EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'Capacitating Change, Restoring the Social Contract in Fragile Contexts'

A Report of the End Term Evaluation of Cordaid's Strategic Partnership Programme

January, 2021

Introduction

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has financed 25 strategic partnership programmes, under the framework of 'Dialogue and Dissent'. Cordaid implemented one of the programmes on 'Capacitating Change, restoring the social contract in fragile contexts', in partnership with the Dutch MoFA, 45 local Civil Society Organisation (CSO) partners and five international NGOs. The partnership started in 2016 and ended in 2020. The programme aimed to strengthen the social contract, as characterized by improved interaction between governments and citizens in six countries: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria and South Sudan. The programme was implemented within four thematic trajectories: inclusive and engendered peace, security and access to justice, inclusive health services, and extractives. International Lobbying and Advocacy (L&A) was geared towards strengthening the social contract in these fragile contexts. The purpose of the evaluation was for accountability to the Dutch MoFA, and for learning purposes, as Cordaid intends to continue the strategic partnership program with partners in fragile contexts after the current subsidy ends. It sought to assess the strength of programme results relation to the external context; and to analyse the extent to which successes, or lack thereof, were within control of the programme. It also explored and developed an understanding of strengths and weaknesses of chosen approaches and the collaboration between partners to draw lessons for future programming.

Methodology

The evaluation pursued an exploratory research approach anchored on the programme's ToC and evaluation questions provided by Cordaid in the ToR. Key components of the methodology are discussed below.

– **Who we consulted:** To collect data, the evaluation employed mixed methods involving desk research and participatory technique for new data collection. Desk research involved review of existing programme documents. These included mid-term report and the mid-term review management response, annual planning and progress reports and outcome harvesting documents. The evaluation relied on ICT-aided at-a-distance data collection methods - mainly Electronic Key Informant Interviews and Outcome Validation Forums to consult major stakeholders of the programme. This is because of the Covid-19 pandemic that limited physical data collection. It reached and documented perspectives of 140 respondents across six countries and international level, including partner CSOs (at national level, community-level and International levels); Cordaid (Global and Country offices), Dutch MoFA, and external respondents from relevant government institutions at country level, other CSOs, media, experts and observers. These were distributed as follows: Burundi – 17; CAR – 22; DRC – 24; Nigeria – 17; South Sudan – 23; Afghanistan – 18; International – 19.

– **What We Did with the Data – Analysis:** Thematic/content analysis was used to analyse evaluation data. Audio recordings were transcribed, forming the core portfolio of new evaluation data. The evaluation applied a framework for attribution and weighting informed by the objectives of the evaluation, and developed in close consultation with Cordaid during inception. The framework involved: i) Clustering outcomes into high-level results; ii) Qualitative ranking of outcomes based on their significance; and iii) Contextualisation and substantiation of outcomes at outcome validation forums.

– **Mechanisms for Verification and Reducing bias:** This being a largely qualitative research work, depending on perspectives of partners and other stakeholders, the evaluation employed effective mechanisms to reduce bias and ensure reliability. These included: i) conducting a high number of interviews (140) that ensured that it considered and depended on a rich and elaborate portfolio of data; ii) clustering of outcomes that ensured analysis arrived at high level outcomes, hence not relying on outcomes directly documented or perceived by individual respondents that would be laden with bias; iii) consulting a variety of stakeholders that included CSOs; iv) triangulation – utilising different types and sets of information – both existing data, put together by programme partners and Cordaid staffs, and new data collected through in-depth interviews; and through v) joint validation meetings (in all six countries and also at global level (programme wide) involving all country offices and Cordaid staffs and experts) that were used to query and validate findings of the evaluation.

