carry out state programmes aimed at benefiting citizens, to providing services the state has not initiated, and engaging

¹⁹ A study on the role of CSOs in sector-wide programmes which included Malawi found that the government was uncomfortable with CSOs in their roles as advocates and watchdogs and reluctant to accept the legitimacy of an oppositional “voice”. Controversial advocacy organisations were not to be invited by the Government to discuss the SWAp (Kruse 2003).

in policy matters, being advocates for specific constituencies, and monitoring the authorities' actions (VUFO 2008: 7).

Higher level interventions

Hypothesis: Over time, CSOs have increasingly tried to address and influence political and economic processes and issues at national level.

This hypothesis is largely confirmed. A growing number of CSOs have certainly *tried* to influence processes and issues, including policies at the national level, and we found many instances where this has happened. However, this does not necessarily mean that policies really were changed or that the poor benefited more directly and immediately from these changes. On this score, the evidence was more mixed.

Norad's guidelines for support to civil society provide the basis for addressing political processes - by supporting CSOs role in democratisation and the redistribution of power at all levels. Most of the larger and some smaller Norwegian organisations (like NCA, Save the Children, Plan Norway and NPA) have also adopted a rights-based approach and terminology to programming, and they certainly articulate these at headquarters. Most Norwegian CSOs combine service delivery with capacity building and advocacy work where they can, and they argue that the three strategies are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

As such, the hypothesis is confirmed in theory, but the extent to which the focus on political issues and processes is followed through at country level, is highly variable in our four case countries. The following table presents the roles on a continuum from active resistance to implementing state policy and indicates where the four countries are situated on such a continuum.

ACTIVE RESISTANCE TO REGIME			▶ IMPLEMENTING STATE POLICY	
Civil disobedience Demonstrations	Critical opposition Radical advocacy	Monitoring policy implementation "Watchdog"	Lobbying and advocating for changes in policies	Welfare Service provision "Shadow state"
				Ethiopia
			Vietnam	
	Nepal			
Malawi				

The Panel found that Ethiopia is at one extreme end of the continuum. The potential for advocacy to be undertaken and to result in tangible wider effects was dramatically reduced when the new civil society law was promulgated in 2009. Since then, local organisations have been forbidden to engage in any advocacy/rights-based activities if they receive more than 10% funding from external partners. What this means in practice is that where influencing takes place, it tends to happen at the very local project level, where it is seen more as enhancing efficiency in service delivery than challenging the hegemony of the state.

The situation in Malawi, however, is quite different. In 1994, a multi-party system of government was inaugurated, which saw the emergence of civil society actors and CSOs beginning to struggle to extend and enhance their roles and their understanding of their role beyond their traditional service delivery activities. However, the space narrowed again following the 2005 elections, after which the government introduced new, more restrictive legislation, and increased the harassment particularly of CSOs and networks working on human rights and governance issues.

Vietnam provides a different and quite complex example. While the role of CSOs in service delivery is not contested, Vietnamese CSOs view their role quite differently from their foreign counterparts in two respects. Firstly, they see themselves as partners working on development projects in support of state policy. Secondly, they view themselves as advocates for improved state services (Thayer 2008: 17). Vietnam has not yet developed civil society groups that act as watchdogs to expose corruption by party cadres and government officials. What is more, there is also evidence that CSOs are allowed to and do play a role in advocacy in relation to particular issues, including local issues – as long as they avoid sensitive political areas like multi-party democracy and human rights. Indeed, there is considerably more policy and law-making engagement than one might expect, much of which is undertaken by more informal groups and networks, including lobbying (Wells-Dang, 2011). However, the general picture which emerges from most studies focussing on CSO/state engagement is that the impact and influence of NGOs/CSOs is weak at the national level – especially regarding policy-making, channelling citizens' views and holding authorities accountable – and somewhat more substantial at sub-national levels (VUSO, 2008).

The hypothesis is confirmed for Nepal, but the effectiveness of CSO advocacy is limited and quite constrained. There are certainly several examples of CSOs involved in advocacy activities and lobbying: these would include SCF, Plan and the local CSO, CWIN-Nepal which receives Norwegian funding. Yet, because most local CSOs tend to be politically aligned, their credibility and legitimacy is compromised and their effectiveness severely reduced. Additionally, a widely-shared perception is that CSO agendas are driven by donors and thus that CSOs are not “free agents” nor autonomous, and this further hampers their legitimacy. State distrust of CSOs is evident as well, even though the state acknowledges them as important development partners.

Examples of wider effects

Hypothesis: There are examples of wider effects in which CSOs have been able to (a) replicate and scale up innovative initiatives, (b) monitor the implementation of government programmes in order to hold government accountable and (c) influence and change policy processes, but the examples are few and the results are difficult to measure.

In many countries over several decades, CSOs have played a major role in service delivery – providing health services and schooling through the clinics, schools and hospitals that CSOs run, often with some running costs, notably salaries of staff, paid in full or in part by the government. While project reports have tended to focus on the impact at the level of the school, clinic or hospital, it is also important to highlight the wider impact that the cumulative contribution of these different CSO service-delivery activities have had and continue to have in meeting the needs of the population. As discussed above, the wider impact of such CSO activities have been significant in each of the four case-study countries. What is more, in the decade since aid was linked more closely to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the wider impact of CSOs in service delivery has increased considerably.

The purpose of this hypothesis is to look beyond the (important) dimension of wider effects to others. It is a core hypothesis in our study. It is also increasingly accepted that CSOs do have a wider development impact. For example, the final communiqué from the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness agreed in December 2011 states that:

“Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation. They also provide services in areas that are complementary to those provided by states.”²⁰

Beyond the wider impact of service delivery initiatives, we looked for three types of wider effects. The first comprises cases where CSOs have introduced innovative practices, tested them out in a few pilot areas, assessed their viability and then tried to replicate and scale up interventions through other partners. As mentioned earlier, the CSOs have played and play a significant role in at least three of the countries. The second category involves systematic monitoring of e.g. implementation of government programmes or the impact of budgetary decisions and the budget process (Mark Robinson, *Budget Analysis and Policy Advocacy; The Role of Non-Governmental Action*, 2006). The third category covers examples of CSOs that contribute to changing existing or developing new national policies and laws.

²⁰ Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Busan, Republic of Korea, 29 November – 1 December 2011, Para. 22. www.busanhlf4.org

The following table provides a summary of how we see the profiles of the Norwegian CSOs in the four countries.

Countries	Evidence of replication	Evidence of monitoring	Evidence of advocacy
Ethiopia	**	0	0
Malawi	*	*	**
Vietnam	*	*	0
Nepal	**	*	**

0 No evidence *Marginal evidence ** Some evidence *** Significant evidence

The Panel found that:

There are examples of all three types of wider effects, but few striking and large-scale examples. Most are clustered in the area of replication and issue-based policy advocacy - CSOs involved in preparing a new national policy on disability, child rights and HIV/AIDS (either by being members of working groups or advocating for change from the outside). However, it was often not entirely clear how much of the changes in policy were due (solely or mainly) to the Norwegian CSOs and their partners. We certainly came across more *claims by CSO representatives* of their having influenced policy than hard evidence that the changes of policy were *attributable to them*.

We found examples of innovation and replication, but the innovative profile was relatively weak. Most projects used well known approaches and technologies, and what was cited as innovation had often been tried out elsewhere rather than being a unique, new approach.

There are few examples of Norwegian CSOs and partners involved in systematic monitoring of government policies. CSOs did monitor government policies according to a looser understanding of the term, but no systematic collection of data over a period of time and formal feedback of results have occurred.²¹ However, other international CSOs, such as Action Aid, were involved in this type of monitoring.

In Ethiopia, there were no examples of CSOs monitoring the implementation of government policies, or, for that matter, publicly addressing sensitive political issues. CSOs are not allowed to pursue a rights-based approach – encouraging people and communities to claim their rights and hold the government accountable. During our field visit we found that CSOs had stopped talking about the rights of women in Ethiopia, whereas in all the other countries, the rights discourse for both women and children was very prominent. In Ethiopia, programmes were renamed “women and development”. We did find examples of CSOs taking part in developing new policies partly in less controversial areas or with a dispensation from the Government, e.g. in the area of child rights (Save the Children), peace and inter-religious dialogue (NCA) and environmental assessment (Development Fund).

21 NCA does what we here define as systematic monitoring in Tanzania. The approach used is called Public Expenditure Tracking – a model which empowers rights holders to demand services from relevant public bodies. Communities are trained to read and analyse public budgets and accounts, and to monitor the implementation of financial plans (NCA Report 03/2011: 54)

ETHIOPIA

Tackling FGM through the churches and religious organisations

Norwegian Church Aid has successfully mobilized the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches to sign declarations condemning FGM, and to use these as a basis for incorporating the issue of FGM into their programmes of religious teaching. Given the significance of religion in Ethiopia, the importance of such a commitment to the fight against FGM is immense. However, it is not yet entirely clear how far this verbal and written commitment has influenced current practices. To obtain an accurate assessment would require the development of measurable performance indicators, with progress monitored against clear baseline data.

Community-based correction programme

Forum on Sustainable Child Empowerment, a partner of Save the Children Norway, has designed a programme which diverts children in conflict with the law from the formal legal process as well as avoids detention of such children, focusing instead on informal and community-based correction approaches. The approach involves the active engagement of families and community institutions in the process of rehabilitating and reintegrating children who have committed offences. The approach, which was not formally recognized in any law in the country, has been modelled in different regions, and the government has come to realize its importance. This has led to its incorporation in the new Criminal Justice Policy.

Engaging faith groups and churches in peace building and conflict resolution

Although engagement in the area of peace building and conflict resolution is normally permitted only in the case of Ethiopian NGOs/CSOs, Norwegian Church Aid has managed to secure a special dispensation to work in this area. Thus, through the Inter-Religious Council, a local partner, NCA has been able to bring together the major faiths to work in the area of peace. This is of significance not just because of the central place religion plays in Ethiopian society, but also because this is the only effective way that emerging conflicts between members of different faiths and churches can be resolved amicably. Religious leaders also work as intermediaries in times of ethnic clashes. They have also been prominent in efforts to resolve the Ethiopia –Eritrea conflict by participating in ongoing discussions with leaders of the two countries. (Source: Panel country notes).

In Malawi, the potential for wider effects is greater. The best example of a CSO having an influence on policy is the Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA) which was directly involved in preparing a bill on disability. Additionally, the Gender Network lobbied for the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act and Wills and Inheritance Act. There are also examples of CSOs monitoring the implementation of government policies. For example, the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) monitored the enactment of the pension bill. The Economic Justice Network monitored national trade policy and lobbied for the deployment of (some) resources released as a result of the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative to fund basic services.²²

²² See http://www.cgdev.org/doc/event%20docs/4.22.04-Debt/Magalasi_comments.pdf

MALAWI

Rights of the Disabled

FEDOMA has successfully lobbied and advocated for the formulation of policy and for legislation in the area of disability. Largely as a result of these efforts, the Government now has a disability policy, and draft bill is awaiting enactment. The change came about as a result of FEDOMA studying policies in other countries and adapting them to the Malawian context. They also chaired the National Task Force that drafted the policy. Additionally, community-based rehabilitation was adopted as a national strategy. FEDOMA argues that the voice of marginalized groups, especially the disabled, is now heard. There is an increasing understanding of disability as a rights and development issue, as opposed to treating it purely as a health matter.

In 2010, FEDOMA submitted a position paper on “Mainstreaming Disability into the Millennium Development Goals” to the Ministry of Economic Planning. The Executive Director of FEDOMA was subsequently invited to a roundtable discussion on the new Malawian Growth and Development Strategy, where he advocated for the inclusion of disability issues.

The national labour movement

Malawi has had an organised labour movement from as far back as 1944, but in 1966 all unions were banned until the wave of 1994 multi-party democracy, when the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) was reborn with support from LO Norway in 1995. From a membership consisting of five unions, MCTU now has 22 affiliated unions drawn from all major economic sectors. Three approaches are used by MCTU to empower the workers, namely education, training and social dialogue. On the one hand, MCTU conducts education events for workers, employers and government representatives to improve labour conditions and to better grasp the socio-economic and political dynamics, including health and safety issues.

On the other hand, training which imparts skills and knowledge is meant to increase the rights of workers in the processes of decision making. In this regard, awareness was raised on the relevance of various International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions to the country. These include especially Convention 29, on abolition of forced labour, Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour, which ignited public debate in Malawi, and Convention 100 on equal remuneration. MCTU has helped the public to better understand the high number of children who toil as servants in many places and the extent of the problem of extreme forms of child labour. Capacity building in social dialogue, conflict management, collective bargaining, labour relations and gender has yielded positive results, including a reduction in the number of strikes. Twelve thousands labour complaints were settled by the government in 2010/2011, and peaceful demonstrations rose in number, with the number of violent confrontations falling. The Panel was informed that in earlier times, the country witnessed many strikes, but with MCTU efforts a culture of dialogue has developed. Policy influencing by MCTU is based on research, and a number of position papers have been produced on key contemporary issues such as “Chinese investment in Africa” and on pension and employment bills.

When the government drafted the pension bill, the MCTU criticised it as being seriously deficient and put forward alternatives which were accepted by the government and which have been incorporated into the labour relations act. Changes that were accepted included extending benefits to those in informal sectors as well. The MCTU monitored the implementation and impact of the pension act after it became law. Additionally, after four years of discussions, the MCTU negotiations received funding from NACC for HIV and AIDS activities at the work place after signing an agreement with the Commission in July 2010. (Source: Panel country notes).

In Vietnam, most of the examples are in the area of replication and low key advocacy.

VIETNAM

Football for All in Vietnam

FFAV is an organization that is appreciated by its partners, and that has made a positive impact in the two provinces where it is working, particularly in promoting the value of football as a means of engaging children in fun activities, as a tool for education in life skills, as a means of bringing people of diverse backgrounds together, and by demonstrating that girls can play football - and play it well. FFAV has developed and implemented a successful model for developing grassroots football in Vietnam.

Some of the lasting benefits of the FFAV programme include its promotion and engagement of girls in football. The requirement that 50% of a club's participants must be girls has resulted in a change in attitude towards the capacities and interest of women by teachers and parents, and by the girls themselves.

Discussions which the Panel had with the Ministry of Education confirmed its interest in the project and the approach adopted – in particular the strong involvement of girls, parents and teachers and the interactive, practical student-oriented learning approach encouraged by UNESCO. The Ministry has decided that it will adopt a similar approach in other provinces, and is trying to secure funding for this. Interestingly, FFAV did not seem to be aware that the Ministry had replicated FFAV's approach.

Involvement of faith-based organisations

Through its efforts, NCA has been able to achieve positive cooperation between the Government in Vietnam and faith-based groups. Especially through its work on HIV/AIDS and related to social issues, there is an increased acceptance of the involvement of faith-based organizations in these sorts of activities. This opens up a space for other types of development work, and lead to a wider impact which was not anticipated when the project began. Supporting FBOs and allowing them to be involved in issues beyond their narrow role in worship and associated religious activities, is quite a new development not only for the authorities, but also for the religious leaders in Vietnam (USAID, 2001: 7).

Gender equality and gender-based violence

NCA has also developed a number of replicable models of engagement to combat gender-based violence at the local level, for example through its approach to campaigning and the support structures established to help those affected by such violence. Its work in this area has been recognized by UN Women as one of the most successful approaches in Vietnam to prevent violence and provide tangible support to victims. There is also evidence that NCA's work has influenced legislation related to attitudes towards gender inequality, gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS, e.g. through changes to the Law on Gender Equality (No. 73/2006/QH11), the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (Law No. 02/2007/QH12), and the Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control (Law No. 64/2006/QH11). The roles of CSOs in the promulgation and passing of these laws were acknowledged by UNAIDS and several other informants.

It seems that NCA has also contributed to changing official attitudes to HIV/AIDS from a medical to a social approach and the perception of HIV/AIDS as a social evil. The Government has also become more open to the reality of homosexuality not only in the society, but especially in prisons. Homosexual relationships in prison have been acknowledged and more systematically addressed. (Source: Panel country notes).

Some of the most significant examples were found in Nepal – both in the areas of replication and policy advocacy.

NEPAL

A modest start – an amazing effect on industrial and hydro-power development

Since 1965, the BIT industrial training programme (4 years on-the-job) - established as a joint venture of United Mission to Nepal and the Government of Nepal - has given industrial education to more than 1,000 people, covering sectors like mechanical and electrical engineering, wood/furniture, biogas, hydropower and civil works. From this institution more than 200 local companies have been established. Some of them are now leading enterprises in their particular fields in Nepal, such as the Butwal Power Company, Nepal Hydro & Electric, and Himal Hydro & General Construction. Both the training programmes and the companies established have been fully run by Nepalese for years.

