



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

IOB Study

Strategies for partners: balancing complementarity and autonomy

Evaluation of the functioning of strategic partnerships between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and civil society organisations

Complete report

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September 2019

Foreword

Since The Netherlands' government first engaged in international development cooperation, the relationships between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and civil society organisations (CSO) has taken on many different forms. From 2013 onwards, the MFA envisaged a more political role for CSOs, in reinforcing civil society dialogues between citizens, government and the private sector. To this end, the MFA introduced so-called 'Strategic Partnerships' (SP) with CSOs. Compared to the previous MFS-II programme, these partnerships should bring more flexibility, more trust, a strengthened advocacy role, and a smaller regulatory burden.

Two of the current SP programs, 'Dialogue and Dissent' and the 'SRHR Partnership Fund', will expire by the end of 2020. A new policy framework is currently under development. This study on the functioning of SP's at various levels of the MFA - CSO collaboration provides timely input for the design of this new framework. IOB's aim is to find patterns in the functioning of these partnerships, to trace underlying causes and to formulate policy recommendations. It does not evaluate the impact of individual partnerships or programmes, since it is too early in the day to see their effects. Impact evaluations are planned for 2020.

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This evaluation draws on a limited document review and a large number of interviews with stakeholders in The Netherlands (>65) and in Nepal, Mali, Sudan and Uganda (>160), amounting to a sample of 26 strategic partnerships. The total budget for the four SP programs examined in this study (i.e. Dialogue & Dissent, the SRHR Partnership Fund, the DSH peacebuilding and conflict mediation SP, and Addressing Root Causes) amounts to some 1.3 billion euros. It is employed by some 56 partnerships in almost 100 countries over a five-year period.

IOB conclude that expectations of SP's where high, but not always clearly articulated. There exist good examples where the MFA and the CSO's played complementary roles within an SP, jointly contributing to results that the MFA or the CSO's individually would not have achieved. Generally, CSO's feel that their autonomy is respected. However, there are a number of constraints that have limited the functioning of SP's. These include: (i) late involvement of thematic departments and embassies in project development; (ii) misunderstanding on how the SP's contribute to the objectives and results of MFA thematic departments; (iii) tensions between aiming for complementarity and for CSO's autonomy; (iv) insufficient MFA staff capacity, especially at embassies; and (v) the long-term commitment and flexibility for Northern CSO's often not being transferred to Southern CSO's.

The report was written by IOB colleagues Ferko Bodnár and Rob van Poelje. They conducted the interviews in The Netherlands, with the appreciated assistance from their colleagues Rita Tesselaar and Pieter Dorst. The field data were collected by George Kasumba in Uganda, Ousmane Sy in Mali, Renuka Motihar in Nepal and Abdelhakam Omer in Sudan, all under the skilled guidance of Corina Dhaene and Geert Phlix of ACE Europe. We thank them all. We also like to thank the members of the external reference group for their advice and

support: Willem Elbers (ASC, Leiden University), Bart Romijn (Partos), Nana Afadzinu (WACSI Ghana), Julia McCall (MFA/DSH), Wieneke Vullings (MFA/DSO/GA) and Jelmer Kamstra (MFA/DSO/MO). The internal IOB advisory group who provided valuable feedback consisted of Rafaela Feddes and Caspar Lobbrecht.

Final responsibility of this report rests solely with IOB.

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Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
ARC	Addressing Root Causes (programme)
CD	Capacity Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
D&D	Dialogue and Dissent
DDE	Sustainable Economic Development Department
DGBEB	Directorate-General for Foreign Economic Relations
DGIS	Directorate-General for International Cooperation
DMM	Human Rights and Multilateral Organisations Department
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSH	Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid Department
DSH/BU	Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid Department / Implementation Office
DSO	Social Development Department
DSO/MO	Social Development Department / Civil Organisations
DSO/GA	Social Development Department / Health and Aids
EU	European Union
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
I-CSO	International Civil Society Organisation
ID	Institutional Development
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGG	Inclusive Green Growth Department
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department
IP	Implementing Partner
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
L&A	Lobby and Advocacy
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MFS-II	Co-financing system Phase II (subsidies for CSOs, 2011-2015)
MLS	Multiannual Country Strategy
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid-term Review
N-CSO	Northern Civil Society Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OD	Organisational Development
PV	Permanent Representative
RTSO	Round Table for Sustainable Palm Oil
S-CSO	Southern Civil Society Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SP	Strategic Partnership
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

ToC	Theory of Change
TFVG	Taskforce Women and Gender
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Part 1:

**Summary with recommendations
and findings**

1

Introduction

1.1 Why this report?

Strategic partnerships (SPs) constitute a relatively new instrument in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ toolkit. Because two of the current SP programmes, i.e. Dialogue and Dissent and the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Right (SRGR) Partnership Fund, will expire in 2020, new policy frameworks are being developed in the course of 2019. This report gives some recommendations for the new policy framework(s).

Also, the amount of funds involved in the SPs justifies a timely external evaluation of the ongoing progress. Together, the four studied SP programmes – Dialogue & Dissent, SRHR Partnership Fund, DSH peace building and mediation SP, and Addressing Root Causes – have a budget of about 1.3 billion euros, which has been used by some 56 partnerships in almost 100 countries over a five-year period.

The main questions of this evaluation are: How do SPs function? Why are they functioning well or not functioning well? What recommendations can we draw for future SPs?

The recommendations are based on an IOB evaluation of how strategic partnerships (SP) between the MFA and civil society organisations (CSOs) have functioned over the past four years. We have not looked at the ultimate results of the various SPs, because this will be done during the final evaluations in 2020.

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This part of the report (Part 1) focuses on recommendations and supporting findings. More information about the methodology and detailed research results can be found in Part 2: Detailed research report.

1.2 The reviewers’ perspective: theoretical framework

On the basis of the policy documents for the Dialogue and Dissent instrument and suggestions from the members of our reference group, we have decided to look at SPs from the following perspective (Figure 1):

Figure 1 *Theoretical framework for the functioning of SPs*



First of all, actors establish SPs because the respective roles they play are supposedly **complementary**. This complementarity can materialise through shared strategic objectives, a frequent strategic dialogue, the sharing of knowledge and networks, or even through joint activities¹.

Second, for an SP to function well, each partner must respect the other partner's operational and tactical **autonomy**. That means that within the strategic agreement the partners are independent in their choice of approaches, instruments and activities.

Third, if resources are shared in a strategic partnership, their use must be flexible enough to accommodate a variety of international and local contexts. In terms of duration and timeliness, the resources must also be flexibly available to facilitate adaptive management in complex systems. In short, the **funding modality** must accommodate the SP's complementarity and autonomy principles.

Last, in an SP all partners are **accountable** to one another. Transparency regarding the use of shared resources is a key driver for mutual trust and a necessity for the justification of the use of public resources. An SP's accountability system of requires careful balancing of complementarity and autonomy.

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Compared to other partnerships, we characterise *strategic* partnerships as focusing more on joint objective-setting, strategic dialogue about results and project guidance, and where possible and useful, coordination of each other's roles and activities.

We have studied the above four elements at two levels:

- (a) the relationship between MFA and the lead (often Northern) CSO (N-CSO), and
- (b) the relationship between the lead CSO, its alliance members, and Southern CSOs (S-CSOs).

1.3 How we worked: methodology

Because it was impossible to look at all SP activities in all countries was impossible in the given time frame, a number of considerations have guided the identification of a selection of SPs and a number of case study countries:

- All four SP programmes had to be covered.
- All different types of Dutch representation had to be covered (no embassy, embassy without development cooperation mandate, embassy with development cooperation mandate).
- The number of visited countries could not exceed four (cost-benefit considerations).
- All thematic directorates of MFA/DGIS should have at least one of their SPs in the sample.
- No duplication with other ongoing studies (in Kenya and India).

¹ In this report, the terms 'complementary roles' for MFA and CSOs and 'complementarity' between MFA and CSOs refer to forms of interaction between MFA and CSOs in a single project. This interaction can vary in intensity from informing each other to actual tactical collaboration, which could result in synergy. What is not meant by complementarity in this report is working separately or independently on different projects that may complement each other in a project portfolio.

This led to the selection of 26 SPs, active in at least one of the following countries: Mali, Uganda, Sudan or Nepal.

The IOB team conducted over 65 interviews with MFA and N-CSO staff in the Netherlands. IOB commissioned the country visits to ACE Europe, who worked with local consultants. Interviews and country visits took place between December 2018 and February 2019. In each country, ACE organised a workshop with S-CSOs, followed by individual interviews with CSOs, often on location. Embassy staff were interviewed separately. Over 170 people were involved in interviews and group discussions in the country case studies. Draft conclusions and recommendations were first discussed with MFA staff in late February, followed by a webinar with S-CSOs and a workshop with N-CSOs and MFA staff in March 2019. This made it possible to discuss findings and draft recommendations in April.

1.4 Main findings

The expectations for strategic partnerships – a new way of working for MFA and CSOs – were high but not always clearly articulated. The complementary roles of MFA and a CSO within an SP started with a strategic dialogue about objectives and results, and often included an exchange of knowledge and the use of each other's network. In some cases this opened doors that led to tactical cooperation, in which each partner played its specific role, jointly contributing to results that MFA or the CSO would not have achieved on their own.

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An example of complementary roles between CSO and MFA thematic department: In Kenya the government wanted to open a coal power plant, using an AfDB loan. MFA thematic department IGG and the CSOs were against investing in fossil fuels, but the S-CSO was not allowed to openly criticise the Kenyan government. The S-CSO informed the N-CSO, who discussed this with IGG. MFA, who is party to discussions at AfDB, and then voiced its objection to coal power plants.

Generally, CSOs feel that their autonomy is respected in the partnerships, thanks to the elaborate project proposal and inception phases. There are good examples of complementarity between CSOs, especially where decision-making power was delegated to a horizontal SP governance structure at the country level, where S-CSO jointly plan, budget and monitor.

In spite of the good intentions, and the positive examples of well-functioning partnerships that this study found, there are a number of constraints that have limited the functioning of strategic partnerships, the most important being:

- Thematic departments and embassies were involved late in the development of the project proposals, which reduced co-ownership of the SP.
- There is some misunderstanding about how SPs contribute to the objectives and results of MFA's thematic departments, which is reflected in the missing links between the theories of change and results frameworks of different MFA departments and SPs.