RESULTS OF THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

The evaluation was tasked to present results in areas where the programme can be construed to have contributed to strengthening the social contract in all implementation contexts. Overall, the evaluation found evidence of many instances where the programme made substantive contributions to strengthening the social contract. The table below presents a summary of these top-line results that represent the most significant contributions of the programme to strengthening the social contract.[1]

ToC Strategies	Key Results of the SP programme
Capacity Development	1. A general improvement in capacities of CSOs to carry out L&A work was evident. This included improved capacity to do evidence-based advocacy that was considered to have promoted improvement of policies, laws, institutions and processes across all the trajectories.
	2. Increased coordination by CSOs to engage governments and other relevant stakeholders to implement policies and take action to respond to the needs of their communities and constituencies. This included collaborative arrangements and coalitions amongst CSOs for more sustainable efforts aimed at influencing government institutions and other stakeholders.
	3. Strengthened and increased engagement of grassroots CSOs and community groups. This increased opportunities for inclusion of voices of women and other vulnerable groups.
Enabling Environment	4. More coordination and inclusion of CSOs in policy-making processes facilitated improvement of security and access to justice; increased inclusion and active engagement of women and youth in policy-making and electoral processes; and promoted more openness and accountability in extractives sector across the relevant six countries involved in the SP programme.
	5. Establishment of mechanisms for community dialogue improved relations between citizens and security actors, as a result of L&A work and awareness creation by CSOs partners.
	6. More actions and commitment by government towards enabling peace and reconciliation processes in CAR, including involvement of victims and providing necessary support.
	7. SP programme partners (CSOs, Cordaid and Dutch MOFA) and policymakers and politicians in The Netherlands and other EU countries provided crucial support to CSOs and advocated for opening up of Civic Space and enabling environment for CSOs in many of the targeted countries.
Policy Influencing	8. Legislative reform and/or development. Partner CSOs contributed to: i) development of legislative mechanisms for promoting health financing (especially in Afghanistan and DRC); improvement of legal framework for governance in the extractives sector – including considerations on community development, transparency and accountability, and mining taxation; and iii) legal reforms that promoted access to justice especially for women and vulnerable groups.
	9. Substantive increases in financing for the health sector in DRC and Afghanistan, facilitated by L&A work led by CSO partners in the SP programme. This included capacity development for government agencies in DRC and Afghanistan on design and implementation of Universal Healthcare Coverage (UHC).
	10. Operationalisation of mobile courts, improving court procedures, providing legal aid and deploying more judges enhanced access to justice for women and the vulnerable.
	11. Policy and institutional reform facilitated by L&A work of SP partners increased access security through establishment of more mechanisms for policing - better mapping, deployment and funding of police, and iv) Feedback mechanisms established for receipt of complaints.
	12. Increased government initiative and commitment to promote participation of women and youth in peace and security processes.

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[1] A detailed description and substantiation of all results of the programme is provided on Annex 2 of the main report for more rigorous appreciation of the outcomes of the programme.

EMERGING ISSUES FROM THE EVALUATION

Regarding results of L&A

Considering the overall goal, the evaluation found evidence that the programme indeed made significant contributions towards strengthening the social contract in all the six country contexts. This was demonstrated by progress in: i) developing the capacities of CSOs to organise and engage their communities and conduct effective lobby and advocacy; ii) improving relations between civil society and institutions of government that saw more coordination and inclusion of CSOs in public policy, electoral and peace processes, and iii) sponsoring and/or promoting policy, legislative and institutional development or reform across all five trajectories that were argued to portend well for rights and needs of citizens across all six countries. These results (discussed in detail in section 3.2 of the main report) represented significant progress towards ensuring that citizens feel more included in their governments (ensuring that they are responsive to their needs) and are more willing to give up their rights and freedoms to be governed. This represented progress towards repairing or strengthening the social contract. It was notable, nonetheless, that there was significant influence of issues linked to the contexts of fragility that impacted conduct of programme implementation and outcomes. These included: i) conflict and insecurity that presented a threat to the safety of partners and execution of programme activities; ii) restricted civic space; iii) fluid political environment and iv) discordance between priorities of government and programme objectives and interventions among others. These were complicated especially in the final year (2020) by the Covid-19 pandemic that limited activities especially policy influencing that were planned for the last year. Whilst some of these contextual challenges were anticipated like the inherent weaknesses of the social contract, constricted civic space and fluid/volatile political environments, others like the Covid-19 pandemic could not have been expected. The programme did well in planning and implementing mechanisms for addressing anticipated contextual issues as much as many of them still impacted the quality and number of outcomes and still remain unresolved. The programme's ToC emerged as an effective mechanism for facilitating reflection, planning and adaptation that allowed partners to manage and reduce impacts of fragility on results. It was however notable that there was a lack of clarity and common understanding (among partners) on the idea of social contract. The evaluation also noted that the structure and scope of the programme was ambitious and complex. This is in the sense that it targeted six countries, working at sub-national, national and international levels across five thematic areas. This may have split thin effort and resources available and also made it difficult to document progress. Ultimately, the results, taking into account implications of the contextual realities in the six countries, demonstrated that this was a good programme, targeting to address relevant needs of communities and vulnerable groups in fragile states.