In the 1970 and 1980s, this triggered an integrated industrial and community development initiative that adopted a wide approach and comprised a forestry-programme, a land-reform programme as part of a major irrigation scheme, drinking water schemes, the establishment of small local enterprises, and agricultural programmes.

A further and wider effect of the Mission's involvement in the industrial and energy sector in the last twenty years has been the establishment of the Hydro Lab Pvt Ltd, set up to undertake pilot studies of intake and dam areas for hydropower projects in the Himalayan region. Another offshoot of the project has been the creation of the People, Energy and Environment Development Association (PEEDA) which is developing and promoting various pioneering activities in the energy sector.

There is also an inspirational line that can be traced from the Butwal Technical Institute to the engineering department at Kathmandu University, the only non-governmental university in Nepal.

Save the Children: Schools as Zones of Peace

Schools as Zones of Peace (SZP) is an approach that brings together education stakeholders, community members, government and political groups who agree to keep schools free from violence, political activities and discrimination. While the SZP model is not unique to Nepal, Save the Children has worked with a coalition of international and national NGOs to promote Children as Zones of Peace (CZOP) at the national and local level in Nepal since 2002. SZOP has been a central element of the campaign. The concept was introduced to schools through Save the Children's local partner organisations, working together with Village Child Protection Committees set up and supported by Save the Children.

Rights of the Disabled

Norwegian support to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Nepal has contributed to increasing the visibility and capacity of the disability movement in Nepal. This has enabled the movement to play a key role in lobbying for changes in policies that are of direct concern to people with disabilities. Service provision projects have contributed to improved physical functioning, self-reliance and social inclusion of targeted children and adults. The most noticeable result of the Norwegian contribution has been the increased capacity of local Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) to advocate for their rights and raise awareness on disability issues. This has enabled DPOs to play an important role in lobbying for the improvements observed on national policy level. Norway has been one of the most important and long term donors to the Nepali disability movement (NCG Evaluation 2011)

Blue Diamond Society

The Supreme Court in Nepal decided in 2007 that the country should enact legislation securing the rights of lesbian, gay and trans-sexual persons: all sexual minorities should be treated equally. The Government decided that all laws in the country should be scrutinised in order to remove all forms of discrimination. This action was the direct result of the work of the BDS and its Director Sunil Pant with support from their Norwegian partner (Norwegian Association for Lesbian and Gay Liberation). BDS sued the Government and won on all counts. In 2008, Sunil Pant was elected a Member of Parliament. (Sources: Panel country notes).

Coordination and aid effectiveness

Hypothesis: Coordination with other projects/donors and integration in national frameworks are weak areas.

This hypothesis is confirmed, but it was found to be at a too high level of aggregation to be useful. Consequently, different types and levels of coordination will be discussed separately. Our findings suggest it is helpful to distinguish between three types of coordination:

- (a) Coordination between international and national CSOs
- (b) Coordination between CSOs and the government
- (c) Coordination between CSOs and the embassies

The Panel found the following:

In Ethiopia, there would seem to be less and less coordination between international CSOs. The role of the Christian Relief Development Association (CRDA), an umbrella organisation, has gradually been weakened. There are examples of pan-African and national thematic networking (in areas like children, FGM, natural resource management, etc.), but there does not seem to be many of them. Networking between international and national CSOs is also forbidden by the Government in the new law. There is only loose and rather marginal formal coordination between CSOs and bilateral/multilateral donors.

The Norwegian Embassy meets with Norwegian CSOs for information sharing, but does not play any role in their strategic planning and coordination. The Embassy used to be responsible for the strategic partnership arrangements with selected Norwegian CSOs, but the funding of such partnerships has now been taken over by Norad in Oslo – reducing the cooperation with Norwegian CSOs further, even if the strategic partnerships are still negotiated at embassy level and it is the Embassy that makes the decision. In general, the aid effectiveness agenda for CSOs is poorly implemented in Ethiopia – the level of harmonisation and coordination between actors is limited.

Coordination is far stronger in Malawi. At the national level, the Council of Non-Governmental Organisations of Malawi (CONGOMA) has been in existence

since 1987 – previously with support from the Norwegian Embassy. There are several national CSO networks in existence covering different thematic areas like the Gender Coordination Network, the Human Rights Consultative Committee, the Economic Justice Network, and the Climate Change Network – some of which are supported by the Embassy and Norwegian CSOs. NCA supports for instance CISONICC (Civil Society Network on Climate Change), Child Trafficking Network, MHEN (Malawi Health Equity Network), MEJEN (Malawi Economic Justice Network) and INFO-COOP (International NGO’s Coordination group).

However, the recent tensions between CSOs and the Government have weakened several of the coordination mechanisms and national networks.

NCA and its partner the Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM) play an important implementing role within the health sector programme (training nurses and building infrastructure), but a marginal role in policy development and in the independent monitoring of the sector. It seems that one consequence of the promotion of the aid effectiveness agenda, namely creating a sector-wide approach (or SWAp), has led to a more marginalised role for civil society than was apparent before the SWAp was formed: “national ownership” in effect means “government ownership”. The capacity for technical civil society input is also limited.²³ The independent watchdog and advocacy role is also constrained by the strong emphasis still placed on implementation.²⁴

Opportunities for CSOs to engage with the Government and contribute to policy dialogue depend on their perceived credibility and legitimacy. Governments in Ethiopia and Malawi raised questions about the legitimacy of CSOs as representatives of the public interest, arguing that most CSOs and their leaders are not elected and not accountable to any constituency. We are told of examples both in Ethiopia and Malawi of politicians using CSOs as their political platform.

In Nepal, there are formal forums for coordination between international and national CSOs and also for networks. The Embassy provides targeted support to certain national CSOs and expressed concern about the high level of fragmentation in Norwegian CSO support.

23 NCA claims to link service delivery and advocacy on national health policy effectively in Malawi (NCA report 03/2011: 7), but we were not able to assess the impact of such national level advocacy.

24 A study of the role of CSOs in SWAps found that there had been an increasing involvement of CSOs in SWAps, but originally the involvement was marginal and CSOs contributions were not recognised as important. However, CSOs are mainly being invited and involved in SWAps as service providers, sub-contracted by national or district authorities (Kruse 2003).

9. Strengthening organisational capacity

International partnerships

Hypothesis: National CSOs appreciate and benefit from partnerships with Norwegian CSOs, but the added value and benefits are intangible and poorly documented.

This hypothesis is to a large extent confirmed.

The Panel found that partnership with Norwegian CSOs is highly appreciated. The relationships are characterised as flexible and friendly and they are reinforced by the manner in which Norad historically has provided long-term, predictable support. Most Norwegian CSOs are clearly more than merely providers of funds – i.e. just “donors”. Southern CSOs value their relationship with many Northern CSOs for reasons other than access to financial resources. These would include the following:

- (a) Access to support for building their own capacity
- (b) Opportunities for international exposure, networking and dialogue
- (c) Access to specific competencies and information
- (d) Bonds of solidarity
- (e) Moral and political support.

NEPAL

Save the Children Norway –how partnership is understood

Partners considered the main elements of partnership to be a shared vision and shared values, mutual trust, respect and equality. However, partners argued that inequity was inevitable in a donor/recipient relationship and, on a broader level, questions were raised about how far the principles of the Paris Declaration for harmonising donor programming with national agendas are being pursued in practice. To mitigate issues of dominant agendas, partners expressed the view that they should be actively involved in strategy development so that community views and experiences are adequately fed into the approaches adopted.

SCN had followed up very closely with partners, providing mentoring support on a regular basis, engaging them in review meetings and annual forums and providing training workshops. In earlier years, SCN made considerable investments in capacity building that were highly appreciated by partners. Most evaluations focus on the implementation of project activities and not capacity building. Hence, the effectiveness of partnerships is difficult to assess due to lack of data and unclear objectives and targets. (Source: INTRAC). 2011).

However, it is difficult to assess the more precise contribution that Norwegian CSOs bring, in part because it is poorly documented. The “added value” of Norwegian CSOs was often referred to in reports or in conversations, but the (potential or actual) “negative costs” were not sufficiently discussed. These would include: the extent to which southern CSOs are treated more as recipients of funds than as equal partners; trends towards more prescriptive donor funding; a greater emphasis on quick and demonstrable results and one-way accountability from southern to northern CSOs in contrast to the rhetoric of “mutual accountability”. The recent partnership evaluation from Save the Children Norway referred to above provides an interesting case (INTRAC 2011).

Building organisations or civil society

Hypothesis: Norwegian CSOs have helped strengthen individual organisations, but not civil society as a whole.

This hypothesis is partly confirmed. The Panel found that:

There has been an increasing focus on capacity building from Norad and Norwegian CSOs which has been translated into a broad range of often loosely-defined capacity building activities.

The dominant mode of capacity building has focused on helping individual organisations respond better to the growing demands placed on them by Norwegian CSOs and Norad in terms of reporting requirements. To the extent that this dominates the capacity building relationship, a focus on building institutional capacities will at best be eclipsed and at worst ignored entirely.

Most of the capacity building that takes place is directly linked to and forms part of wider project initiatives, and it is focused on individual organisations – the partners of Norwegian CSOs. The organisations have to a large extent an instrumental approach to capacity building: strengthening local organisations is rarely an aim in itself. It seems also that there is an increasing demand on the CSOs to deliver tangible services and less demand for capacity building – an activity which is much more difficult to measure.

This is also true in Vietnam, but for a particular reason. None of NCA projects in Vietnam have civil society strengthening as their prime objective, rather they have civil society components as part of their overall approach. One of the reasons why NCA has chosen not to be too explicit about strengthening civil society is the sensitivity of this whole issue in Vietnam.

NEPAL

Capacity building versus service delivery

In earlier years, proposals for SCN partners were tailored to SCN strategic plans and incorporated into overall budgets within agreed budget ceilings, but there was flexibility and partners were encouraged to introduce their own ideas. Partners are also concerned that annual agreements place constraints on their ability to focus on more medium term objectives.

SCN emphasised qualitative monitoring which was undertaken through case studies and interviews, in addition to the gathering of quantitative data which focused more on measurable tangible results. More recently, partners have argued that far less emphasis is now given to qualitative monitoring, in favour of head counting for service delivery through the Total Reach system. They expressed concern that the data produced tend more towards serving SCN Nepal's needs than their own. More recently, partners have expressed a concern that project proposals have become more focused on head counts for service delivery and less attention is paid to community empowerment. However, they were satisfied with the support received in M&E. (Source: Neves 2011, INTRAC).

Norwegian CSOs provided marginal support to the building of civil society as a whole, but there are important exceptions where Norwegian organisations support for instance thematic networks. It is also worth mentioning that several Norwegian CSOs have government counterparts and provide funds to government programmes, like Save the Children Norway in Ethiopia and NCA and others in Vietnam, where the CSOs often are extensions of the Party. Close government partnerships are often well justified, but do not contribute to building civil society as explicitly required in Norad's strategy.

The hypothesis was confirmed for Ethiopia. NCA's support to a national FGM network is an exception. Save the Children Norway has also provided support to national and regional networks for children.

The dominant pattern in Malawi is that of an exclusive relationship between Norwegian CSOs and their partners. The support from Norwegian CSOs to national networks is limited. It is noteworthy that national networks often receive more direct support from the Norwegian Embassy than from Norwegian CSOs.

In Nepal, the evidence was more mixed. While many capacity building initiatives certainly aimed to "build capacities" in relation to fulfilling new, different and often more onerous reporting requirements, UMN has developed a far more rounded and complete approach to capacity development: for them, enabling existing local organisations to stand on their own feet is a core aim of the partnership.

There seems to be a quite widespread and strongly-held belief that civil society will be strengthened by creating more civil society organisations. However, this is not necessarily true. Indeed the evidence from Nepal suggests that in recent years, the rise in the number of civil society organisations has taken place at a time when civil society as a whole seems to become weaker.

Results from capacity strengthening

Hypothesis: There is increased emphasis on capacity strengthening from Norad and Norwegian CSOs, but not much evidence about results.

This hypothesis is only partly confirmed. The Panel found that:

Norad and Norwegian CSOs are highly appreciative of capacity strengthening of local organisations. There are also several examples of strengthened capacity as a result of Norwegian support.

NEPAL

Save the Children Nepal and capacity building

SCN has made a significant difference to the mission, strategy, reputation and institutional growth of partners, and especially to their child rights/child participation focus. Save the Children United States (SCUS) has also helped organisations to grow, especially in terms of governance, systems development and management strengthening, while Save the Children Japan (SCJ) has catalysed capacity in technical sectors. There are numerous examples of service delivery practices where SCN has supported partners to introduce (home based) Early Childhood Development (ECD) and child-friendly schools, (child clubs). Significant achievements have also been recorded in advocacy: the adoption of the child-friendly model by the Ministry of Education; the declaration of schools as zones of peace; contributions to the formulation of the Child Rights Act; adoption of Minimum Standards for Child Care Institutions); and developing and strengthening the relationships between partners. Closer relations with the District Education and Health Offices, the All Party mechanism at District level, and with community and user's groups have been developed as a result of SCN (and latterly SC in Nepal) support (INTRAC 2011).

United Mission to Nepal and Organisational Development

The United Mission to Nepal (UMN) (supported by Himal Mission) began its work in Nepal in 1954 and was at one time the single largest employer outside the government. A fundamental change in its approach to development took place in 2000. From then on, UMN decided that if it was to make a lasting impact, it had to focus far more on helping to strengthen local organisations and focus its work more narrowly in terms of geographical reach. From then on, it decided to no longer seek to *create* local organisations, but rather focus on helping to build up and strengthen *existing* ones. It adopted a "cluster" approach, focusing on only 10 districts where it set up offices to work with already existing NGOs and some cooperatives at the local level. Thus the thrust of its work was focused mainly at the local level where it sought to help local organisations to function better, and without donor help. Nevertheless, UMN has continued to play a role in national networks, trying particularly to use the knowledge it has gained at the local level to influence and help shape national policies. It has also developed a structured tool for Partner Capacity Assessment which is used for creating a baseline, identifying needs and monitoring performance.

Usually Nepali CSOs are funded (up to 95%) from donors and INGOs. They receive funding from the government purse, which accounts for around 4%, and just a meagre contribution (0.5%) from their members. As there is a serious lack of private foundations to support local CSOs, a financial crisis often occurs with the absence of external funding. (Source: Dhalak 2007: 71).

However, several partners expressed concerns that organisational support is undervalued and not sufficiently prioritised by their Norwegian partners (Ethiopia and Nepal).

There seems to be a dominant project focus in the programme portfolios of most Norwegian CSOs. At the end of the day, it is the project results that count the most, and results from capacity building are often too imprecise to enable assessment and reporting on the results achieved.

On the positive side, more Norwegian CSOs work professionally on capacity strengthening activities. Norwegian People's Aid and the Development Fund have tools for organisational assessments which are used to target and monitor organisational growth and development.

The Panel believes that the findings from the recent Dutch study on capacity building, *Facilitating resourcefulness: Evaluation of Dutch support to capacity development* are relevant and valid also in our four case countries (IOB, 2011).

Findings from Dutch study on capacity building

Core capabilities have been strengthened for most of the southern organisations assisted.

- The extent to which positive changes in the core capabilities helped southern organisations achieve their goals remained, however, largely unclear. This is chiefly because southern organisations gather too little reliable data about their outcomes.
- For 15 of the organizations participating in the evaluation, a link was established between positive changes in their core capabilities and positive changes in their outputs. For those organisations, it is plausible to assume that positive changes in their core capabilities had an effect on their outputs.
- Donor funding was relevant to all southern organisations, both those in the public sector and non-governmental organisations. For southern non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donor funding was a vital lifeline. They are also aware that their ability to deal with dependence on external funding is of great importance.
- The Dutch Development Partners (DDPs) adopted a relatively wide variety of capacity development approaches, but the provision of (core) funding to southern organisations appears to be of great importance. Their funding covers in some cases a substantial part (from 60% to 90%) of the southern organisations' annual budgets.
- Dutch support for capacity development contributed to positive changes in core capabilities of the southern organisations. However, contextual factors and circumstances specific to the internal operation of the organisation had frequently more influence on changes in capacity than the provision of Dutch support. (Source: IOB 2011).

Financial and organisational sustainability

Hypothesis: There is weak financial and stronger organisational sustainability.