- There is a tension between the aim to achieve complementarity in the partnerships and CSO autonomy. CSOs require a certain degree of independence from MFA in order to fulfil their role of dissent in advocacy, which is important for policy coherence, and for peace-building and conflict mediation.
- MFA has insufficient staff, in some thematic departments and in many embassies, to fully play out its partnership role in the SP.
- The long-term commitment and flexibility that MFA provides to N-CSOs is not always transferred to S-CSOs, many of which are still bound to annual contracts, activity-based budgets and strict reporting requirements.

2

Recommendations to MFA for future strategic partnerships

These recommendations concern future strategic partnerships (SPs) between MFA and CSOs. We specifically focus here on recommendations for the next phase of the Dialogue & Dissent SP instrument. Therefore, the recommendations and related findings in this document are presented chronologically: (2.1) policy framework development; (2.2) partnership agreement; and (2.3) implementation. These recommendations are supported by a selection of findings. More complete and detailed research findings, as well as more information about the background and research methodology are available in the detailed research report, which will be joint as annex in a complete version of this report.

2.1 Policy framework development phase

Recommendations	Findings
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreement within MFA on the principles and added value of SPs. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Agree on the complementarity between managerial and transformative development views² (b) Continue using theories of change, at different levels, to clarify complementary roles and results (c) Encourage dissent for greater policy coherence, even if it feels uncomfortable 2. Choose for strategic partnerships, above other contractual relations, only if they have clear added value and if both MFA and CSOs are committed to them 3. Clarify MFA's expectations and SP elements to CSOs in the policy framework. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Balance complementarity between MFA and CSO, and autonomy for CSO (b) Choose the funding modality and accountability that suits the desired complementarity and CSO autonomy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Both MFA and CSOs expected more strategic dialogue and complementarity, but expectations were not well articulated 2. Complementarity between MFA and CSO started with dialogue, which created opportunities for joint action 3. CSO autonomy can be undermined by the aim of MFA to achieve complementarity, and may require MFA to give CSOs more space 4. Very few SPs worked on dissent, in spite of its importance for policy coherence 5. Long-term and flexible funding made it possible for N-CSOs to invest in partnerships for transformative processes 6. Some MFA thematic departments used results frameworks that are not appropriate for the SP 7. Generally, N-CSOs appreciate the MFA's less detailed requirements for reporting results 8. S-CSOs were often still bound to annual contracts, inflexible budgets and detailed reporting requirements

² Social transformation in society is a long-term process, changes the attitudes and values of different actors, with, in the case of D&D, the aim of reducing unequal power relations and exclusion in the social economic and political domain.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 Agreement within MFA on the principles and added value of SPs

First of all, there should be clear consensus within MFA on the strategy, to avoid misunderstanding, conflicting expectations and disappointments in future SPs. Even if one thematic department, DSO in the case of D&D, is in charge of developing the policy framework for a new SP instrument, the principles of SPs need to be agreed on within all directorates and departments of MFA which could become involved in future SPs. Principles include the desired complementary roles of MFA and CSO, the respect for CSO autonomy, and the corresponding appropriate financing modalities and accountability systems. Indeed, there are different views within MFA, that need to be discussed, understood and acknowledged:

A. Agree on the complementarity between managerial and transformative development views

There is potential incongruity, within MFA, and to a lesser extent also within CSOs, between the social transformative development view and the managerial development view, which can result in misunderstanding and frustration. In the managerial view, CSOs are a means to an end, while in the transformational view, CSOs have an intrinsic value for their political role in society as well; these views are not mutually exclusive. The trend at MFA is to increase accountability to parliament and the Dutch public regarding SDG-level results, with the risk of reducing space for longer-term social transformational results. DSO is well placed to discuss the complementarity between these two development views within MFA in general, and explain the need to embrace a transformative development view in the long-term processes that SPs work on. This will also clarify the balance between S-CSO's functional capacity development, and institutional and organisational capacity development.³

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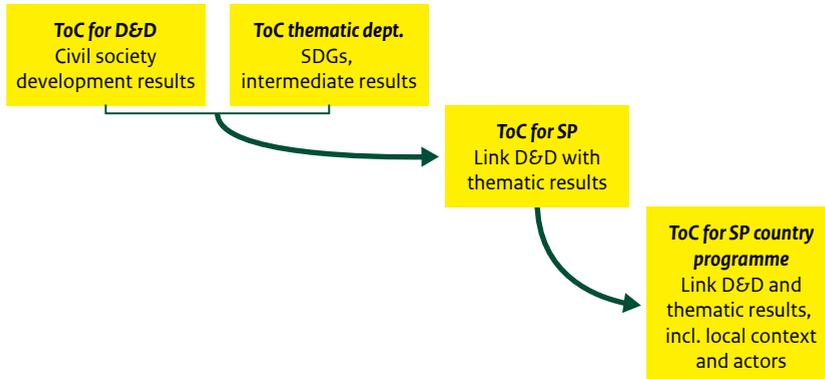
B. Continue using theories of change, at different levels, to clarify complementary roles and results

We encourage all parties to continue working with theories of change, as they are much appreciated by both MFA and CSO staff. We also encourage them to make more effort to periodically reflect on the ToC and the validity of its underlying assumptions, as this shapes the strategic dialogue both between MFA and CSOs, and within the CSO alliance. A ToC is best developed at three levels (Figure 2).

- (i) At the policy or instrument level by MFA, giving enough room for different SPs. Note that for the D&D SP, this requires a discussion about the overlap between the DSO D&D ToC, and the ToC of the involved thematic departments.
- (ii) At the SP level, by CSO in discussion with MFA (including thematic departments where relevant), giving enough room for different country contexts.
- (iii) At the country level, by CSOs, involving S-CSOs and embassies if present.

³ Functional, or instrumental capacity building, often short-term, serves a specific purpose, e.g. skills for lobbying. Organisation and institutional capacity building, often longer-term, serves the autonomy of organisations, by improving internal functioning and functioning in their environment respectively.

Figure 2 Theories of change at the policy, partnership and country programme levels



C. Encourage dissent for greater policy coherence, even if it feels uncomfortable

The SP programme could, but does not necessarily have to fit in an embassy’s strategy⁴, and can even take place in a country without Dutch embassy. Nor does an SP have to agree with all of the various MFA departments. First of all, complementarity can also take place between CSO and MFA in The Hague. Second and more importantly, CSO dissent, with an embassy or a particular thematic department, is important for overall MFA policy coherence⁵. For D&D in particular, activism is one of the policy influencing approaches. As for dissent in strategic partnerships where CSOs and MFA are jointly responsible for results, CSOs and MFA should at least agree on a few main overarching objectives, and to some extent on the tactics and external communication (e.g. first discuss any disagreement internally before campaigning publicly).

Recommendation 2 Choose for strategic partnerships, above other contractual relations, only if they have clear added value and if both MFA and CSOs are committed to them

The internal MFA discussion on SPs will also clarify the place that SPs have among other contractual relationships that MFA can have with CSOs. Not all of the work done by CSOs that is funded by MFA requires an SP. MFA can choose from within a spectrum between trust-based relationships with full autonomy for the CSO, on the one hand, and transactional relationships with predefined results and MFA-determined budget lines on the other. Strategic partnerships are an option in between these two extremities (Figure 3). The type of relationship that is chosen depends on (i) the context, varying from crisis, recovery, transition, transformation to resilient contexts, for example; (ii) the objectives, varying from service delivery such as access to drinking water, to long-term transformative processes such as civil society development; and (iii) the capacity and interest of the CSO

⁴ Since the embassies developed Multi-annual Country Strategies (MLS), ideally all centrally funded programmes, including SPs, should be covered by the strategy. In practice, however, we found embassies that simply had not anticipated any CSO SP work in their embassy strategy, let alone dissent to their embassy strategy.

⁵ For example, an embassy or a thematic department may prioritise the interests of the Dutch private sector abroad, while CSOs can draw MFA’s attention to the overlooked negative social or environmental effects.

and the MFA department. MFA should clarify the criteria for when an SP will be the preferred option, and when other contractual relationships will be preferred, and decide whether strategic partnerships are the desired instrument for a given goal and context.

Figure 3 *Spectrum of different MFA-CSO relationships*



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As an instrument, SPs are well suited for longer-term social transformation processes, as well as for peace building and conflict mediation processes, in which CSOs have sufficient autonomy while benefiting from the complementary roles of MFA, and where there is sufficient room for dissent. To avoid CSOs forcing all their plans into a strategic partnership proposal, MFA should point CSOs to other possibilities and funds for other MFA-CSO contractual relationships.

Recommendation 3 *Clarify MFA's expectations and SP elements to CSOs in the policy framework*

The internally established SP principles and expectations should be explained to candidate SP proponents (CSO) in the policy framework. The framework will clarify what part of it is pre-determined by MFA (e.g. overall policy objectives, financing modality and financial accountability), what part will be agreed on in dialogue between MFA and the CSO (e.g. specific objectives, strategic and tactical alignment; accountability for outcomes), and what part is up to the CSO to determine (e.g. tactical and operational autonomy; approaches; room for dissent; flexibility in implementation). The policy framework and application document should include a set of SP elements to be considered in the CSO proposal and which can be further elaborated in dialogue with MFA. These SP elements are organised as 10 (sub-)recommendations, divided into two groups overarching challenges⁶.

⁶ Note that the policy framework, theory of change, and guidelines for filling in the application forms used in 2015 cover aspects that we now consider to be crucial for strategic partnerships. Apparently, not everyone interpreted these aspects in the same way or else they did not give them sufficient attention during the development and assessment of proposals.