Regarding Learning & Adaptability

The evaluation found sufficient built-in mechanisms for planning, reporting monitoring and evaluation in the programme. Collaborative planning and review - quarterly and annual meetings congregating partners emerged as a key strength of the programme. It was evident that the programme provided sufficient space for learning; which facilitated adaptation to context and adjustment of strategies and approaches to suit programme objectives. Despite initial challenges with understanding and applying it, the Theory of Change (ToC) emerged as an important mechanism for planning, implementation, measuring progress, and reflecting on experience. Partners found the use of the ToC suitable for assessing and tracking change in a policy advocacy programme like the SP. Working with ToC enabled partners to seize opportunities for lobby and advocacy as it guided analysis and mapping of key influential actors to pursue. The ToC also facilitated partners to effectively adjust to changing political economy context in order to effectively pursue outcomes and to take advantage of L&A opportunities. The bottom-up approach was favoured by partners as it: i) ensured inclusion and meaningful participation of everyone in shaping the conduct of the programme; ii) increased relevance of the programme to its intended beneficiaries; iii) ensured flexibility and adaptation to context; and iv) facilitated better understanding of the key stakeholders and how they impacted the programme. Nonetheless, there remained capacity gaps regarding application of the ToC that

need to be further addressed for future interventions. Whilst the ToC remained relevant and made sense, the programme's level of ambition (covering five trajectories in six countries focused on three categories and implemented at country and international levels) and disjointedness frustrated implementation, attainment of outcomes and measurement of progress. Overall, the assumptions appeared substantively relevant, realistic and justified considering the contexts within which the programme was implemented. However, the programme would have benefitted from more contextualised country specific assumptions considering the different contextual realities rather than working with one overall set of assumptions for the entire intervention.

Regarding Partnership

The evaluation observed a general improvement in capacities of CSOs to carry out L&A work as a result of capacity development activities sponsored by or carried out by the SP programme. The partnership provided mechanisms and opportunities for meaningful involvement of all stakeholders that allowed partners to contribute ideas and share experiences during implementation that were perceived by partners to have improved relations and strengthened the partnership. There was notable cordial relations, flexibility and internal democracy in the programme (among CSO partners) which contributed to a stronger partnership. Nonetheless, power relations appeared to be stiffed against local partners; these can be more balanced to strengthen partnership and recognise that CSO partners do the actual work and have more strategic knowledge of the contexts. This is especially in programme management areas such as in contracting, disbursement of funding and accountability to ensure local partners get more strategic leverage and room for manoeuvre considering the contexts of fragility. There was a general understanding that support form Dutch MOFA was crucial for policy influencing at the national level. Some partners indicated that they benefited from strategic backing from international players especially Dutch embassies that helped to bridge priority gaps. The influence of linkages between national and international advocacy was useful in making government to take interest in some of the programme's thematic areas. Nonetheless, it was evident that involvement of MoFA in the programme did not meet expectations of partners. This needed a more comprehensive and strategic review in order to find mechanisms for balancing their participation with capacity limitations. The programme missed out on opportunities for cross-country synergies and linkages between international and country level L&A work that may have impacted quality and number of outcomes. This is despite the programme being designed as a multi-country and multi-level intervention involving work at national and international levels that were meant to be mutually supporting. Nonetheless, some collaborative work done galvanised support, amplified voices of CSOs and increased traction on issues pursued. Finally, sustainability was not consciously and sufficiently built into the design of the SP Programme. There is need to address this in order to achieve durable impact in future interventions.