The former part of the hypothesis is confirmed – the latter only partly. The Panel found that:

The prospects for financial sustainability in Ethiopia, Malawi and Nepal are extremely weak, with only rare exceptions. Being a middle income country, the prospects for mobilising local resources in Vietnam are brighter, and we found evidence (FFAV, for example) of attempts to tap into local funding opportunities.

There is a sense amongst CSOs that the financial climate has worsened and that CSOs are increasingly vulnerable to financial funding volatility. Many CSOs, in particular in Malawi, report a difficult funding climate for civil society, with a large number of CSOs experiencing reduced levels of income. There are several reasons for such a decline – partly due to a cut in funding from international CSOs to local partners; partly because of a reduced level of direct funding from embassies; and, last but not least, partly as a result of a shift to more pooled programme funding, with several donors establishing programmes/funds to which local organisations can apply. A negative side effect is that smaller organisations don't have the capacity to prepare the documentation required to enable them to apply, putting them at a disadvantage over the larger international organisations.²⁵

It is our impression that the largest share of support from Norwegian CSOs to their partners comes in the form of earmarked project funding. More core funding might have helped build stronger organisational sustainability. There are examples of organisational support, but the project mode is dominant.

Strategic framework for partner selection

Hypothesis: The selection of partners is not systematic – it is not based on criteria for reaching the best results.

This hypothesis is to a great extent confirmed, but needs to be explained further. The Panel found that:

Most partnerships are based in some way on “like-mindedness” – meaning that Norwegian CSOs select partners based on shared thematic interests (children, environment, disability) and religious/ideological frameworks (churches, labour unions). This is as would be expected and intended. However, the implications are that while certain parts of civil society are included in the support given, a range of traditional and especially more informal organisations are excluded, even if this is unintended.²⁶

²⁵ There are also examples where contracts are awarded to consulting firms and/or international CSOs.

²⁶ Most of the literature on civil society focuses mainly on NGOs and sometimes even uses the terms 'NGOs' and 'civil society' interchangeably. It has been argued that “there is a strong tendency for NGOs to simply divorce themselves from civil society in practice while at the same time ... ‘monopolizing’ civil society, diverting attention from other associations” (Stiles, 2002, 840). This is why it is worth noting that civil society includes not only NGOs, but also faith-based organisations, religious communities, informal groups, cooperatives, recreational and cultural organisations as well as academic circles and the media.

This unintended effect is well described in the recent CIVICUS report as “a noticeable disconnect between civil society organisations and the increasing number of citizens involved in both new and traditional form of activism. “Time and again we see the strongest level of involvement and associations in religious, cultural and sporting structures. This is interesting because such types of organisation and forms of association do not always show up strongly on the radar of those analysing or seeking to support the civil society sector” (CIVICUS 2011: 46-47).

In other words, there is no strategic framework for Norwegian civil society support to any of the four case-study countries (and almost certainly none for most of the others, either) – nor any assessment of needs and opportunities that would form the basis for making strategic choices aimed at securing an optimal impact. On the contrary, the civil society portfolio is highly fragmented between different Norwegian CSOs and between the CSOs and the embassies. The whole is the sum of all the independent and often isolated parts.

PART C: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT RESULTS FROM THE WIDER LITERATURE?

The purpose of Part C is to place the work of the Civil Society Panel in a wider context by providing a synthesis of “what we know about results, based on existing studies and evaluations” from Norway and internationally. The focus of this discussion is on the more recent literature, but Section 10 places this in context by providing a very brief overview of the older literature; the remainder focuses on more recent studies and evaluations. Section 11 surveys the recent literature on capacity building and institutional strengthening of civil society. It then goes on to highlight what the literature tells us about civil society’s contribution to development outcomes. It ends by highlighting key gaps in the literature. Section 12 discusses the challenges involved in trying to assess the contribution that different agencies and groups of agencies make to wider development outcomes and how these challenges are being addressed. Section 13 sums up the discussion by highlighting the key lessons from recent literature for the work of the Civil Society Panel.

10. Brief historical contextual background

It is only in the past few decades that attention has been focused on the impact of development interventions made by Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and Civil Society Organisation (CSO). However, as with official aid, the first wave of studies examined the impact of individual discrete projects, especially the relationship between the aid inputs provided and the more immediate outputs, using project-specific data to try to draw out sketchy implications concerning wider impact.

Many of these early studies (undertaken from the mid-1980s onwards) were commissioned by donor agencies,²⁷ which may explain in part why most CSOs were initially quite sceptical about the benefits of undertaking in-depth impact assessments of their projects. In successive “country evaluations” of development activities, evaluators have remained largely reluctant to use this project-based evidence to draw wider conclusions about the overall impact of development interventions at the country level.²⁸

Increasingly over the last 10 to 15 years, however, more and more CSOs and in particular the larger ones have seen the value of evaluating and assessing the impact of their work. Most are now undertaking their own evaluations, with the larger ones using external evaluators as well. Although this has led to an explosion of impact assessments, the work has continued to be dominated by evaluation and assessment at the project level, with lively debate on the best methods and

²⁷ See Riddell et al. (1997) for a synthesis of these early studies.

²⁸ See Oakley and Folke (1999a and 1999b) and the most recent Norad NGO impact evaluation, Ternström Consulting AB (2011).

approaches and continuing recognition that the data typically remain inadequate for in-depth evaluations to be undertaken and robust conclusions to be drawn.

These impact assessments are still largely output-focused, and even recent “country studies” largely comprise assessments of individual projects or clusters of projects, with evaluators reluctant to draw firm conclusions about wider or longer-term impact or the relationship between aid input and broader outcomes. At the same time, increasing attention is being given to examining the impact of activities beyond the project, trying to assess the impact of the lobbying, advocacy, campaigning, policy and general influencing work of CSOs. These assessments, too, have tended to focus on discrete interventions and have not been used to make judgements about the wider or longer-term impact of these types of interventions.²⁹

Other important changes have been occurring, not least in the literature on the nature of the discourse about CSOs and development. These changes have profound implications for how one judges the impact of CSOs and the activities they support or promote. Thus, firstly, it has become quite common in recent years to talk about the role and impact of *Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)* in development, and of civil society more generally. For some, the term CSO has replaced the term NGO, though for many, the words NGO and CSO are used interchangeably.³⁰ Secondly and related to this, contemporary development discourse speaks of the importance of “strengthening civil society”. This, in turn, has led to a massive increase in the funds northern agencies channel to southern agencies for the immediate purpose of building and strengthening the capacities and capabilities of CSOs in the South. But for what precise purpose? – This is a crucial question when assessing impact.

It has also been increasingly recognised that the effectiveness of NGO development work would be enhanced by improving the capacity and capabilities of the CSOs that implement projects and programmes. If this was the only or core purpose in strengthening southern agencies, then a key way to assess the impact of such activities would be to examine the difference this investment has made to the overall impact of the work of such agencies.

However, a growing number of development actors would now argue that there is intrinsic merit in having a strong civil society even if no necessary, clear and direct link may be traced between a stronger civil society and a discernible, short-term and measurable impact on development and poverty reduction. In short, having a stronger civil society is in many respects seen as an end in itself rather than as the means to another end (development). From this perspective, assessing the direct impact which civil society strengthening will have on development and poverty reduction, matters less than assessing whether or not civil society has been strengthened “as a whole”.

29 For an overview of these developments, see Riddell (2007), Riddell (2008: 259-324) and Riddell et al.(2008).

30 The dominant view in the literature is that the term CSO encompasses a wider group of organisations than the traditional NGOs. See, for instance, Van Rooy (1998) and Edwards (2004).

Against this backdrop, the next Section provides an overview of what recent studies tell us about the wider development impact of NGOs and CSOs.

11. What recent literature says about wider and long-term effects

Norad evaluations focusing on project results

- Norad Evaluation Study 1/2005, “Study of the Impact of the Work of FORUT in Sri Lanka and Save the Children Norway in Ethiopia. Building Civil Society”.
- Norad Evaluation Study 2/2007, “Development Cooperation Through Norwegian NGOs in South America”.
- Norad Evaluation Report 5/2007, “Evaluation of the Development Cooperation through Norwegian NGOs in Guatemala”.
- Norad Evaluation Report 3/2009, “Evaluation of Norwegian Development Cooperation through Norwegian NGOs in Northern Uganda (2003-2009).”
- Norad Evaluation Report 1/2011, “Results of Development Cooperation through Norwegian NGOs in East Africa”, Volume 1 and 2.

Norad has commissioned five independent evaluations of CSO projects and programmes between 2005 and 2011:

Two of the reports have a regional focus (East Africa and South America), while three examined the work of Norwegian CSOs in selected countries or parts of countries: Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Guatemala and Northern Uganda. All the reports, except the study of the impact of the work of FORUT in Sri Lanka and Save the Children in Ethiopia, have a focus on projects and do not encompass what we have defined as “wider effects”.

The FORUT and Save the Children Norway (SCN) report is exceptional in that it examines “how Norwegian CSOs contribute to strengthening civil society, along the lines set out in the Norwegian guidelines for support to civil society organisations”. The study assesses the impact of the work of these two CSOs and their partners in three areas in which CSOs are believed to be in a position to make a contribution: good governance and democratisation, respects for human rights and poverty reduction.

The conclusions are quite cautious: more focused and strategic capacity building is needed if CSOs are to function as change agents for a stronger civil society; the programmes had a positive impact on households in terms of income-related poverty, but the contributions were too small to enable people to escape the poverty trap. However, the study also judged that FORUT and SCN have contributed to good governance primarily through direct collaboration with government agencies, leading them to adopt new policies and practices.

The evaluation of 15 projects in East Africa is overwhelmingly positive. “We assess that the projects achieved their intended key results to a high - or very high – extent (achieving 73-85% of intended results, depending upon the

One of the findings of the work in Ghana is that participants perceived projects to have a bigger impact ‘Now’ (today) than they did ‘Then’ (the first year a project came). Often the reason cited for this was that ‘Now’ projects have grown or matured and are impacting more people – a positive sign for project sustainability. Of note, too, agencies generally perceived projects in a similar way to the participants (Bymolt, 2010: 155).

The EC’s 2008 Evaluation of EC Aid Delivery through Civil Society Organisations is of importance to the discussion of wider impact for three reasons.³⁴

- Firstly, because it draws attention to the EC’s decision to provide assistance to CSOs not only as a channel of development but as an end in itself.³⁵
- Secondly, because the Commission remains unclear on precisely how CSOs “add value” and so there is no clear objective against which to assess impact.
- And thirdly, because in practice, the EC’s approach to CSO support is inconsistent: providing assistance to further their narrow objectives as service deliverers still dominates interaction (Bossuyt, Madrid *et al.* 2008: i-v.)

This last issue is referred to in other studies as a problem of wider relevance. For instance, a 2010 study for the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) sees tensions “between the priorities of the aid effectiveness agenda and the desire to foster and support a diverse and vibrant civil society in the South” (Giffen and Judge, 2010: iii).

Strengthening Civil Society

Over the last 10 years, strengthening civil society has become a dominant feature of relationships between northern and southern CSOs and of the growing support that different official agencies give to CSOs.³⁶

Against this backdrop, the first key question is what the literature tells us about the outcomes of efforts to strengthen civil society. In short, has civil society been strengthened?

Strengthening civil society is generally assumed to be achieved by strengthening civil society *organisations*, through building their capacities to achieve their objectives more effectively, as well as by expanding their *numbers* (see below for challenges to this assumption). As a result, much of the literature on civil society strengthening focuses on the issues surrounding capacity development. Box C.1 summarises key findings from the literature on efforts to strengthen civil society.

34 Confusingly, this study does not appear on the DAC evaluation database under all evaluations of the sector listed under the heading “Civil society and NGOs”, though it does appear under the list of EC evaluations.

35 This is by no means unique to the EC. An example from Sweden: From 2004, the whole approach of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to the support given to civil society organisations has been based on the notion that regardless of the primary aim of specific interventions it funds, every programme of cooperation with NGOs and CSOs needs also to be viewed in relation to “the development of a vibrant and democratic civil society in which people have the opportunity to act together in order to influence the development of society and/or improve their living conditions” (Sida, 2004: 6) See also Sida (2007).

36 For example “almost every (UNDP) country office engages in capacity development activities...” (UNDR 2009: 6), while more than 90 per cent of international NGOs engage in some form of capacity building, allocating as much as one third of programme funds to such efforts (Hailey and James, 2006:1)

Box C.1 Efforts to strengthen civil society – key findings from the literature

- Studies confirm that CSOs acknowledge that their ability to influence development processes is inhibited by weaknesses in their organisations and their capacity to work more effectively (see Court et al 2006: 37 and Pereira, 2011: 4).
- Far more effort has been focused on undertaking capacity development as a means of strengthening civil society than on assessing the impact of what has been done, though growth in the literature that examines what has happened, indicates that more northern CSOs and northern agencies are placing more emphasis on assessment now than they did even in the recent past. One problem has been the lack of a clear methodology for making assessments: the recent study by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IOB) argues the assessment is “to a large degree, unexplored territory” (IOB, 2011: 121).
- The evidence shows that undertaking capacity development is a complex affair – probably far more complex than many of those undertaking it, have sufficiently realised (IOB, 2011: 32-4). As a result, “civil society strengthening” has become an umbrella term which encompasses a range of different activities – from skills training and organisational strengthening aimed at helping an agency, to achieve its core purpose more effectively, to facilitating the creation of more CSOs.
- Not surprisingly, therefore, studies suggest that efforts to build capacities have had a mixed impact: some appear to have been successful (see Borchgrevink et al., 2007: 33), though one study warns that some capacity development successes may have been due as much or more to external factors than to the specific initiatives of those trying to build capacities (IOB, 2011:17). On the other hand, many initiatives to build capacities and strengthen CSOs have fallen well short of what was hoped for, with sustainability of outcomes being a major challenge: “CSOs often struggle to retain existing capacities” (Baser et al., 2011: 10). The studies point to a range of factors which influence effectiveness. These range from the country context, the nature of civil society (whether CSOs are new or well-established), the extent to which the CSOs have articulated specific needs they wish to have addressed, the design of programmes, the skills of those undertaking the institutional strengthening and the funds available.
- Related to this, some evidence suggests that as civil society strengthening efforts have often been focused on particular groups of CSOs and not on others. Official donors, for instance, have tended to channel support to traditional NGOs (Bossuyt, Madrid et al. 2008: 24) and to those involved in efforts to extend and deepen democratic processes. This has resulted in a “re-shaping” of civil society and, in some cases, to the further marginalisation of particular types or clusters of CSOs. In the case of Moldova, rural-based CSOs seem to have been adversely affected (Dawidson and Öbrand, 2007: 47ff). However, other studies have judged this not to have been a problem (see Borchgrevink et al., 2007:34-5 for Guatemala).
- Civil society strengthening has focused overwhelmingly on strengthening civil society *organisations*, whereas “civil society” is far bigger than the aggregate number of more formal CSOs. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that some of the key effects that civil society has had on development policies, and hence on development outcomes, have come from informal or loosely-linked citizens’ networks (see CIVICUS, 2011: 5 and Lavalle et al., 2005).
- Civil society strengthening and capacity building need to be undertaken and planned more within a system perspective, adopting a long-term approach with careful discussion and coordination between the different partners, rather than single one-off and ad hoc efforts (Court et al 2006: 39 and IOB, 2011).
- Finally, a dominant theme in the wider literature suggests that efforts to build capacities and strengthen public sector institutions in poor countries have been marked more by failure than by success, both in general and at the sector level (Berg, 2000:3), with sustainability of impact being particularly problematic (DAC-OECD, 2006 and Baser et al. 2011).³ Thus, one needs to be cautious about expecting far-reaching and sustainable outcomes from CSO strengthening efforts. However, it has also been suggested that one of the characteristics of CSO approaches to capacity development which has been clearly identified as a strength, has been the development of customised, endogenous and specific approaches rather than the blunt, one-size-fits-all approach more common with official aid initiatives (Watson, 2006)

The wider contribution that civil society makes to development

The second key question about civil society concerns the influence it has on broader development outcomes. Has civil society more broadly, and have individual CSOs or groups of CSOs more specifically, had a notable impact on development beyond the immediate project level? If so, what factors have contributed to these outcomes, or if not, what have been the main reasons?

The first thing to say is that there is a growing literature which is beginning to provide answers to these questions – itself a notable advance compared to five to 10 years ago. It is clearly not possible in the space of a few pages to provide detailed answers to these questions. What can be done is to summarise some of the major issues emerging from this literature, especially those which point to more general answers to these questions. The following eight issues would appear to be particularly important.