A. Balance complementarity between MFA and CSO, and autonomy for CSOs:

- **Complementarity: CSOs should have clear added value in terms of their roles being complementary to the roles played by MFA.** CSOs and MFA can play complementary roles at the country level in the South, in the Netherlands, and at the international level. For D&D, advocacy roles include: advising, lobbying, and activism.
- **Complementarity: CSOs should clarify how different CSO partners, including local movements, in the SP complement each other.** For D&D, often a combination of CSOs and movements is needed covering local constituency, research, diplomacy and campaigning.
- **Autonomy: MFA should not undermine CSOs' autonomy, in their aim to achieve complementarity.** Strategic objectives, country choice and results reporting should be agreed on in dialogue, not imposed by MFA. Certain lobbying and advocacy work requires regional or global activities that cannot be limited to Dutch priority countries. CSO country selection should be based on needs and the opportunity to address these needs; if this turns out to be a non-priority country, complementarity can still take place with MFA in The Hague.
- **Autonomy: N-CSOs should give sufficient autonomy to S-CSOs.** Autonomy for S-CSOs (and southern movements), representing local beneficiaries and interests, deserves special attention in the partnership between N-CSOs and S-CSOs. N-CSOs should discuss with S-CSOs how to reduce power inequalities, in spite of the funding modality and accountability, and how to acknowledge the added value of each partner in the SP.

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B. Choose the funding modality and accountability that suits the desired complementarity and CSO autonomy:

- **Funding modality: MFA could combine a long-term commitment with flexibility for new SPs .** MFA is committed to long-term engagement in an SP, but it also wants to create space for engaging in new SPs. To overcome this dilemma, MFA might consider selecting the best candidates from the pool of both old SP and new SP candidates, based on their track record and long-term results in the past.
- **Funding modality: N-CSOs should use funding modalities for S-CSOs that reflect a strategic partnership.** The funding modality should correspond to long-term commitment, autonomy, flexibility and limited administrative requirements. There is an inherent tension between the long-term commitment and capacity development of selected partner S-CSOs, and the flexibility of partner choice from a large network or emerging movements, with limited short-term functional support, responding to emerging lobbying and advocacy opportunities.
- **Funding modality: MFA should guide CSOs towards funds for non-L&A activities.** In lobbying and advocacy trajectories, there is often need for funding services to increase local buy-in and legitimacy. Ideally, this should be funded from other budgets available for CSOs. There may be cases where MFA could agree to a small part of the D&D budget being used for non-L&A activities.
- **Accountability: MFA and CSOs should agree on a mutual upward and downward accountability system.** A strategic partnership is reinforced when MFA and CSOs share responsibility for results and jointly report on these. Besides the usual upward accountability, downward accountability needs to be strengthened, from MFA to CSOs,

from N-CSOs to S-CSOs, and to local stakeholders and beneficiaries, for example by including them in planning and monitoring.

- **Accountability: MFA and CSOs should discuss and agree on which short- and medium-term indicators to report on.** MFA's desire to report annually on aggregated results should not result in requests to CSOs to report on irrelevant indicators. For D&D SP, it is possible (i) to translate the generic six D&D indicators to the specific SP theme; to link SP indicators to thematic indicators through a plausible narrative; or (iii) to directly report on thematic process or outcome indicators. The flexibility in SP implementation should be reflected in the accountability: (i) with a focus on (short-term, intermediate) outcomes and (ii) flexibility in process and output indicators.
- **Learning: MFA should continue to expand funding and facilitate of learning.** MFA should consider using the D&D Linking and Learning activities in other SP programmes as well, and expand them to thematic learning, and learning at the country or regional level. First and foremost, learning should serve the needs of adaptive management in (local) SP programmes.

Findings

The above recommendations are based on the following findings:

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Finding 1 Both MFA and CSOs expected more strategic dialogue and complementarity, but expectations were not well articulated

The N-CSOs' expectations of the new strategic partnership were positive: more strategic dialogue with MFA as partner, more complementarity between CSO and MFA in joint objectives, and in the case of D&D, more acknowledgment for lobbying and advocacy with a link between local, national and international activities. N-CSOs were also uncertain about what a 'strategic partnership' meant exactly, and how it would work in practice. The MFA's expectations at DSO, the department initiating the D&D and SRHR SP, were similar to those of CSOs.

Some thematic departments and embassies were only involved at a later stage, and either did not have any clear expectations, or anticipated having a much stronger influence on the SP, in terms of where the SP would work, and the extent to which the SP would contribute to and report on the specific thematic results framework, or fit in with the embassy's multi annual country strategy (MLS). Too little effort has been made to come to a joint agreement on overall objectives and clarifying how some of the SPs would contribute, in the short-term or the long-term, to the thematic department's results framework.

Our study also confirmed the findings of an earlier study from 2016⁷, namely that CSOs had higher expectations than MFA.

Most S-CSOs mentioned that they did not have clear expectations of the new strategic partnerships. A few S-CSOs mentioned that they had expected more capacity building and

⁷ Wessel M, L Schulpen S Hilhorst, K Biekart. 2017. Mapping the expectations of the Dutch Strategic Partnerships for lobby and advocacy.

that they would be less dependent on N-CSO's for technology and funding. Both N-CSOs and S-CSOs had expected the Dutch embassy to be more involved. CSOs' expectations of MFA's role were often unrealistic, according to MFA, given MFA's limited staff capacity.

Finding 2 Complementarity between MFA and CSOs started with dialogue, which created opportunities for joint action

Complementarity between MFA and CSOs started with agreement on strategic objectives in the project proposal and inception phase, and was followed by a strategic dialogue, often through frequent informal contact between MFA and N-CSO. This made it possible to use each other's knowledge and networks. Dutch embassies, when present, were often involved as well, and helped to facilitate the exchange of information between the embassy and the various strategic partners. The strategic dialogue has also informed Dutch policies and the embassies' multi-annual country strategies. When strategic dialogue was effective, it created opportunities for the actors to assume complementary roles. For example, MFA and embassies have opened doors for CSOs' lobbying and advocacy efforts in international forums or national governments, while CSOs have informed embassies about the concerns of local communities, and provided evidence on themes that MFA would like to address, such as human rights and the environment. This study found good examples of complementary roles, involving MFA in The Hague, embassies, N-CSOs and S-CSOs (Table 1). However, both CSOs and MFA acknowledged that many opportunities for complementary roles were missed as well, partly by unclear expectations about each other's roles, diverging interests, and lack of MFA staff capacity.

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There are major differences between the four different SP programmes. Looking at the spectrum of relationships, which range from transactional relationships, via strategic partnerships, to trust-based relationships (see Figure 3), the DSH ARC programme was more transactional-based during implementation, while the DSH 'Peace building and mediation SP' are more trust-based. The D&D and SRHR SPs are more in the middle, and show the most complementarity between MFA and CSOs. For the DSO D&D objective to strengthen civil society for their lobbying and advocacy role, we found in this study that SP agreements are indeed appropriate and certainly have added value. Within the complex environment of lobbying and advocacy, SPs enable many of the partners to consistently act, observe and respond in a complementary manner.

One of the features of strategic partnerships is that setting joint strategic objectives can only be achieved when proposals are developed in a dialogue between MFA and CSOs, which explains why a standard tender procedure, in which the applicant is required to submit a full, detailed proposal, is inappropriate for strategic partnerships.

Several examples of joint CSO-MFA action were found, a few of which are presented below. The overall patterns of the complementary roles that CSO and MFA played are summarised in Table 1.

An example of complementary roles between MFA and an environmental CSO: In Uganda, IFAD supported the development of two oil palm areas. However, the environmental assessment was done poorly. Therefore, the Dutch embassy asked the environmental CSO for advice. The CSO commissioned an additional study that showed the negative environmental impact. As a result, IFAD is currently reorienting their investment, and Dutch banks that were ready to invest in oil palm, are warned by this assessment.

Table 1 Overview of complementary roles of MFA and CSO found in this study

Role MFA	Role CSOs
Use each other's knowledge and networks:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate information exchange between SPs. Bring CSOs in contact with other CSOs working on same theme. Organise and fund learning, through knowledge platforms, linking and learning events. Introduce CSOs to international organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share knowledge (thematic, local context). Share network (local constituency; local concerns). Train MFA staff.
Strategic dialogue:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite CSOs for reflection on programme or thematic theories of change Invite CSO advice for Dutch policies and strategies (MLS) Participate in joint political country analysis. Invite CSOs for reflection or input on international policies. MFA departments discuss policy incoherencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide thematic and local context input (CSO network). Add legitimacy through local constituency. Participate in joint political country analysis. Point MFA at policy incoherencies.
Coordinate joint advocacy in the South:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise CSO about tactical approaches. Forward CSO message to government that CSO cannot deliver themselves. Linking CSO to Dutch programmes or investors, in case of concerns about social or environmental impact. Protect S-CSO activist and lobby for civic space in dialogue with government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signal local concerns (social, environmental, human rights). Provide embassies with information for dialogue with government. Mobilise local constituency for credibility. Inform embassy about threatened S-CSO activists and shrinking civil space.
Coordinate joint advocacy in international forums:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MFA The Hague and Dutch Permanent Representatives discuss roles with CSO in joint policy lobbying initiatives. Use MFA access to, and credibility in international forums (UN, World Bank) Inform CSO about political feasibility and advice about tactical approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link local to international lobbying and advocacy. Mediate between Dutch and Southern governments. Lobby, through MFA in The Hague and Dutch public, for more attention to social and environmental issues in the South. Provide MFA with evidence and legitimacy (CSO network).

Finding 3 CSO autonomy can be undermined by the aim of MFA to achieve complementarity, and may require MFA to give CSOs more space

There is a trade-off between complementarity and autonomy. The complementarity between roles assumed by MFA and CSOs has resulted in synergy, but it can also undermine a CSO's autonomy. Some MFA staff, in their aim to achieve complementarity and reduce fragmentation, would like to see CSOs work on MFA priorities in MFA priority countries. However, CSOs and other MFA staff agree that CSOs should not be prevented from working in countries where the Netherlands does not have an embassy, in non-priority countries, or from working on themes such as human rights or the environment in countries where Dutch priorities are different, for example trade, private sector development and the interest of Dutch companies. On the contrary, the latter is seen, also by MFA, as an example of 'dissent', or providing a platform for unheard voices. Indeed, it is viewed as a different kind of complementarity, which would disappear if CSOs had to conform to MFA's priorities.