Qualitative Grading of Programme performance in the evaluation

Evaluation Area	Qualitative Grading
Results of L&A	🟧
Learning & Adaptability	🟩
Partnership	🟧
Programme Design & management	🟥
LEGEND	

Green	🟩	– Effective performance; with some room for improvement
Amber	🟧	– Satisfactory performance; with significant limitations; require to be addressed
Red	🟥	– Weak performance; with substantive limitations that threatened success; require to be addressed

RECOMMENDATIONS

Programme design and management
1. Ensure recruitment of strong programme management capacity dedicated to the programme (with experience in multi-country policy influencing, L&A interventions) to facilitate coordination and exposition of programme design and structure and ensure partners understand roles and expectations.
2. Conduct an inclusive process during design of the subsequent programme – to have a common understanding among partners (Cordaid, MoFA and country level CSOs) on what it seeks to achieve (in terms of ToC, choice of trajectories and selection of countries).
3. Review programme management structure to increase opportunity for devolved programme management and decision making to allow more leverage for country offices to determine shape and form of the programme.
4. Infuse rigorous review of internal processes into quarterly and annual review meetings to provide space for interrogation of how programme management processes impact the programme; and require progress reports to include feedback from partners on programme management.

Learning & Adaptability
1. Continue with, and strengthen collaborative approach to PMEL and further build capacity of partners on PMEL.
2. Conduct further capacity development work to build capability of partners to utilise ToC as a central mechanism for PMEL and retain and strengthen use of the inclusive bottom-up approach to developing and working with ToC.
3. Consider and infuse alternative tools and mechanisms (preferably quantitative) to complement Outcome Harvesting to allow more rigorous analysis.
4. Increase opportunities for cross-country learning among partners – especially those implementing same trajectories.
5. Review role of gender expert to ensure they provide technical support for gender sensitive programming (especially at country level) and conduct regular monitoring (quarterly or annually) of improvement in capacities of partners on gender-sensitive programming.

Partnership
1. Conduct further capacity development and provide technical support to partners on L&A especially on engaging at international level; and on linking international level and country level L&A work.
2. Explore more mechanisms for empowering CSO partners to participate meaningfully in management and decision making in the programme – like a steering committee AND Consider reviewing contractual arrangements to make agreements more long term (like 3 years of five years mirroring the life of the programme) rather than annual contracting.
3. Dutch MoFA to consider appointing consultant technical experts or focal persons to act as links with Cordaid and partners to increase presence of MoFA in programme (planning, reviews and learning)
4. Encourage RNEs to play more active role in the programme – Dutch MoFA to facilitate more partnerships and stronger cooperation between RNEs and local partners at country level.
5. Dutch MoFA and Cordaid to pursue more strategic discussions on design and structure of subsequent programme – to have a common understanding on what the programme seeks to achieve and roles and expectations of partners.
6. Strengthen and increase opportunities for cross-country work among partners – especially those implementing same trajectories AND increase monitoring of coordination between international and country level work (especially linkages between thematic experts and country level CSO partners).
7. Develop a programme strategy (and specific country or organisational strategies) for ensuring sustainability; include an objective on sustainability in programme design.
8. Dutch MoFA and Cordaid to consider longer, continuous implementation periods, building on outcomes of the 1st phase in subsequent partnerships AND institute mechanisms for supporting CSO partners in countries dropped from the partnership to ensure outcomes are not lost.