1. There are numerous examples of particular CSO interventions that have achieved their immediate objectives. However, there are also plenty of examples of initiatives which have had very little impact. Recent evidence probably contains more examples of success than failure, though one study suggests that successes at the individual project level mask major concerns about the systemic impact and sustainability of donor-funded interventions (Bossuyt, Madrid *et al.* 2008: iv and Dawidson and Öbrand, 2007: iv). Additionally, the preference for good news will have influenced the way some documentation was gathered. The current literature certainly cannot be considered to be a representative sample.³⁷

An important conclusion to draw from this evidence is that successes and failures are critically related both to the external “setting” and to the country context (Paffenholz, 2009: 3), as well as to the capacities and competencies of the CSOs (Court, *et al.* 2006: 37-8). Thus, what works in one setting will not necessarily work in another, and, equally, the fact that a CSO activity has not worked in a particular country at a particular time does not necessarily mean that it will not work in the same country at a later date. The recent Dutch study was not able to find evidence that capacity-building, even if successful, had been the cause of any marked increase in the CSOs’ ability to deliver on their development objectives (IOB, 2011: 15-6).

2. The wider literature informs the debate on the expectations we might have for the wider impact of CSO activities. Development is not only a complex process, but the nature of this complexity cautions one against expecting change to occur in a steady incremental and linear fashion and against judging projects solely on this basis: some areas progress, while others lag (Dawidson and Öbrand (2007: 27). Indeed, the process of permanently lifting people out of poverty is not an instantaneous quick-fix. Permanent positive

³⁷ The studies prepared for the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness by the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness (AG-CS) provides a rich source of individual examples: Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness Case Book and the Exploration of Experience and Good Practice paper (Taylor-Meehan, Wood and Lavergne, 2008 and Wood and Lavergne, 2008).

change is not only likely to take a while - “real impacts may be detectable only years after a programme has ended” (IOB, 2011: 48), but projects and programmes are likely to suffer reversals, or to set in motion impact trajectories that either show no major short-term change, or (not uncommonly) reveal things getting worse before they get better.³⁸ As noted above, the Dutch PADev study suggests that impacts tend to be greater over time than they were when the projects were first started (Bymolt, 2010: 155).

3. Related to this, the literature suggests that when CSOs engage in efforts to shape and influence development processes or to change policies, it is critically important for them to have or to develop a *theory of change* to contextualise their plans. The literature suggests that a number of official donor agencies are now demanding that NGOs/CSOs in receipt of their aid funds provide such an analysis – among them the Dutch and Norwegians³⁹ - and that failures and weaknesses have been due, in part, to an absence of such an analysis (see Nordic Consulting Group, 2009: 11). The four case studies provide fresh evidence which will help assess the extent to which this new directive is being followed and with what result.
4. A number of factors often feature as those contributing to success. They include:
 - The overall attitude to civil society and the space that governments give to civil society and its activities, which are often volatile and contested (CIVICUS, 2011:16);
 - *Networking* and forming *coalitions* with other agencies (Court *et al.* 2006: 37-8; CIVICUS, 2011: 35 and Cox, 2011:4);
 - Having the *necessary skill set and resources* to pursue the organisation’s key goals (Kruse, 2004: iii and Cox, 2011: 5);
 - Having a better *understanding of political processes* (Court *et al.* 2006: 17).

Conversely, studies suggest that in many countries and contexts, the influence and wider impact of CSOs in helping to alter the path of development and accelerate the development process, could be far greater if CSOs focused more on addressing the key factors which currently reduce their effectiveness (Court *et al.* 2006: 1).

5. The evidence strongly suggests that CSOs have had greater success in achieving tangible gains in relation to social issues than they have in relation to key policy issues (Bossuyt, Madrid *et al.* 2008: 34, and Kruse, 2004: iii). Indeed, one recent influential study stated that in the policy arena “failure seems more common than success”, notwithstanding a huge amount of activity in this area, especially at the national level (CIVICUS, 2011: 36-9). Another (though older) study stated that “few civil society organisations

³⁸ These issues are discussed more fully in Woolcock (2009).

³⁹ Inter alia, the Principles for Norad’s Support to Civil Society in the South stipulate that “Norwegian organisations will have to increase their knowledge about how they may best contribute towards altering power relations, politics and achieve economic redistribution benefiting poor people” and that poverty analyses should be undertaken which “must show who the poor are, why they are poor and how they can escape poverty. There is a strong need for analyses that explain why and how poverty is being created and upheld” (Norad, 2009: 10 and 12).

(have) achieved significant policy impact” (Robinson, and Freeman, 2005: 39). Nonetheless, the fact that CSOs are now “round the table”, actively engaged in policy discussions in many countries, should be viewed as an advance compared to the situation some five to ten years ago (see Kruse, 2004) with some successes recorded in influencing policy debate (de Renzio, 2007), and some weaknesses in terms of monitoring government programmes (Kruse, 2004: v).

Additionally, there is evidence of CSO successes in the policy arena (Borchgrevink *et al.*, 2007: 36) as well as NGO successes in politically difficult contexts (Court *et al.* 2006: 17) However, one study suggests that to have a lasting effect on the poor, CSOs need to engage (effectively) in advocacy, policy change and service provision (Ibrahim and Hulme, 2010: 21), in many ways confirming the view of the Norad evaluation of the impact of Norwegian NGOs in Guatemala, which suggested “limited outcomes in terms of economic development” (Borchgrevink *et al.*, 2007: 40).

6. The evidence from some studies questions the widespread belief that a stronger civil society is necessarily “good for democracy” and that democracy in turn is “good for development”. One study suggests that it is crucial to examine the context to understand the potential effect CSOs and NGOs can have (Mercer, 2002), another that a too strong civil society could hinder the development of (legitimate) political parties (Braathen *et al.* 2007: 48). A recent meta-analysis of the evidence suggests that there is only a positive and direct link between greater democracy and faster development in eight out of 21 studies (Horner, 2008:1). One practical problem is that in spite of high donor expectations for the CSOs’ potential to promote democratisation, there is still no consensus on the precise role that civil society is expected to play in strengthening democracy (Robinson and Freedman, 2005:2). However, one study suggests that priority should be given to building voice and freedoms (Horner, 2011: 13), while another points to success in the narrow area of democratisation, human rights and participation (Borchgrevink *et al.*, 2007: 40).
7. The evidence from some recent studies supports the general view that CSOs have a particularly good chance of exerting influence in post-conflict societies and in peace-building efforts (Bossuyt, Madrid *et al.* 2008: 36-74, and Ulleberg, 2009:32). However, other studies suggest a more mixed and nuanced view. For instance, the findings of a recent three-year analysis of national excluding INSOs CSOs in peace-building activities (with 13 case studies) concluded that while funding was channelled to CSOs largely to undertake social cohesion activities, these were far less effective than and less relevant than other activities such as protection, monitoring, advocacy and facilitation (Paffenholz, 2009: 2).
8. Recent literature provides ample evidence to confirm that NGOs and CSOs continue to play an important development role in piloting innovation through projects which, once they been found successful, are taken up and

replicated by others (often governments, but sometimes other CSOs), leading to their wider impact (Wood and Lavergne, 2008 provide numerous examples). However, the recent literature also provides evidence of a failure to replicate or scale-up projects that could have had a wider impact (Ternström Consulting AB, 20011: 93). A key difficulty is that there is insufficient evidence to understand precisely what has been the wider impact of innovative CSO projects at the country level. Recent studies have simply not addressed this question.

Gaps in the wider literature

Many of the recent studies and nearly all the larger ones which have focused in some way on the CSOs' wider impact on development, have been undertaken by northern and donor agencies, most often to try to assess the impact of their activities. This is important, as it helps explain why a number of key questions for trying to understand the wider and overall impact of CSOs have either not been examined in the recent literature or have not been very prominent in the analysis undertaken and the ensuing discussion.

The purpose of this section is to highlight some of these under-researched areas. Attention is drawn to four areas in particular.

Firstly, as noted above, it does not appear that there have been any recent standalone country studies which have tried to assess the overall impact and influence of CSOs, or civil society more generally, on development and poverty reduction. While the recent literature certainly has both deepened and extended our understanding of some of the wider impact of CSOs in the overall development process and the influence CSOs have had, they fall consistently short of providing a complete picture even when taken together.

- We know the most about interaction between northern and southern CSOs and about southern CSOs funded by donor agencies. We know far less about the influence of national CSOs with few links to northern CSOs and donor agencies, about smaller and locally-based initiatives and their overall impact and influence on wider development processes and outcomes, and hence we also know little about the relative importance of these different groups of CSOs to overall development outcomes.
- Similarly, while we know far more now than we did a few years ago about the strengthening of particular CSOs, there remain large gaps in our understanding of precisely how such strengthening has contributed to development outcomes.
- Norway has commissioned a range of important studies which have begun to look at the role that Norwegian CSOs have played in contributing to our understanding of how CSOs in particular countries and regions are contributing to wider development outcomes, but key questions remain. For example: without placing the role of Norwegian CSOs and NGOs in a wider context, we do not know enough about how well the Norwegian contribution addresses the key overall constraints that CSOs have.

Secondly, and related to this, the recent wider literature on development highlights the importance for poverty reduction of working at the local level, with specific marginalised and vulnerable groups, including the disabled, and working at both the national and local levels in engaging with the issue of inequalities.⁴⁰

- Thus, a key question that needs to be addressed when assessing the wider CSO impact on development processes and outcomes, concerns the priorities that CSOs give to these issues and what impact they have had. While the recent literature certainly provides examples of CSO projects that work with, and try to raise the profile of, different marginal and vulnerable groups, there is very little discussion about the wider impact of CSOs in these key areas beyond the issue of gender (which has been covered in some depth).

The *third* under-researched area relates to the systemic problems that arise, especially when there is an increase in the number of agencies undertaking development activities, in particular when they are working in similar or overlapping areas and with the same communities in the same localities. Since at least the mid-1990s and most notably since the signing of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, the discourse on official aid has been dominated (some would argue overwhelmed) by the recognition that the overall impact of official aid has been significantly reduced because of a range of key systemic problems: too many donors, too many projects, the work of individual agencies insufficiently harmonised or uncoordinated, and insufficiently aligned to and integrated with host country development strategies.

- There is a lot of partial evidence to suggest that a number of the systemic problems and inefficiencies of official aid are increasingly being mirrored in the fast-expanding world of private anti-poverty organisations and projects working at the grassroots, including CSOs and NGOs. There are probably too many agencies providing the same or similar goods, services and advice, often operating in an uncoordinated fashion, not sufficiently in touch with the parallel work of line ministries and not infrequently undermining their work by drawing key personnel away from government to work for their projects, as they usually pay higher salaries than those paid in line ministries. Likewise, CSO policy, advocacy and lobbying work is often undertaken by many similar organisations, all requiring similar skills and support structures, resulting in a duplication or overlap of initiatives. To better understand the overall impact of CSOs in the development process at the country level, it is necessary to examine these systemic effects. To date, there is little evidence in the wider literature that such issues are being investigated.

Fourthly, the early literature on NGOs gave prominence to the overall contribution that NGOs and CSOs have made to the service delivery dimensions of development: in many poor countries, NGOs have historically been responsible for providing ten per cent or more of the nation's health and education services; in some of the poorest countries, such as Haiti, in excess of 50% and in Zambia close to 40%.

⁴⁰ See the work emanating from the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) <http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk/index.shtml>, including Stewart (2003).

In Bangladesh alone, one NGO has provided basic curative and preventive health services to 97 million people (nearly 70% of the total population) (Riddell, 2008:259). In many countries, the wider influence of NGOs is even greater than these statistics would suggest, because people often prefer to access services provided by CSOs rather than the state because they are perceived to be of a higher quality (Riddell, 2007: 8). In the last ten years, the closer alignment of aid to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has seen a significant expansion of projects focused on meeting immediate basic needs and expanding access to key services (health, education, water and sanitation). This, in turn, has resulted in an expansion of the role of NGOs and CSOs in service delivery projects, and an increase in NGOs/CSOs acting as implementers of official aid projects and programmes. Against this backdrop, it is surprising that the recent literature on CSOs has given very little prominence to this growing wider impact of CSOs in development. As more and more aid for CSOs has been channelled into service delivery projects, the priority has been to try to provide more and more robust evidence to show that this aid “works”. The result is that the literature on service delivery is dominated by a debate on the merits of different methods for assessing the impact of discrete CSO interventions, and which types of interventions are likely to be more cost-effective. Notably absent have been assessments of the overall impact on development efforts nationwide or at the sector or sub-sector level, and the contribution of the increasing number of people assisted by NGO/CSO-led or managed development interventions in different sectors or for different groups of poor, vulnerable and marginalised people.

12. Methodological challenges

An accurate assessment of the wider impact of the contribution made by CSOs and civil society more generally to development outcomes, depends critically upon two related factors:

- The quality and reliability of the data which assessments will be based on
- The robustness of the methods used.

There are major challenges on both counts. The recent wider literature draws attention to major data problems. A long-standing concern about how to accurately assess the impact of discrete CSO and NGO projects has been the combined effect of common weaknesses: a lack of clarity concerning the precise objectives of projects and how they might best be assessed; poor or non-existent base-line data; inadequate monitoring and project completion reports; the low priority given to assessment and the related problems of inadequate in-house skills (Riddell *et al.*, 1997). These concerns persist. For example, one of the key conclusions of the recent Norad evaluation of NGOs in East Africa was that “most projects lacked the data and information required to be able to measure changes in indicators for key results accurately” (Ternström Consulting AB, 2011: xvii, 50-66 and 76-7). As the wider impact of CSOs in part is based on extrapolating outwards from project impact data, this remains a fundamental problem for understanding the wider impact of CSO development efforts. All too

often, attention is focused on what evaluations tell us, while far less attention is given to assessing the quality of the methods used to draw these conclusions. “Evidence” ought to be treated with scepticism – arguably even discounted entirely - unless one is sure that the methods used are robust enough to guarantee that sound conclusions can be drawn.

A related problem is that assessments of the wider impact of CSO development activities require not merely information on inputs and outputs, but also information on outcomes and the relationship between these. Poor quality data comprise major and recurrent problems that are highlighted in the recent wider literature. For example, the recent Dutch study on capacity development noted that because organisations gathered insufficient data and information on outcomes, it was impossible to judge whether capacity building initiatives had resulted in attainment of core organisational goals (IOB, 2011: 15-6) - a fundamental weakness. Similarly, the large 2008 EC CSO evaluation discussed above concluded that the lack of data made it difficult to assess impact beyond the project level (Bossuyt, Madrid et. al., 2008:32).

Weak data add to other methodological challenges that face those trying to assess the link between CSO activities and wider development outcomes. The evaluation of discrete NGO and CSO projects faces challenges in trying to judge to what extent the outcomes achieved can be attributed to the project, when a range of other external factors also are likely to have influenced outcomes. It is possible, however, to address many of these challenges through a range of different methods, including in-depth evaluations and Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs). The CSO sector is currently awash with debates and discussion about what methods to use and how appropriate and costly they are (see Woolcock, 2009 and Karlan, 2009).

In trying to assess the contribution of CSO interventions to *wider and long-term* development outcomes, attribution problems abound and escalate, as the number of factors that could potentially influence development outcomes increases, and it becomes more and more difficult to trace the causal relationship between the CSO contribution and the development outcomes. It also becomes increasingly difficult to develop a robust “counterfactual” in order to assess what might have happened to development paths in the absence of CSOs. These problems tend to rule out some of the rigorous methods that can be applied to project assessment.⁴¹ These kinds of methodological challenges are so great that the recent Norad evaluation of Guatemala stated that because:

“National outcomes are the results of a number of different factors... it is methodologically impossible to single out what is the specific contribution of one factor, such as Norwegian NGOs. Thus the aim of the analysis must

41 In particular, as their advocates are themselves ready to acknowledge, randomised impact evaluations are not suitable for a wide range of activities that development agencies are engaged in, including national programmes, policy advice, technical assistance, institutional development or direct budget support (See, for instance Duflo (2003). More generally, a range of new methods is being piloted, but these are almost entirely project or (at best) sector-focused (see Tuan, 2009).

be more modest... (merely) to show the direction of change to which Norwegian support is contributing” (Borchgrevink et al., 2007: 28).

Methods being used or considered

The difficulty in drawing firm connections between aid input, policy input, campaigns and lobbying on the one hand and monitoring activities and wider outcomes on the other, is an issue that faces not only CSOs, but official aid agencies and governments more generally. One method that is being used to assess wider outcomes is *contribution analysis* – see Box C.2 below.