The perceived autonomy is also influenced by the local context and cultural reality of the S-CSO. In some countries it is important to maintain some critical distance from donors and their embassies. Some S-CSOs must stay under the radar, while others need to be seen as being impartial and not give the impression that they are being funded by Dutch money. The reverse is also true: MFA may agree with a CSO's activist approach, but may avoid this association when conducting government-to-government diplomacy.

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An example of a CSO not wanting to be openly associated with the Dutch government: The fishing community in Jakarta did not want to engage in a consultation with the Dutch embassy staff because of Dutch support to Dutch dredging companies, who were causing troubles to the fishing community.

Finding 4 Very few SPs worked on dissent, in spite of its importance for policy coherence

The Netherlands is quite unique in its support to the political role of CSOs, which is becoming even more relevant given the current shrinking civic space in many countries. Dissent and activism is an important part of advocacy work. Although CSOs appreciate having the room to disagree, most CSOs emphasised the element of dialogue. CSOs stated that discussions with MFA, and the resulting policy input from SPs, proceeded smoothly because they have common objectives. True dissent only took place in a few SPs, where CSOs brought attention to MFA's internal policy incoherencies, e.g. between the government's interest in trade, investment, and the Dutch private sector abroad, on the one hand, and labour conditions for the local population and the environmental impact, on the other. In such cases, the CSO may agree with certain departments, and disagree with others. The MFA departments that feel least comfortable with dissent, for example those dealing with foreign trade and investment abroad, note that dissent in SPs can work well as long as there is agreement on overarching objectives from the start, and a willingness to come to an internal agreement before starting to campaign publicly. There are interesting examples where initial disagreement ultimately resulted in more policy coherence.

An example of CSO dissent contributing to MFA's policy coherence: In Kenya, there were problems with labour conditions in the flower sector, where Dutch companies are involved: low wages, sexual harassment and exposure to pesticides. For CSOs it is difficult to get in contact with the private sector. Through the embassy, the CSO was introduced at a round table with the private sector. This resulted in the setup of a 'Living wage lab' consisting of CSOs, the private sector and ILO, which has launched a pilot project with several Dutch flower companies.

Finding 5 Long-term and flexible funding made it possible for CSOs to invest in partnerships for transformative processes

Characteristics of the MFA financing modality in the SP are a long-term commitment (often five years) that makes it possible to plan for longer-term processes and build local capacity, and flexible funding along broad budget lines that makes it possible to focus on outcomes rather than detailed activities. These were much appreciated by N-CSOs and lead S-CSOs, and allowed them to build longer-term relationships with other S-CSOs and communities, invest in capacity development, and adapt plans when contexts change. It also allowed CSOs to combine SP funding with other funding and to build a more coherent, long-term country programme. Long-term processes require longer than five years, so most CSOs hope for continued funding for well-performing SPs.

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An example of the positive effect of long-term and flexible funding: A N-CSO involved in an SP in Sudan explained that they can combine this with funding from other donors to develop a longer-term coherent country programme.

On the other hand, some CSOs mentioned that for lobbying and advocacy purposes, flexibility is needed to switch partners, select partners from a larger network and involve informal movements, as lobbying and advocacy opportunities arise. This may limit the duration of the commitment towards S-CSOs and the focus on civil society development in the South.

Finding 6 Some MFA thematic departments used results frameworks that are not appropriate for SP

The idea of a strategic partnership is that MFA and CSOs agree on long-term outcomes, and provide the CSOs with sufficient flexibility in their choice of outputs, processes, and intermediate results, to achieve those outcomes. However, MFA reports aggregated results to parliament annually, and wishes to include SP results. In the case of D&D, most SPs were transferred to other thematic departments, who have their own results framework. Too little effort has been made to link the different ToCs and to look for overlap in the result frames. Unfortunately, in the chain between MFA thematic department, Dutch-based N-CSOs, the N-CSOs' field office, and S-CSOs, what was meant to be a dialogue about indicators to report on, ended up being an imposition of inappropriate indicators for certain S-CSOs. The final result reflects what the DSO D&D ToC document (2017)⁸ describes

⁸ Kamstra J. 2017. Dialogue and Dissent Theory of Change 2.0. Supporting civil society's political role.

as a clash between the transformative development view and the managerial development view, partly caused by MFA's aim to report results annually, and partly by the relation between N-CSOs and S-CSOs.

An example of an inappropriate results framework for S-CSO: A D&D programme in Sudan, implemented by an S-CSO, was happy with its own innovative 'community score card' monitoring tool. Then a consultant, brought in by the N-CSO, came and developed an additional list of indicators, which were not considered relevant by the S-CSO. Later, the N-CSO requested the S-CSO to report on MFA/DSH indicators, and these even changed a number of times. The S-CSO is now focusing on meeting as many of the MFA/DSH requirements as it can and using as few of the indicators proposed by the consultant as possible. Their own M&E, including the community score card, is not integrated into the new M&E system yet.

The ARC programme has developed a common results framework, but the CSO does not consider it to be particularly appropriate as it does not reflect the local reality, nor do the figures aggregated by DSH mean much. The DSH peace-building and mediation I-CSOs, by contrast, whose funding is largely unearmarked, prepare one report that is sent to all core donors. In addition, since 2018 these I-CSOs also report to MFA/DSH on a limited number of DSH indicators, which were discussed and agreed upon.

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Finding 7 Generally, N-CSOs appreciate the MFA's less detailed requirements for reporting results

MFA's intention was to have lower administrative requirements than under the previous MFS-II programme, and joint responsibility for agreed outcomes. For the D&D programme, DSO identified six universal indicators, which all D&D SPs could report on. MFA recommended an 'eight-page' annual report, but most SPs submitted more elaborate reports, typically 30-60 pages long. N-CSOs appreciated the less detailed reporting requirements with a focus on (intermediate) outcomes and a reflection on the ToC and its underlying assumptions (complemented with reporting in IATI). This is considered appropriate for the longer-term transformative processes such as support to the capacity development of civil society and lobbying and advocacy. Nevertheless, MFA Control Units still require detailed financial reporting.

Finding 8 S-CSOs are often still bound to annual contracts, inflexible budgets and detailed reporting requirements

Many S-CSOs have not benefitted from long-term commitment and flexibility, and are still bound to annual contracts with inflexible activity-based budgets. Most SPs have a limited budget for S-CSO overhead costs and contingencies. This limits the continuity of their activities – including staff retention – and the possibility of strategic long-term planning and capacity building, and it also affects their sustainability.

A particular constraint, mentioned by several CSOs in the D&D SP, is that expenditure on service delivery is currently prohibited. These CSOs see this expenditure as necessary for their

lobbying and advocacy work, for gaining the buy-in of local communities and governments, in particular in contexts where there are limited options for other donor funding.

In the South, reporting on outcomes was new and appreciated by S-CSOs, because it facilitated more strategic discussion and programme adaptation. However, most S-CSO still need to submit detailed activity reports accompanied by detailed financial reports. This is related to the above-mentioned annual, inflexible activity-based budgets. One of the reasons mentioned by N-CSOs and lead S-CSOs, is the level of the administrative capacity of the contracted S-CSOs, and N-CSO and lead S-CSO's fear of financial mismanagement by S-CSOs. Another reason why lead S-CSOs have high financial reporting requirements: working for different donors, they use one system that meets the requirements of the most stringent donor.

An example of short-term budget and its negative consequences: An N-CSO visited Sudan to find out why there was budget underspending. It turned out that the implementing S-CSO had ran out of money, and had been waiting for a long time for money from the bureaucratically organised lead S-CSO. The implementing S-CSO turned out to run out of money regularly, had to discontinue activities, and had difficulty retaining staff.

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2.2 Partnership agreement phase

Recommendations	Findings
4. Involve thematic departments, embassies and S-CSOs earlier in the assessment and further development of the proposals.	9. Late involvement of thematic departments and embassies reduced co-ownership of the SP.
5. Aim to achieve complementarity between CSOs in SP country programmes.	10. The elaborate inception phase increased ownership and autonomy for S-CSOs.
6. Clarify and document the complementarity with thematic departments and embassy programmes in an MoU.	11. Flexibility in the strategic choice of partners with different expertise increased complementarity between MOs.
7. Address MFA staff inadequacies, in particular at the embassy level.	12. Complementarity also depended on the available MFA staff to play out its partnership role.
8. Encourage N-MO to delegate power to a country level SP governance structure.	13. A horizontal governance structure between CSOs at the country level improved SP functioning.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4 Involve thematic departments, embassies and S-CSO earlier in the assessment and further development of the proposals.

In the spirit of a more equal partnership, the assessment and further development of SP proposals should involve discussions between MFA and CSOs about the above-mentioned SP elements. S-CSO autonomy benefits from early involvement in the design of the SP. In particular existing SPs that intend to continue working together in a subsequent phase have the opportunity to better involve S-CSOs, other Southern stakeholders and the embassy in the design. MFA could ask submitters of SP proposals about the extent to which S-CSOs, including movements and CBOs, have been involved, and about the extent to which these represent a local constituency to which they are accountable.

Recommendation 5 Aim to achieve complementarity between CSOs in SP country programmes.

For SPs working with a group of different Northern and Southern CSOs, MFA should encourage the N-CSO to choose a CSO alliance that meets the required capacity of the SP objectives in the country context. The roles are a logical consequence of the ToC, context and actor analysis at the country programme level. The political roles that are expected to be assumed in the D&D programme often involve bringing into play a combination of local constituency, information and knowledge, international networks, diplomacy, and activism. MFA should encourage SPs to include community-based organisations, movements, the private sector and local governments, not only as lobbying targets, but as coalition partners to play complementary roles in the partnership.

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Recommendation 6 Clarify and document the complementarity with thematic departments and embassy programmes in an MoU

For SPs elaborating a programme in countries with a Dutch embassy, make sure that the SP is not only co-owned by thematic departments, but also included in the embassy Multiannual Country Strategy (MLS). The MLS should explain how the respective ToCs reinforce each other, so the SP receives sufficient attention through a certain level of co-ownership by the embassy, while respecting CSO autonomy. The embassy, thematic department and CSO should discuss and agree on the desired level of complementarity, which can vary in intensity from simply informing each other, using each other's network, to actual tactical collaboration in joint activities. An outline of the expected roles of the CSO, the thematic department and the embassy in the partnership, should be agreed on, based on a realistic estimate of staff time each partner can make available for this partnership. This should also be documented, e.g. in an MoU, also to avoid disruption in case of staff rotation.