Box C.2 Contribution analysis

Contribution analysis does not try to quantify with precision the influences of a range of different factors which contribute to outcomes. Rather, it seeks to use careful and logical analysis to draw up hypotheses of causality, to make and test judgements about the importance (and strength) of these different influences in an iterative process, to draw “plausible associations” between the aid input and the wider outcomes and (eventually, or until over-ridden by new data and information) to draw firm conclusions. There is no presumption of providing proof of these relationships. In many ways, contribution analysis attempts to bring the rigour of log-frame analysis and approaches to the wider development setting.

- Contribution analysis comprises six steps:
- developing the results chain (the programme’s logic);
- assessing the existing evidence on results;
- assembling different alternative explanations;
- assembling the performance story;
- seeking out additional evidence; and
- revising and strengthening the performance narrative

Source: Mayne, 2004 and Kotvojos, 2006.

This type of approach to assessing wider development outcomes has informed some of the discussion and methods used for assessments of the wider and longer-term impact of CSOs. It has influenced, for example, the “results chain” approach which was used in the recent Danida evaluation (Nordic Consulting Group (2009). Here, the different processes to be assessed were divided into a “results chain” in which the bottom level of the results chain was an assessment of the understanding of the ‘enabling environment’; the second level, an enhancement of ‘capacities’; the third level, an assessment of ‘channels of intervention’; the fourth level, an assessment of ‘changes in policy, practice, behaviour and power relations’; and the highest level, the contribution to ‘broader development outcomes’ (p. 7). It has also informed the approach Oxfam has been piloting to attempt to identify the causal processes linking different interventions and eventual outcomes. Like contribution analysis, this approach involves considering, specifying, and documenting what kinds of evidence, if found, would either validate or exclude each of these alternative explanations (Hughes and Hutchings, 2011: 7-8).

However, the recent literature also includes methods and approaches which are far simpler. For example, the ongoing Dutch PADev research study for assessing

longer-term impact through intensive three-day workshops was discussed above. Likewise, the recent Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation (Sadev) evaluation of CSOs in Moldova was able to produce a range of valuable insights into broad development outcomes using a mix of documentation reviews, targeted questionnaires and in-depth interviews with a range of groups and individuals, both within and external to the "world" of CSOs, using triangulation techniques to verify assessments made and conclusions drawn, including resolving conflicting assessments (Dawidson and Öbrand, 2007: 4). This relatively "light-touch" approach resulted in an extremely rich and insightful study. Similarly, a mix of interviews, document reviews, surveys, focus groups, participatory exercises, policy mapping, stakeholder analysis and the triangulation of the draft findings was used in a widely-cited ODI study on the effectiveness of CSO interventions (see Court *et al.*, 2006: 30).

It is clear that the search for a useful and robust way of assessing the wider impact of CSO development interventions not only remains an ongoing process; it is still in its infancy.

ANNEXES

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Mandate

1. Background

For more than 50 years, the Norwegian Government has collaborated with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in development cooperation. Since the 1990s it has remained stable at around 22-25% of the total Norwegian ODA. In 2010 Norad's Civil Society Department channelled 1,233 billion NOK to around 100 Norwegian development CSOs and their national partners in 74 countries.

Numerous evaluations, reviews and reports show that important results are achieved at project level. However, there is a knowledge gap when it comes to the long-term impact. To what extent are there any aggregate effects at local and national level as a result of CSO interventions? Have the Norwegian CSOs catalysed and supported any societal changes? And is it possible to say something about the overall value of providing so much support through Norwegian CSOs?

Lack of data, intangible goals, and problems of attribution are some of the constraints in answering questions about the wider effects. But despite the challenges, it is possible to gather more and better information about this than what we have today.

2. Purpose

The purpose of establishing a Civil Society Panel is to contribute to the building of more and better knowledge about results, and to break new ground in how to deal with aggregated effects of CSO interventions. A composition of participants from the North and South with in-depth knowledge and experience with and from CSOs is instrumental for achieving this.

The Panel's work is not meant to replace the need for more and better research or evaluations, but based on the mandate and the joint insights and experiences of the members it should provide a broader perspective than what is usually the case and thereby fill some gaps of information. The process itself and as well as the final report should draw attention to the broader questions that research and evaluation seldom deal with, and thereby create more interest around impact and how CSO actors and donors like Norad better can address these questions and provide better answers to the general public about how development aid works. It will also provide guidance for future focus in the quest for results in development cooperation.

3. Scope

The Panel shall provide an informed opinion and judgement about Norwegian CSO performance based on their insights and experience, careful review of available materials and selected case studies.

The Panel shall perform the following tasks:

- (a) Synthesise what we know about results based on existing studies and evaluations and identify gaps in data and information.
- (b) Explore and discuss the wider effects of Norwegian civil society interventions in four countries and prepare the ground for further studies.
- (c) Strengthen the awareness and interest about results and impact of civil society.
- (d) Provide recommendations to Norad and the CSOs for how to collect more and better information.

Norwegian CSOs operate at many different arenas and levels and cover a range of different activities. What concerns us here is the search for results of long term development activities. Below is a table showing various types of CSO results. The Panel will seek to summarise what we know about the first two levels (a) and (b), but focus their attention on (c) and (d).

<p>(a) <i>Improved quality of life for people and communities</i> as a result of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Providing cash to individuals and families– Training and providing know how to people and communities.– Providing services directly to people and communities, such as in health and education.
<p>(b) <i>Strengthened organisational capacity</i> – as a result of assisting partners in the South to better help themselves. There is a narrow perspective – strengthening individual organisations and a broader civil society perspective – increasing democratic space and organisational pluralism in a society.</p>
<p>(c) <i>Increased innovation</i> – CSOs deliberately trying out new methods and new approaches with an eye to their being replicated by others if proved successful.</p>
<p>(d) <i>Changed frame conditions</i> - CSOs seeking to influence socio-political and economic processes beyond separate projects and programmes, like peace and reconciliation efforts, international trade, pro-poor policy – advocating and lobbying for change, monitoring policy implementation and holding governments accountable. Such work could take place at various locations: (i) local level (giving “voice” to local groups), (ii) at the national level and (iii) at the sub-regional and international level.</p>

The Principles for Norad's Support to Civil Society in the South (May 2009) – in particular Principle no 2 “strengthen civil society actors working to achieve development, democracy and a redistribution of power” - should be the key reference for panel discussions. The six principles that since 2009 have guided Norad's support to civil society in the South imply a shift towards stronger agenda setting and leadership by southern CSO partners. The Panel will look for impact on the ground from this overall policy guidance to Norwegian CSOs.

The Panel will also try to relate its work on aggregated results to current development policy discourses, such as the discussion on how to measure impact on global public goods, international financial flow, taxation and climate/environmental issues.

4. Methodology

The overall assumption is that there are wider effects emerging from the work of Norwegian CSOs. These effects are methodologically difficult to document. Although the questions may be more or less the same, a Panel will work with and answer them differently from the methodological approaches normally used in research and evaluation.

Document studies and field visits shall be carried out. When searching for information and insight, the Panel shall strive to lift its focus beyond project level.

A list of hypotheses shall form the basis of the Panel's assessment. The hypotheses are assumptions about CSO results. They are developed in cooperation with Norwegian CSOs and the Advisory Group.

The Panel's task is to verify, modify or change the hypotheses through a discussion and analysis of their reliability and validity. Weight shall be given to category C and D:

Category A: Improved quality of life for people and communities

1. Significant results can be found and documented at individual and community level, but the number of people reached is limited.
2. People have greater control over their lives
3. The projects reach poor people, but not necessarily the poorest of the poor.
4. There is little evidence of wide ranging effects beyond each project.

Category B: Strengthened organisational capacity

5. National CSOs appreciate and benefit from partnerships with Norwegian CSOs, but the added value and benefits are intangible and poorly documented.
6. Norwegian CSOs have helped to strengthen individual organisations, but not civil society as a whole.

7. Norwegian CSOs have not focused on learning as an important part of their impact tool box – assessed interventions which have not worked and “fed” this information into the next round of projects (lessons learning).
8. Financial resources are used in a cost efficient and prudent manner, but transaction costs are high with several intermediaries reducing the resources reaching the ultimate beneficiaries.

Category C: Increased Innovation

9. Norwegian CSOs have deliberately tried out new methods and new approaches with an eye to their being replicated if proved successful.
10. CSOs have been innovative in the area of micro finance, with examples of results, but challenges in terms of financial and organisational sustainability.
11. There are no/few examples of replication of CSO initiatives in other settings and/or by other donors.
12. There is evidence that CSO initiatives have been scaled up locally, but not at national level.

Category D: Changed frame conditions

13. CSOs have increasingly tried to address and influence political and economic processes and issues at national and international level.
14. CSOs have effectively expanded the social space of civil society and defended it against political attempts to limit its influence in society at large.
15. There are examples of CSOs being able to influence and change policy processes and outcomes and hold government accountable, but the examples are few and the results are difficult to measure.
16. CSOs with high legitimacy and credibility produce the best results.

5. The work of the Panel

(a) Roles and responsibilities

The Panel has six members – one person from Africa, one from Asia and one from Norad, plus one southern-based, one northern-based and one Norwegian-based expert. The three last members will be responsible for preparing the synthesis and final report. The notes and draft report will be prepared by the small writing team while the whole Panel is to review and respond.

Members of the Panel have individual contracts with Norad, where their respective tasks are specified.

Norad will coordinate the work and provide administrative support for contracting, organising international travel and meetings of the Panel in Oslo, collection of existing data and reports, etc.

The Advisory Group has eight members – four from Norwegian CSOs, two experienced researchers and two representatives from Norad. The functions of the Group are:

- Review and comment on this proposal and suggest members to the Panel
- Assess the final work plan
- Discuss and comment on draft and final reports.

The Country Groups: Four specific country groups with representatives from Norwegian CSOs active in each of the selected countries will be tasked to draft the country visit program, identify key stakeholders to meet the Panel, look for a suitable venue, make reservations and assist in other practical matters. The CSOs will also be requested to provide background information for all the projects and documentation on results and impact. If there are good reasons, local consultants/researchers may also be hired for specific tasks.

(b) Phases of Work

The work will be organised in three phases with the following tentative timeline:

Phases	Activities	Timing
Preparatory phase	Preparations by Norad and the Advisory Group.	May – July 2011
Main phase	Introductory Panel meeting in Oslo: Discussing and revising the mandate, conducting interviews with Norwegian CSOs, Norad and other relevant stakeholders	Late August 2011
	Document studies, preparation and carrying out of two country visits, preparation of draft reports.	September – November 2011
	Synthesis of work. Final Panel meeting in Oslo: Discuss and agree on findings, conclusions and recommendations.	December 2011 – January 2012
	Final report	February 2012
Presentation phase	Core team presents the Panel's work and conclusions in Oslo.	March 2012

(c) Timeline for the work of the Panel (tentative)

29-31 August: First meeting of the Panel
 September: Review documents and prepare country visits
 10-21 October: Visit to Africa followed by country reports
 14-25 November: Visit to Asia followed by country reports
 December: Prepare first draft synthesis report (major findings and conclusions)

20 December:	Submit draft synthesis report to Panel and Advisory group
9-10 January:	Second meeting with Panel including Advisory Group
January:	Prepare consolidated draft report
25 January:	Submit consolidated draft report to Panel and Advisory Group
2 February:	Deadline for comments
10 February:	Submission of final report for printing
5 March:	Presentation.

(d) Document studies

Besides summarising what is already known of results for people, local organisations and communities, the Panel will also build upon and synthesise knowledge generated through evaluation and research. This will include the relevant evaluations and reviews and other studies.

A CD with the most relevant documents will be provided to the Panel. Norad might also assist the Panel with compiling existing information about results of Norwegian NGO assistance.

There is also a growing body of literature of evaluations and reports from other countries that will be consulted according to relevance, needs and time opportunities.

(e) Country visits

The Panel will visit four countries on two continents – two in Africa and two in Asia. The countries have been selected based on the following criteria:

Geographical and socio-political diversity

Receiving substantial support from Norwegian CSOs

Documented interventions at all levels, but with a particular focus of policy advocacy and lobbying in order to influence frame conditions.

The following four countries have been selected:

Africa: **Malawi and Ethiopia**

Asia: **Vietnam and Nepal**

The two visits to Africa and Asia will last 10-14 days each – starting in the respective countries with meetings and interviews with national CSOs and relevant stakeholders and ending with a workshop to discuss the relevance and validity of the hypotheses. The Norwegian partner organisations will be invited for the workshop. The purpose of the visits is to discuss with national level stakeholders and not carry out any field or project visits.

More detailed programmes for the country visits will be provided.

(f) Reporting

The Panel shall write a report not exceeding 35 pages (excl. annexes). A draft report shall be submitted for comments by Norad and the Advisory Group before the Panel submits the final report to Norad in February 2012.

A presentation of the Panel's findings and conclusions is scheduled for Monday 5 March 2012. Norad's Communication Department is invited to participate in the preparation of the presentation. Details will be specified in due time.

Oslo, 25.08.2011

Annex 2: References

Norad CSO Evaluations

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Annex 3: Informants

Ethiopia

Michael Assefa, Norwegian People's Aid
Tamrat G Giorgis, Fortune Newspaper
Birkit Terfe Tiruneh, Women's Health Association
Dr.Assefa Bekele, African Child Policy Forum
Sarah Guebreyes, African Child Policy Forum
Asmelash W Mariam, Rohi Weddu, Pastoralist Women Development Organization
Linda Osarenren, Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices (IAC)
Debebe Haile Gebriel, Consultant
Yetnebersh Negusse, Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development (ECDD)
Birhanu Birkie, Consultant
Maria Munir, Association for Women Sanctuary and Development
Saba Gebre Medhin, Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations
Mengistu Wondafrash, Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History
Dr.Ermias Habte, ADRA
Pastor Zerihun, Inter Religious Council
Hans Birkeland, Norwegian Church Aid
Mohammed Jemal, Save the Children Norway
Befekadu Refera, MELCA Ethiopia
Jon Erik Nygaard, Norwegian Development Fund
Tiruneh Zena, Ambassador, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
Odd-Inge Kvalheim, Ambassador, the Norwegian Embassy
Ashenafi Gizaw Beyea, the Norwegian Embassy
Tormod Nuland, the Norwegian Embassy

List of workshop participants

Dr.Beyene Tadesse (Facilitator), Private Consultant
Dr.Ermias Habte, ADRA
Sintayehu Hailu, Mary Joy
Elias Getachew, Save the Children Norway
Asmelash W Mariam, Rohi Weddu/ Pastoralist Women Development Organization
Mulu Haile, MCDP
Malfrid Anestad, NPA
Aragachew Wondimu, NLM/E
Iteffa Gobena (Rev.). NCA
Maria Munir, AWSAD
Kidist Belayneh, NCA
Afewerk Hailu, EWNRA
Zerihun Awano,ADRA
Girmay Abadi, NLCO
Tesfai Hailu, Independent consultant
Mahlet Tadesse, Ethiopian Civil Society Forum on Environment

Feyera Abdi, SOS Sahel
Befekadu Refera, MELCA Ethiopia
Abera T, NCAR
Linda Osarenren, Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices (IAC)
Fikirte Aragaw, KIHAE

Malawi

Dorothy Ngoma, Executive Director, NONM
Harriet Kapyepye, Deputy Executive Director, NONM
Michael Nyirenda, Human Rights/Democracy, the Norwegian Embassy in Lilongwe
Solrun Maria Olafsdotter, Programme Officer, the Norwegian Embassy in Lilongwe
Asbjørn Eidhammer, H.E. Ambassador, the Norwegian Embassy in Lilongwe
Dr. Charles Mwasambo, Principle Secretary, Ministry of Health
Willie Samite, Secretary for Health, Ministry of Health
Director of Nursing Services, Ministry of Health
Collins Jambo, Head of Human Resources & Administration, CHAM
Grace Nyirenda, Deputy General Secretary, MCTU
General Secretary, MCTU
Chris Chisome, Executive Director, CCJP
Emma Kaliya, Chairperson, NGO Gender Network
Victor Maulidi, NGO Gender Network
Leonard C. Nkosi, Project Director, AIDSSTAR TWO Capacity Project
Chandiwira Chiso, Policy Coordinator, Action Aid Malawi
Timothy Mtambo, Programme Manager, HCRR
Memory Rundo, Paralegal Project Officer, HCRR
Luke Kembo, HRCC
Esther Masika, Senior Programme Manager, NCA