Recommendation 7 Address MFA staff inadequacies, in particular at the embassy level.

For the implementation of the SP, MFA should provide sufficient capacity, proportional to the number of programmes and their budget, to the thematic department but even more so at the country level. The best place to increase capacity at the country level is at the embassy. Alternatively, if no additional MFA staff can be hired, additional CSO staff could be hired for the duration of the programme, funded from the overall programme budget, to facilitate communication and collaboration between the embassy and CSOs.

Recommendation 8 Encourage delegating power to a country-level SP governance structure.

The SP framework, proposal, and country programme, in increasing level of detail, should clarify what decisions can be taken at what level, thus applying local ownership and subsidiarity principles. This requires N-CSOs to delegate power. MFA could ask how the SP expects to organise country-level governance in order to enhance the SP's functioning. The benefits of different CSOs with complementary roles working in one SP in one country depend considerably on the country-level governance structure. We recommend a horizontal governance structure in which, at the country level, all SP partners can jointly plan, budget, divide tasks, monitor and take responsibility for results. This kind of a horizontal governance structure also reduces the power inequality that still persists in some N-CSO-S-CSO bilateral contractual arrangements.

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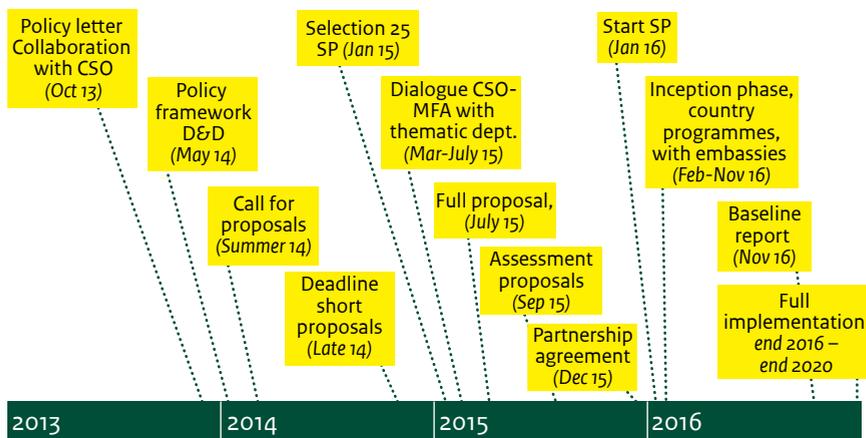
Findings

The above recommendations are based on the following findings:

Finding 9 Late involvement of thematic departments and embassies reduced co-ownership of the SP

As described in Finding 6, complementarity between MFA and CSOs had a false start due to the late involvement of the thematic departments and often even later involvement of the embassies. The timeline of the D&D project development procedure, from the first policy letter in 2013 to the start of full implementation in late 2016, reveals that the thematic departments and embassies were not involved in the initial short proposals (global ToC and track record) in 2014. Selected short proposals, which already included overall goals, were then divided across thematic departments for the joint elaboration of the full proposals in 2015. Embassies were only asked to come on board, insofar as relevant, during the inception phase in 2016. This reduced early opportunities to reach a joint agreement on overall goals and to link the ToC and corresponding results frameworks. Especially in the case of DSH, and in the case of certain embassies, there is not much sense of co-ownership because of the perceived dissonance between the overall objectives and results frameworks.

Figure 4 Timeline of the preparation of D&D strategic partnerships



Finding 10 The elaborate inception phase increased ownership and autonomy for S-CSOs

S-CSOs are often sub-contracted after the overarching SP agreement has already been signed, and S-CSOs therefore have less influence at the strategic level. Although the assumptions underlying the SP policy frameworks are therefore challenged by CSO realities, both the N-CSOs and the S-CSOs feel that their autonomy is well respected in the SP. The elaborate, in-country inception phase has contributed to this strategic autonomy, as it allows parties to adapt their strategic choices to the local contexts.

Finding 11 Flexibility in the strategic choice of partners with different expertise increased complementarity between MOs

Certain SPs made more of an effort during a scoping study in the early stages, which prompted the CSO alliance to welcome additional partners with complementary expertise, needed in pursuit of the SPs' objectives. This increased complementarity between MOs in an SP. For lobbying and advocacy, this could include: contact with local communities, local government legitimacy, information gathering and research, links to international forums, capacity for campaigning, and diplomacy.

Finding 12 Complementarity in the SP depended on available MFA staff to play out its partnership role

A major constraint, mentioned by many CSOs, but also by several staff at MFA, has been the lack of MFA capacity to play out its partnership role. This had to do with the number of staff, staff expertise and personal motivation, and high staff turnover. International CSOs witnessed a high staff turnover in MFA compared to other donors. CSOs appreciated longer-term contacts (>4 years) with MFA staff in The Hague, as it led to more trust and strategic dialogue. Embassies that have (additional) staff dedicated to maintaining contact with CSOs played out their partner role much better. The most interesting cases of complementarity are those where S-CSOs, N-CSOs, embassies, Dutch Permanent Representatives and different thematic departments collaborate, thanks to motivated staff and good personal relationships.

An example of the benefits of additional MFA staff capacity: The embassy in Uganda recruited an additional local staff member for the coordination of SP (and other projects) working on SRHR, organised several meetings per year, and invited the SRHR SP for input in the Multi-annual Country Strategy (MLS).

Finding 13 A horizontal governance structure between CSOs at the country level improved SP functioning

Several SPs had innovative governance structures, involving all CSOs at the country level. Both new and less experienced CSOs and older and more professional CSOs participated to an equal degree. The governance structure organised joint planning, divided tasks according to the CSOs' capacities and divided the SP country budget according to outcomes. Joint monitoring of outcomes made it possible to rearrange tasks and budget between CSOs when necessary. The governance structure supported peer-to-peer support for capacity development, and resulted in a clear shared responsibility for the agreed outcomes. This governance structure was in sharp contrast to some of the bilateral N-CSO–S-CSO relationships found in some of the other SPs, which suffered from major power inequalities.

Examples of a horizontal governance structure of S-CSOs: In three SP's, active in Uganda and Nepal, the CSOs have a joint government structure at the country level, and, in two SP's a steering committee with rotating presidency. The S-CSOs do joint planning, divide the country budget, and discuss progress. All S-CSOs are well informed about the others, have a strong sense of joint responsibility, and when necessary tasks are redistributed among the partners.

2.3 SP implementation phase

In the current D&D programme, there was a separate inception phase of almost one year (2016), followed by a four-year implementation phase (end 2016–end 2020). In reality, implementation already started in the inception phase, while the programme was regularly reviewed and adapted during implementation. Therefore, DSO proposes not to have a separate inception phase in the new D&D programme. Our recommendations below concern the new implementation phase, including the further development of country programmes, but the supporting findings refer to both the previous inception phase and the previous implementation phase.

Recommendations	Findings
9. Facilitate adaptive project management by regular strategic dialogue and validation of the assumptions underpinning the SP.	14. Continued strategic dialogue enabled joint MFA-CSO action.
10. Let each SP formulate a strategy for both short- and long-term capacity development for S-CSOs.	15. A vicious circle of short-term support and limited capacity development kept some S-CSOs in an unequal partnership role.
11. Fund and organise continued learning relevant for SP implementation.	16. CSO autonomy was strengthened by the focus on outcomes and trust.
12. Strengthen shared responsibility and downward accountability.	17. Joint learning was well organised in D&D, but poorly organised in ARC due to limited staff.
13. Allow flexibility in the SP results framework for context specific interpretation and flexibility over time.	18. Shared responsibility for outcomes evolved over time, and was facilitated by the SP governance structure.
	19. Accountability remains mainly upward.

Recommendations

Recommendation 9 Facilitate adaptive project management by regular strategic dialogue and validation of the assumptions underpinning the SP.

Dialogue should not be limited to the formal, annual strategic dialogue meeting. Rather, it should be frequent and informal – and strategic. It should take place both locally at the country level, and in The Hague, and the dialogue should be sure to cover the achieved outcomes, the ToC's underlying assumptions and the consequences for making adaptations to the programme.

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Recommendation 10 Let each SP formulate a strategy for both short- and long-term capacity development for S-CSOs.

SP proposals should present a vision and strategy on how capacity development in civil society will be supported in the short- and the long-term. The question is to find the right balance between capacity for a specific purpose (functional or instrumental capacity development), and capacity for empowerment of an organisation, by better internal functioning (organisational capacity, e.g. financial management, M&E, HRM) and by better functioning in their environment (institutional capacity, e.g. networking and relations management, fundraising, and determination of coherent strategy).

Recommendation 11 Fund and organise continued learning relevant for SP implementation.

The Linking and Learning activities in the D&D programme are recommended for other SP programmes as well. In addition, more learning could take place at the country or region level, as well as at the thematic level. The focus should be on lessons for SP implementation and adaptation.

Recommendation 12 Strengthen shared responsibility and downward accountability.

To strengthen shared MFA-CSO responsibility for SP results, MFA – and embassies where possible – should play a role in monitoring and reporting. Moreover, MFA should encourage downward accountability, from MFA to CSOs, from N-CSOs to S-CSOs, and to beneficiaries, for example by including southern stakeholders in planning and monitoring. A horizontal CSO governance structure at country level, (see Recommendation 8) with delegated decision-making power, combined with strategic dialogue with MFA, facilitates joint planning, monitoring and adaptation, and reporting.

Recommendation 13 Allow flexibility in the SP results framework for context specific interpretation and flexibility over time.

Because of the nature of the SPs – clear overall objectives, and flexibility in approach and activities – MFA thematic departments should also allow SPs a certain flexibility in the results reporting – in discussions between MFA and CSOs.