Vietnam

Anders Krystad, Director, Football for All in Vietnam, Project, Hue
Mags Gaynor, Deputy Head of Development, Irish Aid for Vietnam, Lao PDR and Cambodia
Phan Dang Cuong, Adviser, Social Development and Governance, Irish Aid for Vietnam, Lao PDR and Cambodia
Margareta Koltai, Country Representative, Nordic Assistance to Vietnam, Hue
Jonathan Guthrie, Country Director, Norwegian People's Aid, Hanoi
Nguyen Xuan Duy, Program Country Director, Norwegian Red Cross, Hanoi
Le Quang Binh, Managing Director, Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (OISEE), Hanoi
Nguyen Ngoc Hung, Deputy Director General, People's Aid Coordinating Committee (PACCOM), Co-Director, VUFO-NGO Resource Center, Hanoi
Nguyen Trung Dung, Vice Director, European Desk, People's Aid Coordinating Committee (PACCOM), Hanoi
Ragnhild Dybdahl, Counsellor, Deputy Head of Mission, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Hanoi
Larissa Falkenberg, First Secretary, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Hanoi

Tran Thi Lanh, Founder of Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI), Hanoi
Dam Trong Tuan, Vice Director of Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI), Hanoi

Le Thi Quy, Director, Research Center for Gender and Development Hanoi and the University of Social Science and Humanities, Hanoi

Pham Thi Bich Ngoc, Deputy Director General, International Cooperation Project Management Division, the National Assembly Office, Socialist Republic of Vietnam

François Reybet-Degat, Head of the Resident Coordinator's Office, UNDP, Hanoi

Patricia Barandun, Head of Governance Cluster, UNDP, Hanoi

Ingrid Fitzgerald, Policy Specialist, UNDP, Hanoi

Prof. Chung A, Ph.D. Vice Chairman and Secretary General Vietnam Association of Sociology, Former Vice Chairman of National AIDS Committee

Vu Xuan Hong, President, Vietnam Union for Friendship Organization (VUFO), Hanoi

Marko Lovrekovic, Managing Director, VUFO-NGO Resource Centre, Hanoi

Phan Anh Son, Director General, Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), Hanoi

Pham Quang Tu, Director, Office of Social Evaluation and Consultancy-OSEC, Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), Hanoi

Do Thi Van, Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), Head of Department of Organization & Personnel, Hanoi

Duong Thi Nga, Officer, Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), Hanoi

Doan Van Thai, Vice President, Secretary General, Vietnam Red Cross Society, Hanoi

Luong Hong Thuy (Quynh), Vietnam Red Cross Society, Member of the Central Committee, Deputy Director of International Relations & Development Dept. Hanoi

Nepal

Hem Paudyal, Plan International

Sher Bhadur Rana, Plan Nepal

Prem Krichna Aryal, Plan Nepal

Sunita Danuwar, Shakti Samuha

Sita Ghimire, Save the Children Nepal

Donal Keane, Country Director, Plan Nepal

Bhagawan Das Shrestha, M&E, Plan Nepal

Krishna Ghimire, Sponsorship and Grant Support, Plan Nepal

Silje Vold, Advocacy and Child Rights, Plan Norge

Alf Arne Ramslie, Ambassador Norwegian Embassy

Camilla Røssaak, Norwegian Embassy

Asbjørn Løvbræk, Norwegian Embassy

Kristine Storholt, Norwegian Embassy

Sheila Padmanabhan, Norwegian Embassy

Brian J Hunter, Country Director, Save the Children Nepal

Jagat Bahadur Khadka, Ass. Country Director, Country Director, Save the Children Nepal

Soni Pradhan, Country Director, Save the Children Nepal

Tarun Adhikari, Save the Children Nepal
Udaya Manandhar, Save the Children Nepal
Dharma Raj Shrestha, ED, Central Child Welfare Board, Ministry of Women,
Children and Social Welfare
Gopi K. Khanal, Under Secretary, Ministry of Local Development Program
Manager for Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCDP)
BholaThapa, Professor, University of Kathmandu, Dean School of Engineering
Murari Shivakoti, Deputy Program Coordinator, Danida, HUGOU
Richard Holloway, Program Coordinator, World Bank
Anjalee Thakali, Deputy Project Coordinator World Bank, Program for Accountability
in Nepal (PRAN)
Pushpa Raj Paudel, Director Community Development Department, Nepal Red
Cross Society
Lawadeu Awasthi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Education
Narayan Krishna Shrestha, Under Secretary, Ministry of Education
Sunita Danuwar, Chairperson, Shakti Samuha
Khemraj Upadhyana, Economic and Local Development Advisor, Dfid
Kedar Badu, Freelance consultant
Shveekrishma Subedi,
Robin Subedi, Advocate/Consultant
Sadixya Bistra, Consultant
Arun Dhoj Adhikary, Consultant
Bihari K. Shrestha, Consultant

List of workshop participants

Dr.Mohan Das Manandhar (Facilitator), Private Consultant
Keshab Raj Achara, Jhuwani Community Library
Tarun Adhikari, Save the Children Nepal
Prem Krichna Aryal, Plan Nepal
J. B. Bishwakarma, Dalit NGO Federation (DNF)
Chandra Bahadur Chhetri, Butwal Technical Institute
Dr. Arabinda Dey, Population, Energy and Environment development Association
(PEEDA)
Judith Ellis, Kathmandu Int. Study Centre, Educational Quality Improvement
Program (KIS EQUIP)
Sita Ghimire, Country Director, Save the Children Nepal
Laxman P. Gyawali, National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFDN)
Gokarna Prasad Joshi, United Mission to Nepal (UMN)
Dilip Koirala, Shakti Samuha
Udaya Manandhar, Save the Children Nepal
Bipul Neopane, Nepal Red Cross Society
Mina Pandey, Shakti Samuha
Hem Paudyal, Plan International
Soni Pradhan, Save the Children Nepal
Surya Bhakta Prajapati, Resource Centre for Rehabilitation and Development
(RCRD)
Manish Prasai, Resource Centre for Rehabilitation and Development (RCRD)
Sher Bhadur Rana, Plan Nepal

Santosh Sharma, Nepal Music Centre
Durga Sob
Sushl Timsina, Rural Education and Development (READ)
Chanda Thapa, Sankalpa Nepal
Rita Thapa, Sankalpa Nepal
Reiny de Wit, Early Childhood Education Centre (ECEC).
Santosh Sharma, Nepal Music Centre
Durga Sob
SushlTimsina, Rural Education and Development (READ)
ChandaThapa, Sankalpa Nepal
Rita Thapa, Sankalpa Nepal
Reiny de Wit,EarlyChildhood Education Centre (ECEC).

Annex 4: Hypotheses and Questions

CATEGORY C: WIDER EFFECTS

1. CSOs have increasingly tried to address and influence political and economic processes and issues at national and international level.
 - I. *What wider and longer-term (development) effects beyond the immediate project level have Norwegian and other CSOs had in the country?*
 - II. *What evidence is there to enable you to draw such conclusions?*
 - III. *If the evidence is not quantitative and objectively based, describe briefly the basis for drawing such conclusions.*
 - IV. *Would others agree to such conclusions?*
 - V. *Any evidence of changing profiles of national CSOs with increased emphasis on policy advocacy and lobbying?*
 - VI. *What factors explain the changes or the efforts made and what factors have constrained or blocked the desired changes?*

2. There is an increasing interest among Norwegian NGOs and their partners about results and impact.
 - I. *How would you assess the level of interest about results and impact among Norwegian CSOs, their local partners and other CSOs in the country?*
 - II. *Has this level of interest changed in recent years? Explain how.*
 - III. *Is this interest focused mostly on the impact of discrete (small-scale and micro-) interventions or is there also an interest in the wider impact of CSOs – and can you explain the reason for this?*
 - IV. *How do you think the awareness and interest about results and impact of civil society could be deepened, extended and strengthened?*
 - V. *Could you give any practical specific examples – for instance do you think that greater coordination of CSO activities would help?*

3. CSOs have effectively expanded the social space of civil society and defended it against political attempts to limit its influence in society at large.
 - I. *Any evidence of better coordination with other state and non state actors?*
 - II. *Any evidence of more accessible and response public officials and institutions?*
 - III. *Any evidence of expanded social space – open processes for people to voice their opinions and engage in dialogue with the government on political issues?*

4. There are examples of CSOs being able to influence and change policy processes and outcomes and hold government accountable, but the examples are few and the results are difficult to measure.
 - I. Any evidence of CSOs addressing policy and regulatory issues – of involvement in policy processes?*
 - II. Any evidence of CSOs monitoring the implementation of government policies?*
 - III. Any evidence of CSOs trying to hold government accountable and claim their rights at local and/or national level?*
 - IV. Any examples of changes in policies as results of CSO interventions at local and national levels?*

5. The interaction between governments and CSOs are increasingly tense due to controversial advocacy work.
 - I. What is the current climate between government and CSOs – and why?*
 - II. Any evidence of increased government responsiveness to CSO demands?*

6. There is evidence that CSO initiatives have been influential and been scaled up locally, but not at national level.
 - I. Any evidence that interventions/projects have had effects outside the project area?*
 - II. Any evidence of replication and scaling up?*

7. The coordination with other projects/donors and integration in national frameworks is weak.
 - I. Any evidence of active coordination with other NGOs?*
 - II. Any evidence that relationships are built with national/international donors?*
 - III. Any evidence of discussions with government, other CSOs or other providers to ensure coordination and complementary with their work and of links to the broader development plan in the project area.*

CATEGORY B: STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

8. National CSOs appreciate and benefit from partnerships with Norwegian CSOs, but the added value and benefits are intangible and poorly documented.
 - I. Have baseline survey on the needs for capacity building for CSO partners in the recipient countries been carried out?*
 - II. Do the evaluation reports examine the results of the capacity building?*
 - III. What is the added value?*

9. Norwegian CSOs have helped to strengthen individual organisations, but not civil society as a whole.

- I. Do reports provide evidence that the role of the organisations in the wider civil society movement before and after the capacity building was conducted?*
- II. Is the capacity building geared towards individual organisations?*
- III. Any evidence of support to the wider civil society?*

10. Norwegian NGOs have not focused on learning - assessed intervention which have not worked and “fed” this information into the next round of projects.

- I. Do the reports provide lessons learnt on capacity building?*
- II. Any evidence that this analysis has been used in future planning?*

11. There is increased emphasis on capacity strengthening from NORAD and Norwegian CSOs, but not much evidence about results.

- I. Any evidence that more attention and resources are focused on capacity strengthening?*
- II. What is known about results so far?*
- III. Do the reports provide lessons learnt on capacity building?*

12. There is weak financial and stronger organisational sustainability.

- I. Do the reports provide information on the length of support and why the support is provided for such a long time?*
- II. Do the reports provide evidence that a plan was developed to build CSO partners financial and organisational sustainability?*
- III. Any evidence of financial and organisational sustainability?*

13. The selection of partners is not systematic – based on criteria for reaching the best results (should be reformulated)

- I. Any clear reasons why Norwegian CSOs choose a particular partner?*
- II. Any analysis that the choice was made to address a specific context when the project was developed?*

CATEGORY A: IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

14. Significant results can be found and documented at individual and community level, but the number of people reached is limited.

- I. What evaluations are carried out assessing project outcomes and impact at individual and community level?*

- II. *Do the reports provide robust evidence about the impacts of projects funded by Norwegian CSOs at individual and community level?*
 - III. *What do they say about impact and coverage?*
 - IV. *Do the reports examine any wider impacts?*

- 15. People have greater control over their lives (level of empowerment and development of life skills).
 - I. *Do the reports specify the condition of the community and understanding the concept of empowerment before and after the intervention?*
 - II. *Do the plans articulate how the community should be empowered and whether this has been achieved/fulfilled?*
 - III. *Any evidence of empowerment?*

- 16. The projects reach poor people, but not necessarily the poorest of the poor.
 - I. *Do the reports provide evidence that baseline survey has been carried out to determine the socio-economic status of the intended beneficiaries (e.g. the most vulnerable - women, children, the disabled and indigenous people).*

- 17. The projects are relevant to the needs of people, but not based on any systematic assessment of needs, priorities and context.
 - I. *Any evidence that the projects address the most important priorities of the beneficiaries?*
 - II. *Any evidence that the partners have analysed the country context and designed/adjusted the project accordingly (to carve out a niche and make strategic decisions)?*

- 18. Financial resources are used cost effectively, but transaction costs are high with several intermediaries reducing the resources reaching the ultimate beneficiaries.
 - I. *Do reports provide information on cost effectiveness in the planning stage and in the evaluation of the project?*
 - II. *What are the findings?*
 - III. *Is the evidence provided robust enough?*

- 19. New methods and new approaches have not been tried out to any large extent with an eye to being replicated if proved successful.
 - I. *Could you present an innovation?*
 - II. *To what extent has it been successful and replicated?*

Annex 5: Statistics

Introduction:

This annex provides information about Norwegian Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Some tables refer to all Norwegian CSO support (5.1) and some only to support through Norwegian CSOs (5.2). Some concentrate on the long term support for strengthening civil society channeled by Norad's Civil Society Department from Chapter 160.70 in the Norwegian National Budget (5.3). The annex also provides some information about Norwegian ODA to the countries chosen as cases in this report (5.4). Most figures are from 2010. Unless otherwise stated, the source of all statistics in this annex is Norad.

5.1 Norwegian ODA to CSOs 2001-2010

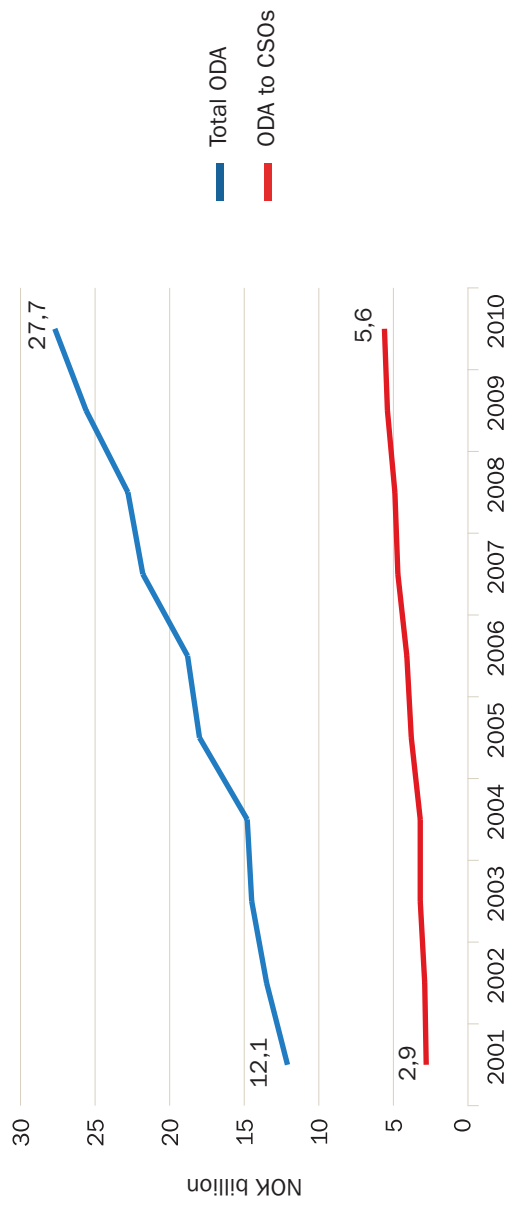
5.1.1 Total Norwegian ODA and total Norwegian ODA through CSOs (NOK 1000)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total Norwegian ODA	1 2 103 756	13 544 316	14 468 882	14 814 938	17 994 996	18 826 914	21 808 456	22 862 066	25 623 595	27 681 233
ODA to Norwegian CSOs	2 247 333 (19%)	2 353 035 (17%)	2 525 042 (17%)	2 579 395 (17%)	3 067 344 (17%)	3 217 891 (17%)	3 397 448 (16%)	3 493 312 (15%)	3 566 485 (14%)	3 619 937 (13%)
ODA to all CSOs	2 857 695 (23,6%)	2 911 846 (21,5%)	3 172 581 (21,6%)	3 210 165 (21,6%)	3 828 435 (21,2%)	4 075 430 (21,6%)	4 696 372 (21,5%)	4 932 071 (21,5%)	5 414 545 (21,3%)	5 602 699 (20,2%)

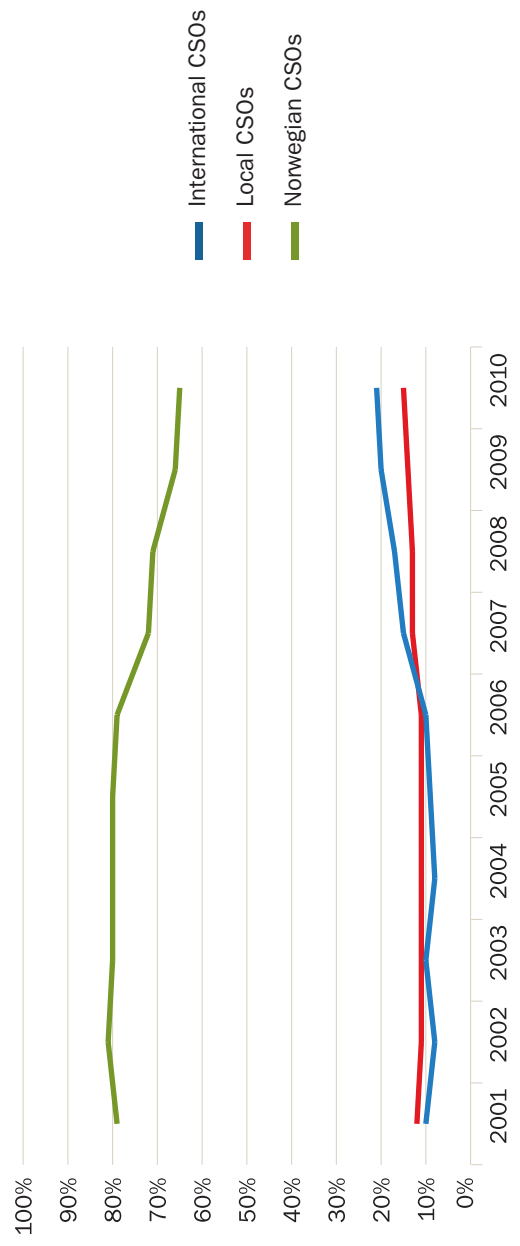
5.1.1.2 Norwegian ODA through Norwegian, local and international CSOs (NOK 1000)

Group of Agreement Partner	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
CSO International	273 923 (10%)	235 003 (8%)	303 146 (10%)	272 275 (8%)	349 020 (9%)	406 780 (10%)	692 871 (15%)	821 525 (17%)	1 107 313 (20%)	1 158 500 (21%)
CSO Local	336 440 (12%)	323 808 (11%)	344 393 (11%)	358 495 (11%)	412 071 (11%)	450 759 (11%)	606 054 (13%)	617 235 (13%)	740 746 (14%)	824 262 (15%)
CSO Norwegian	2 247 333 (79%)	2 353 035 (81%)	2 525 042 (80%)	2 579 395 (80%)	3 067 344 (80%)	3 217 891 (79%)	3 397 448 (72%)	3 493 312 (71%)	3 566 485 (66%)	3 619 937 (65%)
Total CSOs	2 857 695	2 911 846	3 172 581	3 210 165	3 828 435	4 075 430	4 696 372	4 932 071	5 414 545	5 602 699

Graphs showing total Norwegian ODA and total Norwegian ODA through CSOs.



Graphs showing Norwegian ODA through Norwegian, international and local CSOs

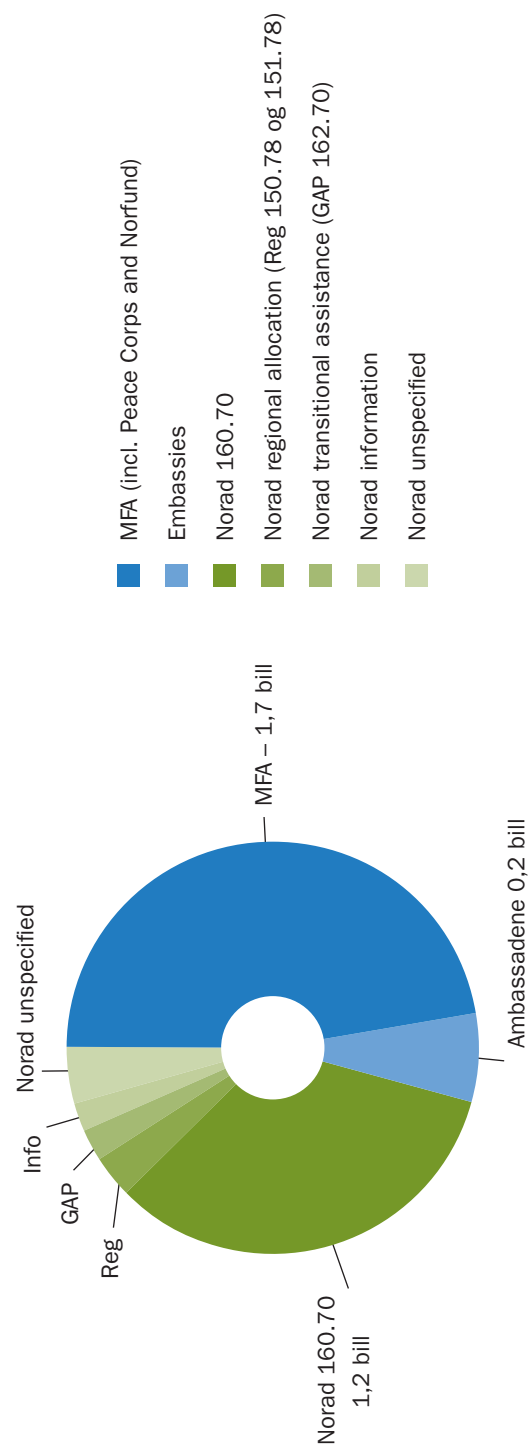


5.2 Norwegian ODA through Norwegian CSOs in 2010

5.2.1 Overview of total Norwegian ODA through Norwegian CSOs (NOK 1000)

Extending agency	2010	%
MFA Oslo	1 660 484	46%
Peace Corps and Norfund	41 200	1%
MFA Embassies	241 808	7%
Norad:	1 676 445	46%
Chapter 160.70 Civil Society Strengthening	1 226 352	
Chapter 150.78 and 151.78 Regional allocation	125 062	
Chapter 162.70 GAP (transitional assistance)	90 499	
Chapter 160.71 Information	79 502	
Other chapters	155 031	
Total Norwegian ODA through Norwegian CSOs	3 619 937	100%

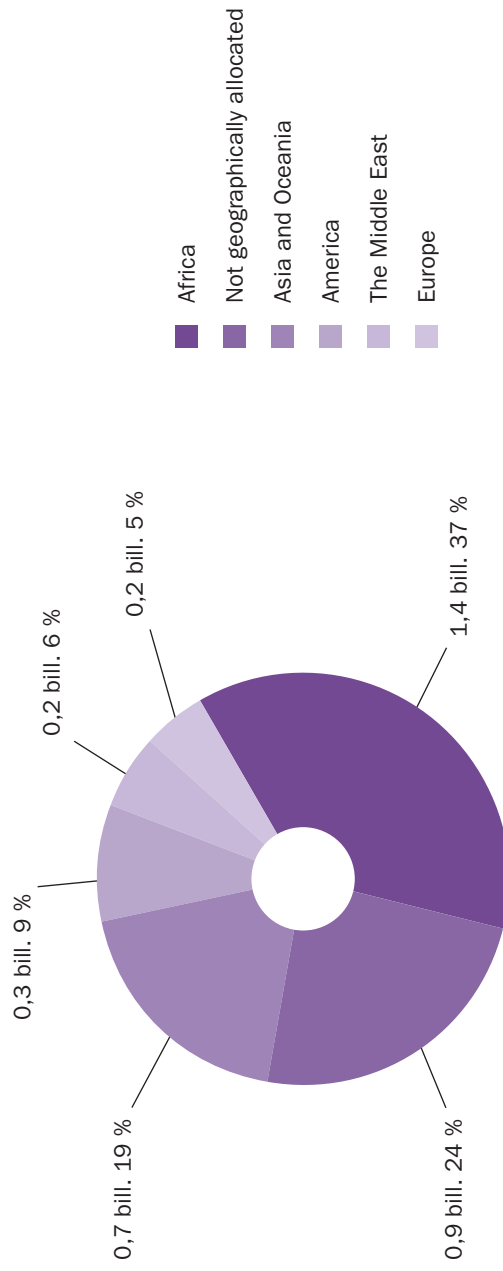
Total Norwegian ODA through Norwegian CSOs



5.2.2 Geographical distribution of Norwegian ODA through Norwegian CSOs in 2010 (NOK 1000)

Main Region	2010
Africa	1 356 565
Not geographically allocated	854 005
Asia and Oceania	694 636
America	338 855
The Middle East	212 869
Europe	163 008
Grand Total	3 619 937

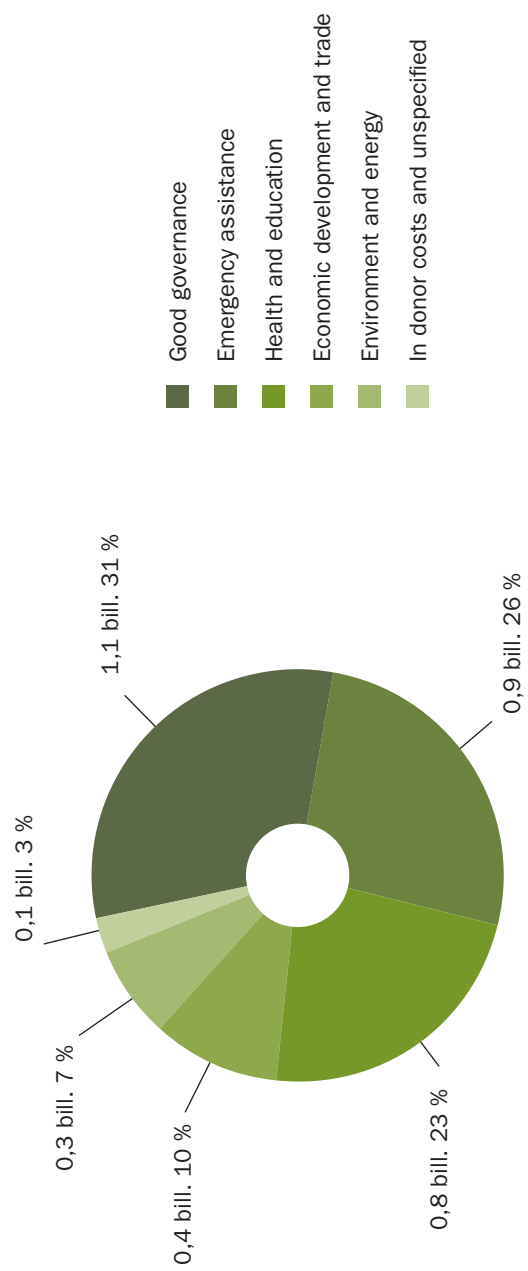
Geographic distribution



5.2.3 Thematic distribution of Norwegian ODA through Norwegian CSOs in 2010 (NOK 1000)

Target area	2010
Good governance	1 113 027
Emergency assistance	930 274
Health and education	827 913
Economic development and trade	365 229
Environment and energy	252 415
In donor costs and unspecified	131 080
Grand Total	3 619 937

Thematic distribution

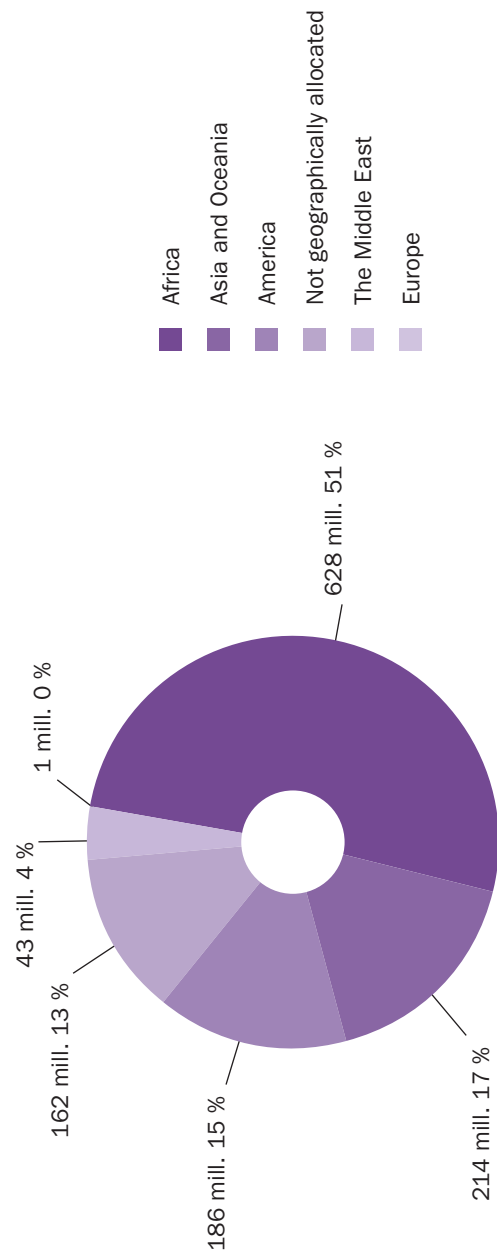


5.3 Allocation to Norwegian CSOs from Chapter 160.70 in 2010

5.3.1 Geographical distribution of allocations to Norwegian CSOs from Chapter 160.70 (NOK 1000)

Main Region	2010
Africa	628 452
Asia and Oceania	213 708
America	186 053
Not geographically allocated	161 720
The Middle East	43 420
Europe	870
Grand Total	1 234 223

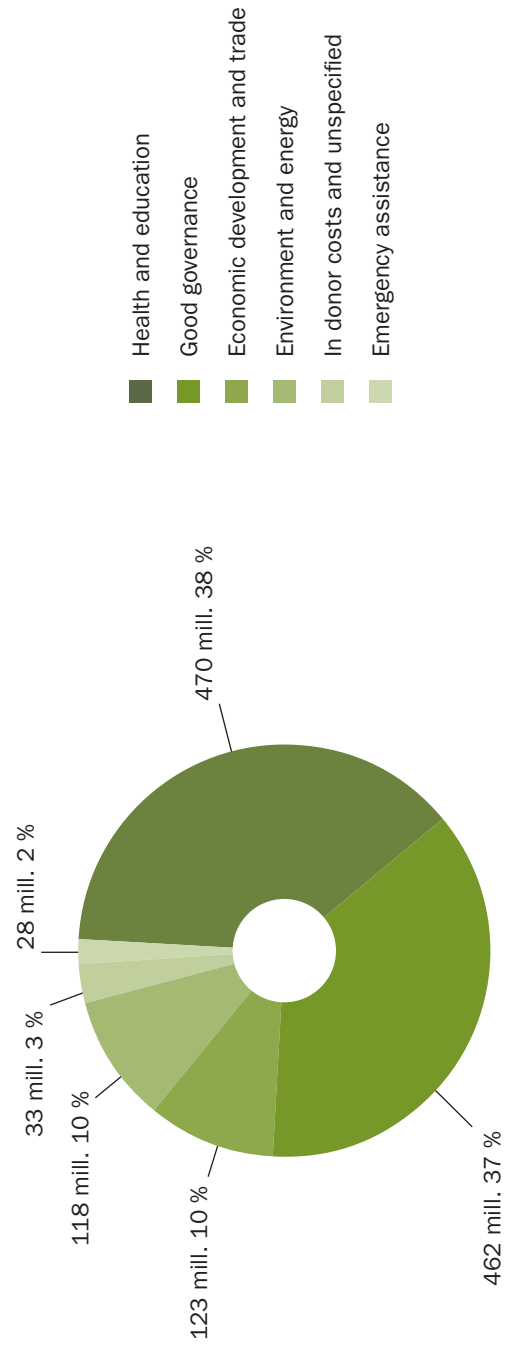
Chapter 160.70 by region



5.3.2 Thematic distribution of allocations to Norwegian CSOs from Chapter 160.70 (NOK 1000)

Target area	2010
Health and education	470 227
Good governance	462 208
Economic development and trade	122 833
Environment and energy	118 045
In donor costs and unspecified	32 709
Emergency assistance	28 201
Grand Total	1 234 223