Findings

The above recommendations are based on the following findings:

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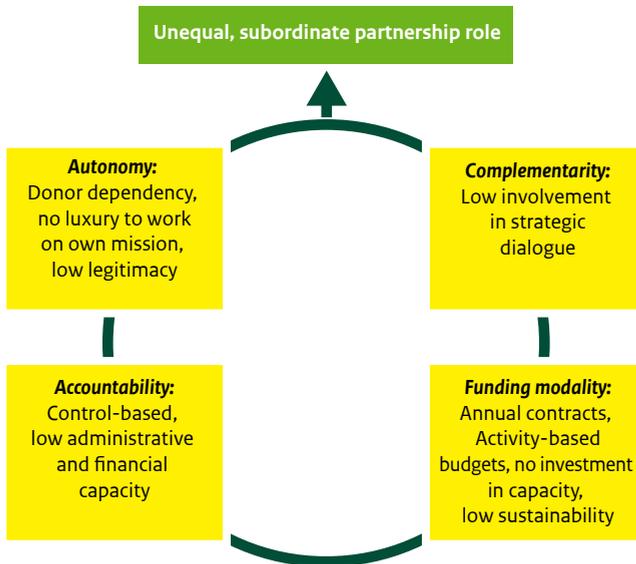
Finding 14 Continued strategic dialogue enabled joint MFA-CSO action

As Finding 2 illustrates, the study has found various examples of joint action in which CSOs and MFA played complementary roles, thanks to continued strategic dialogue during the implementation of the SP. The involvement of embassies varies considerably between countries, and depends on embassy priorities (MLS), but also on the personal interest of individuals. As a consequence, embassy involvement also varies with staff rotation.

Finding 15 A vicious circle of short-term support and limited capacity development kept some S-CSOs in an unequal partnership role

In the case of D&D, two main objectives were combined: (i) a general objective to enhance the development of civil society in the South, and (ii) lobbying and advocacy towards decision-makers that will eventually contribute to SDGs. The first objective required longer-term commitments and flexible funding to build the capacities of S-CSOs. The second objective required flexibility in partner choice, including less organised and formalised movements, and support was sometimes limited to short-term functional capacity building. In practice, grassroots organisations or movements are often combined in an alliance with more professional CSOs to take advantage of their administrative capacity and accountability. So even though not all S-CSOs needed to professionalise, some of them found it difficult to escape from a vicious circle that involved all four aspects of SPs' functioning. As a result, these S-CSOs found themselves in an unequal, subordinate role in the SP partnership (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 *Vicious circle between funding modality, accountability, autonomy and complementarity*



Finding 16 CSO autonomy was strengthened by the focus on outcomes and trust

The flexibility regarding the day-to-day management of the SP activities is highly appreciated by the CSOs in all four programmes. The annual joint discussion on outcomes and the reflection on the ToC had a positive effect on the flexibility and autonomy of S-CSOs. However, as Finding 8 demonstrates, in some cases S-CSOs faced demanding reporting requirements, not in line with the original idea of strategic partnerships. Trust between MFA and CSOs, and between N-CSOs and S-CSOs, improved the autonomy of CSOs. High staff turnover often meant re-building trust again, and had a negative effect on S-CSOs' autonomy.

Finding 17 Joint learning was well organised in D&D, but poorly organised in ARC due to limited staff

Joint learning in SPs, between MFA and different CSOs, happened to varying degrees. The D&D SP were facilitated by the MFA budget for Linking and Learning events, which were much appreciated. ARC, by contrast, had very little effective support from MFA for learning, and N-CSOs found the research agenda too academic. Some CSOs involved in ARC organised exchanges themselves at the country level. Embassies often facilitated exchanges between SPs, or, in some cases between CSOs working on the same theme, e.g. SRHR. The main determinants were budget, and availability and priorities of MFA staff.

Examples of suggestions made for improved thematic learning: Several CSOs mentioned that it could be more beneficial if a smaller group of CSOs (not limited to D&D) working on the same theme would be invited to learning events, e.g. at the country level. Examples are the three SPs working on child marriage. One CSO explained that the ToC is not being used sufficiently to validate assumptions, which is best done by inviting SPs working on the same theme.

Finding 18 Shared responsibility evolves over time, and is facilitated by SP governance structure

Shared responsibility for agreed outcomes gradually developed as MFA's involvement in joint strategic dialogue and collaboration increased. In Uganda, the embassy even tried joint monitoring of all SRHR projects, but that turned out to be difficult for practical reasons. Shared responsibility between CSOs in the same SP was stronger when there was a governance structure for joint planning, budgeting and monitoring (Finding 13). A constraint in the outcome-focused monitoring and the desired flexibility in implementation was the imposition of reporting requirements on S-CSOs, from N-CSOs or from MFA.

Finding 19 Accountability remains mainly upward

Accountability has mainly been upward, from S-CSOs to N-CSOs to MFA. S-CSOs complained about the lack of feedback. Downward accountability happened to some extent if S-CSOs were member-based organisations or organised meetings with beneficiaries or local authorities, as part of their monitoring and planning. In exceptional cases, SPs facilitated downward accountability from the minister to Dutch parliament and the public, responding to questions following SP campaigns in the Netherlands, e.g. about environmental or social issues in the South.

An example of downward accountability: in Sudan, the first step towards downward accountability was involving beneficiaries and local authorities in progress monitoring, during interviews and focus group discussions. An interesting side effect of this was the increased trust between local communities and local authorities.

Part 2:

Detailed research report

1

Impetus

This reports presents the results of the IOB evaluation of the functioning of strategic partnerships as an instrument. The main impetus is that two of the current strategic partnership (SP) programmes that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has with civil society organisations (CSOs) will expire in 2020. It concerns the Dialogue and Dissent (D&D) SP of DSO/MO (civil organisations), and the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) partnerships of DSO/GA (Health and Aids). This evaluation report serves as input for the new DSO SP policy framework, which is being developed in 2019.

In addition, DSH (Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid) also has strategic partnerships in the area of peace-building and mediation, and partnerships for humanitarian aid (Addressing Root Causes, ARC), which are included in this study.

This study focused on the functioning of the SPs between MFA and CSOs. This study did not examine the ultimate effectiveness of the SPs. Effectiveness will be considered in the final evaluations of the DSO SP planned for 2020.¹ We distinguished four main aspects of SP functioning: (i) complementarity of roles played by MFA and CSOs roles; (ii) autonomy of CSOs; (iii) funding modalities; and (iv) accountability. The main questions of this evaluation are: how do SPs function? Why are they functioning well or not functioning well? What recommendations can we draw from this?

¹ This study of the functioning of SPs will also serve as input for the policy review on social progress planned for 2021.

2

Background, theoretical framework and partnership programmes

2.1 Strategic partnerships of MFA with CSOs

Strategic partnerships with Dutch CSOs were announced in 2013 in the policy paper ‘Collaborating with civil society in a new context: aid, trade and investment’. This paper explained that a different kind of collaboration between the ministry and Dutch CSOs was desirable as a follow-up to earlier partnerships between MFA and CSOs in MFS-II. In addition to the role that CSOs play as service providers in the context of spearheads such as food security, water, SRHR, and security and rule of law, CSOs should fulfil a more political role than previously and reinforce civil society dialogue between civilians, government and the private sector. The policy paper presented four recommendations for the new SP based on experiences with former partnerships with CSOs:

1. Create flexibility (in programmes and types of partnership)
2. Build trust between CSOs and the ministry (avoid excessive supervision and control by MFA)
3. Strengthen the advocacy role (the biggest added value of CSOs, according to the policy paper)
4. Limit the regulatory burden (which was too heavy with MFS-II)

The policy framework for D&D from 2014 builds on this. In addition to the above-mentioned four recommendations for SPs, a number of desired characteristics for SPs were also mentioned:

- Joint analysis and target setting at the strategic level;
- Leaving sufficient room for each other’s identity, expertise, experience and network, and independence;
- Respecting each other’s roles;
- Considering options for the joint, complementary roles of MFA and CSO;²
- A critical dialogue between MFA and CSOs: collaboration is not always possible or necessary; dissent is necessary sometimes; and
- Annual strategic consultation about results driven by the theory of change, and regular informal consultation, in The Hague or at embassies.

The policy framework for the DSO/GA SRHR partnership fund 2016-2020 (2015) is in line with the D&D policy framework, and uses the same concept for SPs. In both policy frameworks, the expectation was that joint action by MFA and CSOs would be more effective.

The DSH partnerships have a different ultimate objective than the DSO partnerships: they focus more on peace-building and mediation, and reconstruction, and less on the political roles of Southern civil society. DSH also has its reasons to opt for a partnership approach. An unstable context requires relative autonomy and flexibility in order to respond rapidly; conflict sensitivities require an apolitical approach and (substantive) independence from

² The terms ‘complementary roles’ for MFA and CSOs, and ‘complementarity’ between MFA and CSOs, refer to forms of interaction between MFA and CSOs in a single project, which can vary in intensity from informing each other, using each other’s networks, opening doors, to actual tactical collaboration. What is not meant by complementarity in this report is working separately, independently, on different projects that may complement each other in a project portfolio.

donors; and for MFA these partnerships, which operate in the most difficult areas, are a valuable source of information for Dutch policy and strategies.

A clear picture emerges from the 2013 policy paper, the 2014 policy frameworks, and interviews with DSO and DSH staff about what an SP is understood to mean. For the purposes of this evaluation, we use the following working definition for 'strategic partnership', which will be explained in more detail below.

A strategic partnership is a collaboration between MFA and a CSO (or alliance of Northern CSOs and Southern CSOs) in which the long-term objectives have been agreed on at a strategic level, while the work method at the tactical level (who to work with) and activities at the operational level (what to do) are the responsibility of the individual partners. At the same time, MFA and the alliance use each other's networks and knowledge, keep each other informed and when necessary coordinate activities. The complementarity of roles leads to synergy and coherence, and thus to better results than partners would achieve on their own.

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The distinction between 'normal' partnerships and 'strategic' partnerships is not completely clear. Even normal partnerships aim to achieve a certain level of equality, trust, reciprocity and respect. But on top of that, *strategic* partnerships between MFA and CSOs pay more attention to setting joint objectives, developing a joint strategic dialogue about results and guidance, and where possible and useful, coordinating each other's roles and activities. This working definition reflects the expectations of strategic partnerships from MFA's point of view, and is used in the theoretical framework for this evaluation.