Chapter 160.70 by sector



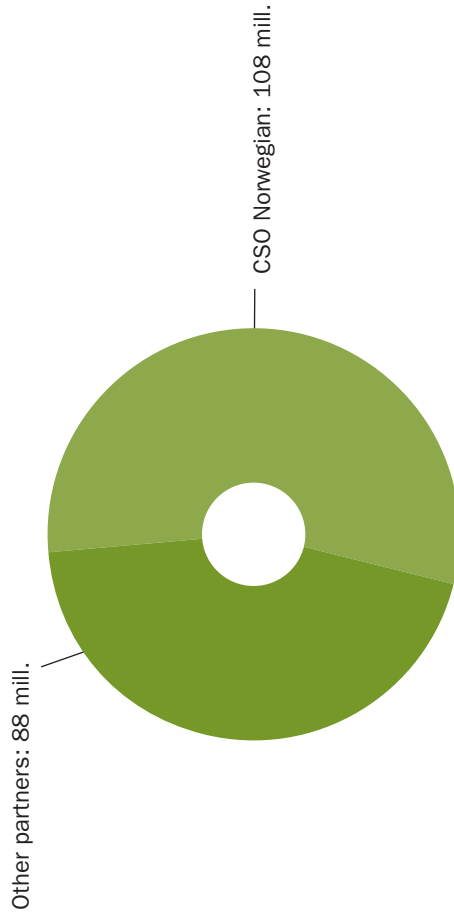
5.4 Norwegian ODA to selected recipient countries in 2010

5.4.1 Ethiopia

a) Norwegian ODA to Ethiopia by group of agreement partner (NOK 1,000)

Recipient country	Group of Agreement Partner	2010
Ethiopia	Consultants	161
	Governments/Ministries in developing countries	20 560
	Multilateral institutions	36 445
	CSO International	3 000
	CSO Local	8 682
	CSO Norwegian	108 430
	Norwegian private sector	450
	Norwegian public sector	13 721
	Other countries private sector	5
	Public sector in developing countries	721
Public sector other donor countries	4 800	
Unknown	-165	
Ethiopia Total		196 810

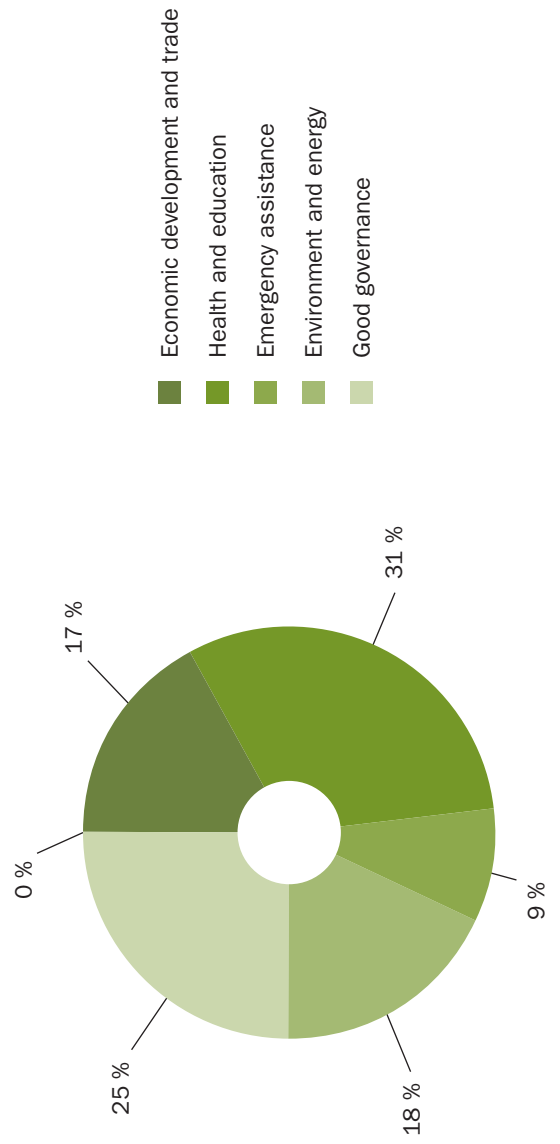
Ethiopia: Agreement partners



b) Thematic distribution of Norwegian ODA to Ethiopia (NOK 1000)

Recipient country	Target area	2010
Ethiopia	Economic development and trade	18 244
	Health and education	33 907
	Emergency assistance	9 620
	Environment and energy	19 666
	Good governance	26 927
	Unspecified	66
Ethiopia Total		108 430

Ethiopia: Thematic areas

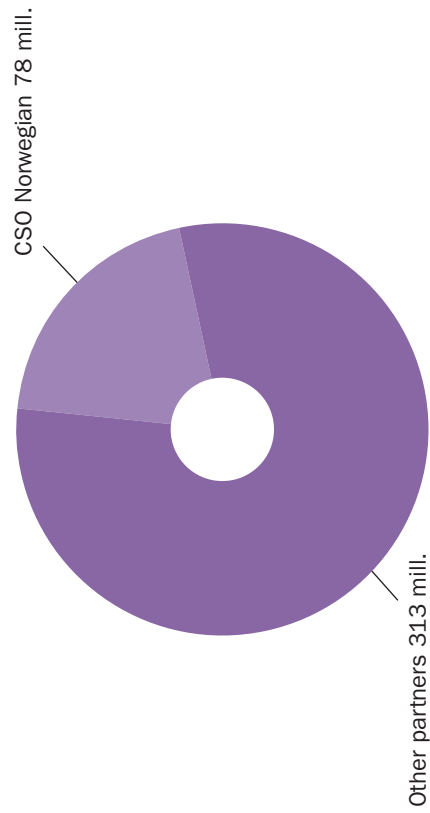


5.4.2 Malawi

a) Norwegian ODA to Malawi by group of agreement partner (NOK 1000)

Recipient country	Group of Agreement Partner	2010
Malawi	Consultants	501
	Governments/Ministries in developing countries	208 666
	Multilateral institutions	15 448
	CSO International	19 978
	CSO Local	50 582
	CSO Norwegian	77 733
	Norwegian private sector	1 037
	Norwegian public sector	16 810
	Public sector in developing countries	275
	Public sector other donor countries	48
Unknown	41	
Malawi Total		391 120

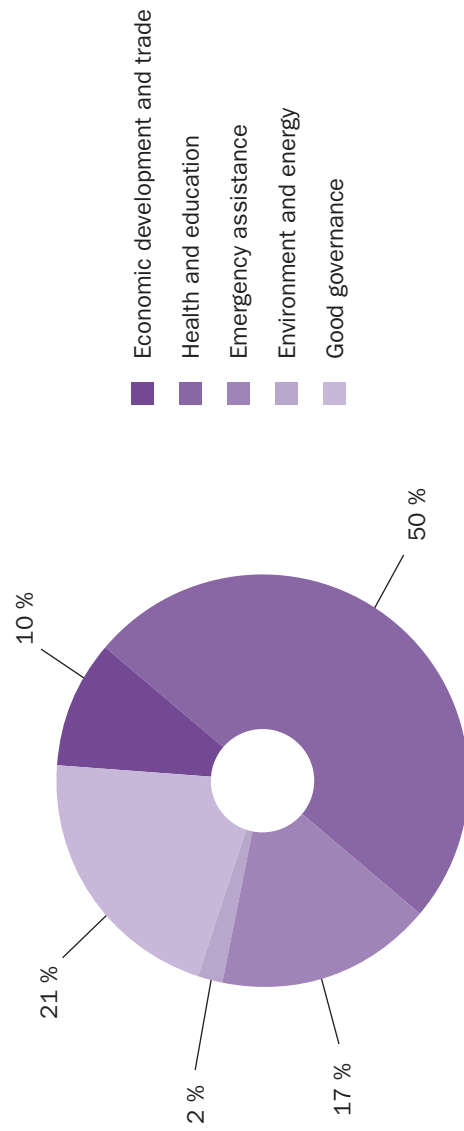
Malawi: Agreement partners



b) Thematic distribution of Norwegian ODA to Malawi (NOK 1000)

Recipient country	Target area	2010
Malawi	Economic development and trade	7 745
	Health and education	38 842
	Emergency assistance	12 929
	Environment and energy	1 430
	Good governance	16 787
Malawi Total		77 733

Malawi: Thematic areas

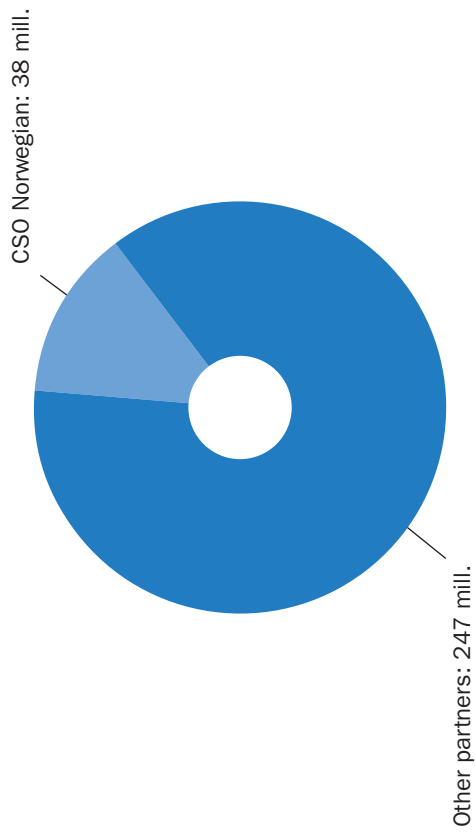


5.4.3 Nepal

a) Norwegian ODA to Nepal by group of agreement partner (NOK 1000)

Recipient country	Group of Agreement Partner	2010
Nepal	Consultants	694
	Governments/Ministries in developing countries	129 246
	Multilateral institutions	39 415
	CSO International	18 851
	CSO Local	25 804
	CSO Norwegian	38 390
	Norwegian private sector	1 552
	Norwegian public sector	15 185
	Other countries private sector	8 247
	Public sector in developing countries	81
	Public sector other donor countries	7 867
Unknown	60	
Nepal Total		285 390

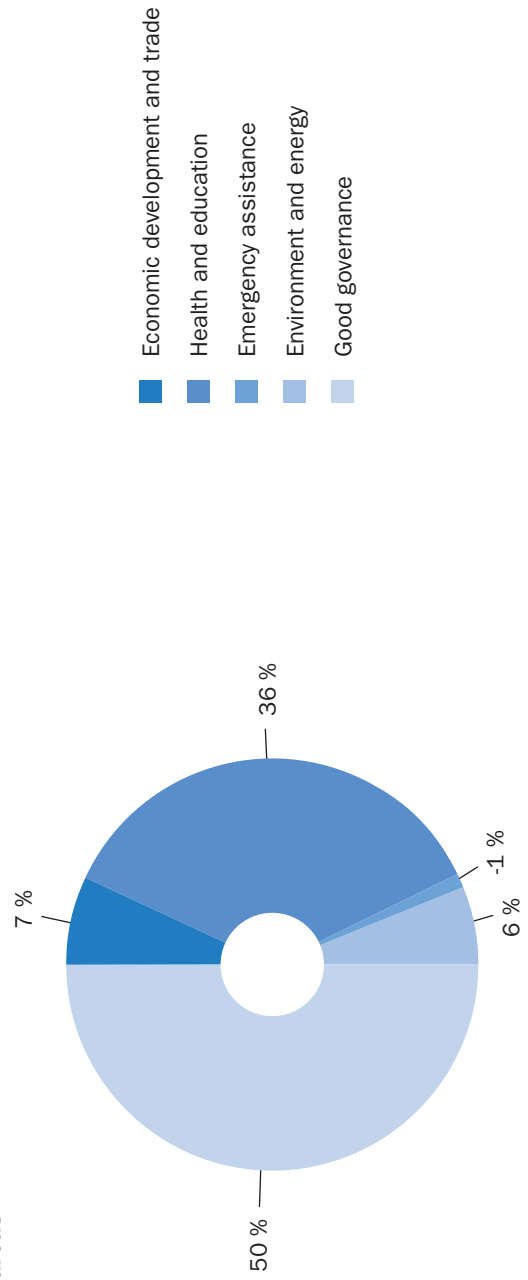
Nepal: Agreement partners



b) Thematic distribution of Norwegian ODA to Nepal (NOK 1000)

Recipient country	Target area	2010
Nepal	Economic development and trade	2 895
	Health and education	13 876
	Emergency assistance	-198
	Environment and energy	2 418
	Good governance	19 399
Nepal Total		38 390

Nepal: Thematic areas

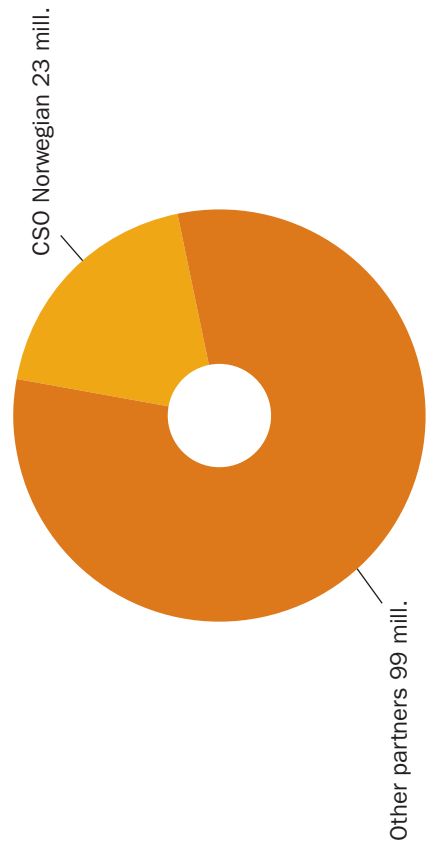


5.4.4 Vietnam

a) Norwegian ODA to Vietnam by group of agreement partner (NOK 1000)

Recipient country	Group of Agreement Partner	2010
Vietnam	Consultants	409
	Governments/Ministries in developing countries	55 838
	Multilateral institutions	14 473
	CSO International	618
	CSO Local	699
	CSO Norwegian	22 913
	Norwegian private sector	6 692
	Norwegian public sector	11 695
	Other countries private sector	6 474
	Public sector in developing countries	1 940
Unknown	197	
Vietnam Total		121 949

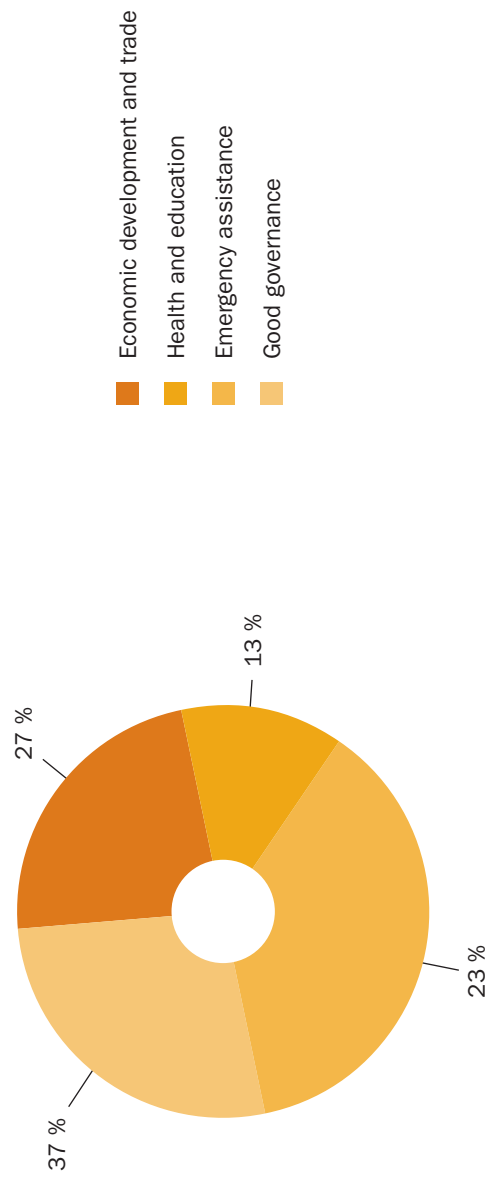
Vietnam: Agreement partners



b) Thematic distribution of Norwegian ODA to Vietnam (NOK 1000)

Recipient country	Target area	2010
Vietnam	Economic development and trade	6 195
	Health and education	5 341
	Emergency assistance	2 850
	Good governance	8 527
Vietnam Total		22 913

Vietnam: Thematic areas



Norad

Norwegian Agency for
Development Cooperation

Postal address

P.O. Box 8034 Dep. NO-0030 OSLO

Visiting address

Ruseløkkveien 26, Oslo, Norway

Tel: +47 23 98 00 00

Fax: +47 23 98 00 99

No. of Copies: 500

postmottak@norad.no

www.norad.no