2.2 Theoretical framework: the functioning of strategic partnerships

For the purpose of this study, we developed a theoretical framework based on literature and interviews:

- Policy documents on the various SP programmes.
- The effects of the 'aid chain' – the relationship between donors, Northern CSOs (N-CSOs) and Southern CSOs (S-CSOs) – on the policy advocacy work in the South has been considered in a study on partnerships between Northern and Southern CSOs (Elbers, 2012), a recent literature review for DSO (Elbers, 2018), and is further elaborated in the theory of change for the DSO D&D SP (Kamstra, 2017). Hypotheses and mechanisms can be distilled from these studies that are more universally applicable to MFA–CSO partnerships, also beyond policy advocacy.
- Reports about the expectations of these SPs (D&D: Van Wessel et al., 2017; peace-building and mediation SP: De Weijer, 2018).
- Previous evaluations about civil society development and lobbying and advocacy (IOB, 2017; Dieleman and Van Kampen, 2016).

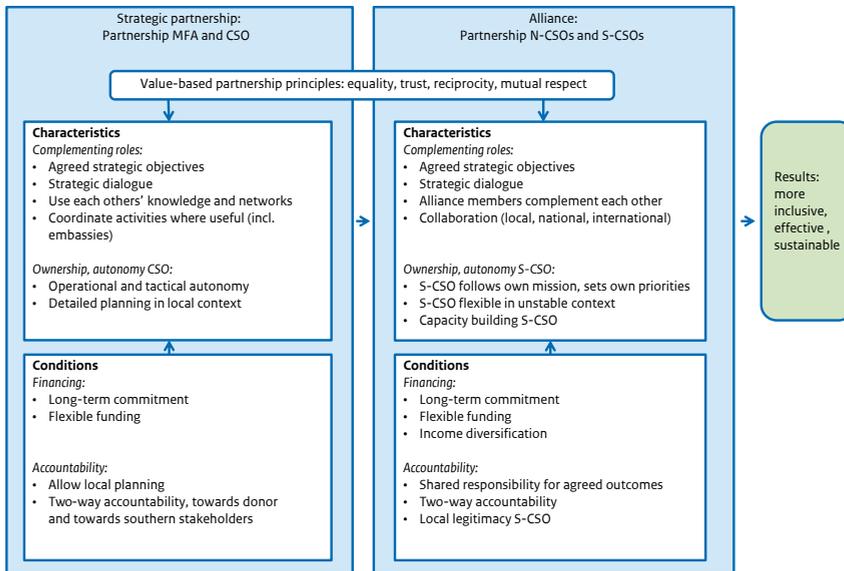
- Interview with DSO and DSH staff.
- Discussions in the reference group, during the elaboration of the ToR for this evaluation, in which we ultimately decided to focus on four main aspects in the functioning of SP:
 1. **complementarity** of the roles played by MFA (including Dutch embassies) and (Northern and Southern) CSOs;
 2. **autonomy** and ownership of CSOs;
 3. **funding modalities** with a long-term commitment and flexibility; and
 4. **accountability** to donors and Southern stakeholders.

The theoretical framework outlines the desired characteristics for MFA, N-CSOs and S-CSOs,³ including complementarity between roles and CSO ownership, and conditions, including the funding modality and accountability, that make up a good strategic partnership (Figure 6). This theoretical framework is built on hypotheses, not on empirically proven mechanisms.

These four aspects influence each other: for example, funding modalities and accountability to donors can affect the ownership and autonomy of CSOs and their accountability to Southern stakeholders.

An important assumption is that well-functioning partnerships enhance S-CSO ownership and make it easier to adapt activities (also during implementation) to the local context and needs. This, in turn, facilitates accountability to Southern stakeholders. Another important assumption is that the complementarity of the roles played by MFA and CSOs creates more synergy and coherence between the different activities, and leads to results that are more relevant, inclusive and sustainable. On the other hand, there is also the assumption that the funding modality and accountability to donors provide CSOs with sufficient room to assume ownership and exercise autonomy, demonstrate accountability to Southern stakeholders, and play out their own necessary roles in the joint action with MFA and other CSOs.

³ In addition to N-CSOs and S-CSOs, there are also international networks of CSOs and Southern field offices of N-CSOs. For this study, the distinction between N-CSOs and S-CSOs remained useful, but it will be nuanced in the results.



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Figure 6 *Theoretical framework of strategic partnerships between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and CSOs, as conditions for more inclusive, effective and sustainable results*

Principles for a good partnership

An ideal partnership, whether one between MFA and the Northern coordinating CSO in a strategic partnership, or between the N-CSO and S-CSO, is based on a number of value-based principles: equality, trust, reciprocity and mutual respect. In practice, the initial situation is often unequal, in terms of funding, knowledge and capacity, and therefore also power, as a result of which the collaboration is not always able to abide by these principles. Still, partners can strive to establish the best possible partnership. The characteristics and conditions of a good partnership can be derived from these principles. ‘Good partnerships’ are about an optimal relationship, also given the context and objective of the SP.

Partnerships between Northern and Southern CSOs

Both S-CSOs and N-CSOs benefit from strategic cooperation by setting goals together, monitoring progress and guidance. They complement each other in terms of knowledge, networks and the different roles they can play, and can cooperate at the local, national and international levels.⁴

⁴ In the specific case of lobbying and advocacy, N-CSOs have the following important added values for S-CSOs: specialised knowledge and information, easier access to government, protection of activists, the ability to create more pressure by coordinated action, visibility and a stronger voice for international L&A, pointing to international treaties, and – in the North – putting pressure on internationally operating companies.

For their credibility and legitimacy towards their constituency and other Southern stakeholders, Southern CSOs – if they are part of the partnership – need to be sufficiently autonomous, and they should have the possibility of pursuing their own mission, setting priorities based on the local context, and being flexible enough in a changing context. This also means that S-CSOs need to be able to invest in their organisation: in long-term contracted personnel, and in knowledge, research and innovation. On the other hand, the CSO alliance should be sufficiently flexible that it can include grass-roots civil movements, important for local constituency and legitimacy, that are unregistered as an organisation, have a lower administrative capacity and can be supported by more professional organisations in the alliance.

One of the conditions for autonomy is that funding be long-term (to address root causes), flexible (partly unearmarked), and from different sources to avoid dependency on a single donor. Another condition is that accountability takes into account the shared responsibilities and agreed-on outcomes, two-way accountability (to the donor and to Southern stakeholders), and the legitimacy of the S-CSO. Legitimacy may consist of representing a constituency, credibility through knowledge, but it, in turn, is also affected by independence and local accountability, thus completing the circle.

Strategic partnerships between MFA and the (coordinating) CSO

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Strategic partnerships between MFA and CSOs have the similar characteristics of a 'good partnership' between N-CSOs and S-CSOs described earlier, and put extra emphasis on several strategic aspects related to (i) complementary roles between MFA and CSOs: joint formulation of strategic objectives, a strategic dialogue about progress and guidance – with room for critique; the use of each other's knowledge and networks, including MFA using CSO knowledge for their policy; informing each other and coordinating each other's roles and activities, which can create greater coherence and synergy between roles and activities towards a common objective. CSOs need sufficient ownership and autonomy at the operational and tactical levels to follow their own plan (flexible and adjusted to the local context) and play out their own roles.

Conditions for this are the funding modalities, with long-term commitments and flexible funding, and accountability not only to MFA but also to S-CSOs and final beneficiaries.

This theoretical framework is used to develop evaluation questions about the functioning of strategic partnerships and assist in formulating indicators to operationalise these questions (see also Methodology).

2.3 Overview of the strategic partnerships of MFA with CSOs

As can be seen in Table 2, the D&D SP instrument has the largest budget, followed by the SRHR SP instrument and the DSH-funded ARC SP.

Table 2 Strategic partnership instruments MFA–CSOs

Department	Partnership (number)	Number of countries	Period	Budget (million)
DSO/CO	SP Dialogue and Dissent (25)	72	2016-2020	925
DSO/HA	Partnerships SRHR (5)	40	2016-2020	215
DSH	Addressing Root Causes (21)	12	2016-2021	125
DSH	SP peace-building and mediation (5)	*	2015-2018	29

* Unearmarked funding, also supported by other donors. These 5 SP work in almost 100 countries.

These partnerships fall under different policy articles: 3: Social progress, and 4: Peace and security. The SPs account for a substantial part of the budgeted programme expenditures for 2016-2020, see Annex 1. These SP instruments have different strategic objectives, but they have in common the fact that they both see SPs as the most suitable type of collaboration for achieving these objectives.

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Dialogue and Dissent

The primary objective of the DSO/CO-funded Dialogue and Dissent SP instrument is to strengthen the political ‘lobbying and advocacy’ role of Southern CSOs (between citizens, on the one hand, and the government, private sector and other civil society actors, on the other hand). As this political role requires relative autonomy, local ownership and flexibility for Southern CSOs, the SP instrument seems the most appropriate. Most SPs have been thematically assigned to other departments (DDE: 3, DMM: 2, DSH: 5; DSO/HA: 3, DSO/CO: 3; IGG: 6; TFVG: 3).

SRHR Partnership Fund

These SPs also have a political and substantive/policy-related objective connected to the objectives of the SRHR policy: to promote knowledge and provide services to young people about sexuality, and respecting SRH rights. For the political role and required autonomy, an SP was chosen as an instrument for SRHR. The DSO/HA-funded SRHR SPs also work ‘strategically’; for example, they use a similar way of formulating strategic objectives together, and in doing so employ a similar tender procedure as well (selection based on main features and ToC; develop country programmes later).

Addressing Root Causes

These partnerships aim to address the political and socio-economical root causes of armed conflict, instability and irregular migration. The partnerships are not called ‘strategic’, but are set up as an SP between MFA and CSOs, during a fairly intensive process. For DSH, the start-up and tender procedure for ARC are particularly interesting to look at.

SP peace-building and mediation

The DSH SPs for peace-building and mediation work with five major international CSOs that specialise in this subject, with the objective of strengthening peace processes. This arrangement is fairly unique and important for achieving Dutch humanitarian policy objectives. That is one of the reasons why these five CSOs are called MFA’s ‘strategic partners’. Because they need to respond rapidly in unstable contexts and be impartial during conflict mediation, it is desirable that they determine themselves what to do (without every donor insisting on its own objectives and reporting requirements). Because of the desired flexibility, autonomy, and use of each other’s knowledge and networks – including augmenting Dutch policy and strategies – SPs are considered suitable in this context, in this case with unearmarked funding.

2.4 Lessons from earlier evaluations

Two earlier IOB evaluations – one on the co-financing system for CSOs (MFS-II, 2011-2015; IOB, 2017), and one on Policy Influencing, Lobbying and Advocacy (PILA, 2008-2014; IOB, 2015) also included findings and recommendations on the four aspects of SP functioning that we consider in the current evaluation (Table 3). In terms of autonomy, evaluations found a decline in the overall autonomy of S-CSOs, as well as less flexibility in financial support and M&E for learning with the start of MFS-II in 2011. As the remainder of this report demonstrates, some of these weaknesses were persistent, in particular the relatively weak position of S-CSOs in the partnership between MFA, N-CSO and S-CSO. Some recommendations from earlier evaluations have been addressed, at least in the some of the new SPs, while other recommendations are still valid today, as we will see later.

Table 3 Overview of findings (F) and recommendations (R) from two previous IOB evaluations on the aspects contributing to the functioning of partnerships between MFA, N-CSOs and S-CSOs

	IOB 2017. MFS-II (416) 2011-2015	IOB 2015. PILA (407) 2008-2014
Complementarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: S-CSOs rarely involved in international L&A: disconnect with local needs. R: Share innovative ILA approaches with clear complementary roles N-CSOs-S-CSOs. F: Limited cooperation in alliance at country level. R: Strengthen cooperation between N-CSOs, for efficiency and complementarity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: Mismatch between local reality and international forums. F: Complementarity limited due to different MFA priorities and capacity for PILA support. F: Donor dependency undermines local coalition forming. R: Coalitions should pursue a common goal. R: ToC based on political economy. R: Donors should be in coalitions and networks to defend civic space.
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: S-CSOs can develop programmes within boundaries set by N-CSOs. Since 2011: decreased funding, changing MFA policies, shifting interests of N-CSOs resulted in less trust, dialogue and flexibility; restricted S-CSOs. R: Involve S-CSOs more in project design. R: Increase ownership of S-CSOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: Dutch support does not reach informal S-CSOs. F: International CSO networks and local legitimacy are effective for PILA. F: Donor dependency undermines connection to local beneficiaries and S-CSO legitimacy. R: MFA and N-CSOs should give precedence to S-CSO ownership. R: MFA to encourage S-CSOs to involve local constituency, form coalitions, add research. R: MFA should not interfere in S-CSO operational processes. R: Give S-CSOs room to develop long-term strategy.
Capacity development (CD), contributing to autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: CD strengthened S-CSOs, increased autonomy and improved legitimacy. F: CD effects on ability to address MDGs are unclear. R: Emphasise mutual learning and networking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: Regular reflection on ToC is good. F: Little is known about long-term effects of training S-CSOs. R: Focus CD on long-term PILA strategy, ToC and campaigns.
Funding modality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: Budget cuts resulted in competition between N-CSO field offices and S-CSOs. F: Long-term support and core funding for S-CSOs under pressure. R: Renew relations N-CSOs-S-CSOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: S-CSOs appreciate direct funding from embassy, core funding, and flexibility. R: Address power asymmetries between MFA-N-CSOs-S-CSOs.
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: Since 2011, more emphasis on accountability than on learning, which is hampering equality in the relationships. R: Improve link between activities and policy objectives using ToC. R: Use appropriate monitoring indicators, validate ToC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> F: MFA policies and financial support invoke upward accountability at the expense of learning and downward accountability. R: MFA should be more realistic about results in the sphere of influence. R: Give CSOs room for failure. R: S-CSOs need M&E systems for learning. R: Less emphasis on financial inputs, more on results, and downward accountability.

3

Research problem, aim and evaluation questions

The desired characteristics and conditions for a good strategic partnership, which are set out in the above theoretical framework, reflect the expectations contained in policy documents and explained by MFA staff. Until this evaluation, it remained unclear whether the current strategic partnerships are meeting these expectations. DSO's and DSH's concerns and questions about SPs have been considered when developing evaluation questions that dovetail with our theoretical framework.

The aim of this study was to find out to what extent the functioning of current SPs meets expectations regarding the characteristics of (i) complementarity of MFA–CSO roles, and (ii) relative autonomy of CSOs; and to what extent the required conditions, in terms of (iii) funding modality and (iv) accountability have been met. Moreover, an inventory of factors that have an impact on this functioning helped in formulating recommendations for future strategic partnerships.

The three interrelated main questions of this study were: (1) how do the SP function, (2) which factors make SPs function well or less well, and (3) what recommendations can we take from this for future strategic partnerships? These three main questions were divided into detailed sub-questions, which are based on the theoretical framework with characteristics and conditions for 'well-functioning SPs'.

1. How do the strategic partnerships function with respect to (i) complementarity of MFA–CSO roles, (ii) ownership and autonomy of CSO, (iii) funding modalities, and (iv) accountability?⁵
 - 1.1. What initial expectations did the different stakeholders have of the SPs?
 - 1.2. How do SP function in practice between MFA and the lead CSO in practice?
 - 1.3. How do SPs affect the partnership between N-CSOs and S-CSOs in the alliance?
 - 1.4. How do the funding modality, accountability, complementarity in roles, and ownership of CSOs influence each other?
2. Which factors have had an impact on the functioning of SPs?
 - 2.1. Which factors have had an impact on the functioning of the SP between MFA and the (lead) CSO?
 - 2.2. Which factors have had an impact on the functioning of the partnership between N-CSOs and S-CSOs?
3. What recommendations can we make based on this for future strategic partnerships?

⁵ A few sub-questions, proposed in the ToR, have not been studied in detail: (i) whether expectations were written down in agreements, and (ii) to what extent functioning is expected to have an impact on the end results.

4

Method

The methodology consisted of a desk study, country field visits, interviews in the Netherlands, an analysis and synthesis, and validation workshops.

4.1 Desk study

The desk study included a review of policy and programme documents, and a limited review of SP project documents, earlier evaluations and literature on the functioning of donor–CSO relations. This served as the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) and the preparation for fieldwork and interviews in the Netherlands.

4.2 Field visits

IOB first selected which countries and SPs to include, and then contracted ACE Europe to conduct the country field studies.

Country selection

An Excel overview table of all SPs and all countries was used to optimise the choice of countries and SPs. Four countries were selected that cover the range of strategic partnership projects and the presence and mandate of the Dutch embassy:

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	Dutch embassy presence and mandate
Mali	Embassy with development cooperation agenda and SRHR officer
Nepal	No embassy (nearest embassy: New Delhi)
Sudan	Embassy without development cooperation agenda
Uganda	Embassy with development cooperation task and SRHR officer

Project selection

From the 60 SPs operating in these four countries, 26 were selected for the case study, covering the range of SP types (Table 4). This range, in turn, covers MFA's different programmes (D&D, SRHR, ARC, and peace-building and mediation SP, with the most emphasis on D&D), and the different thematic departments involved (DSO/MO, DSO/GA, DDE, DMM, DSH, IGG, TFG).

Table 4 Selected SPs in the four case study countries

Prog.	SP name	Phase before 2016	Thematic dept. (D&D)	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda
D&D	Advocacy for Change		DDE				1
D&D	Building Capacity for Sector Change		DDE				1
D&D	Citizens Agency Consortium	1	DSO		1		
D&D	Civic Engagement Alliance	1	IGG				1
D&D	Conducive environments for effective policy		DSH				1
D&D	Count Me In!		TFVG			1	
D&D	Every Voice Counts		DSH			1	
D&D	Fair Green and Global Alliance	1	DSO				1
D&D	Freedom from Fear	1	DSH			1	
D&D	Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action		TFVG		1		
D&D	Green Livelihoods Alliance		IGG				1
D&D	No News is Bad News	1	DMM	1			
D&D	Partners for Resilience (PfR)	1	IGG	1			
D&D	Prevention Up Front		DSH	1		1	
D&D	Right Here, Right Now	1	DSO		1		1
D&D	Watershed – empowering citizens		IGG	1			
SRHR	Bridging the Gaps II	1					1
SRHR	Get Up, Speak Out: For Youth Rights Alliance (GUSO)	1					1
SRHR	Her Choice Alliance	1			1		
SRHR	More than Brides Alliance			1			
Mediation	Interpeace*	1		1			
Mediation	International Alert**	1					
Mediation	International Center for Transitional Justice**	1					
ARC	Building Constituencies for Peaceful Change in Sudan					1	
ARC	Enhancing stability through community resilience					1	
ARC	Human Security Approach to Address the Root Causes of Conflict and Violence in Mali			1			
Total				7	4	6	9

Programme: D&D: Dialogue and Dissent; SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; Mediation: Peace-building and mediation; ARC: Addressing Root Causes.

* Only interviewed in the South; ** only interviewed in the North.

The list of 26 SPs with an SP description (project, consortium members, objective) and departments and organisations interviewed at MFA and N-CSOs is presented in Annex 2. Organisations and persons interviewed in the four case study countries are presented in country reports that will not be made public.

Case study methodology

IOB commissioned the country field visits to ACE Europe, who worked with local consultants. ACE Europe had prepared interview sheets with evaluation questions, judgment criteria, indicators and sub-questions that guided the discussions. In each country, first a workshop was organised, often at the embassy, in which the S-CSOs involved in the selected SP were invited to jointly discuss the functioning of the SP. Subsequently, individual interviews were conducted for each selected partnership, often on location, and, if relevant, distinguishing the lead S-CSO from the other, implementing S-CSOs. In a few cases, where S-CSOs were membership-based, discussions were held with individual members. Embassy staff were interviewed separately. International consultants and local consultants worked for together for a week running the workshop, conducting some interviews and discussing the methodology, after which the local consultant continued visiting additional S-CSOs for more interviews. The interviews and fieldwork took place between December 2018 and February 2019. In total, over 160 people provided feedback in interviews and group discussions.

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4.3 Interviews in the Netherlands

The IOB evaluation team conducted over 65 semi-structured interviews in the Netherlands, plus a few with international CSOs by phone. For most SPs, 1-2 persons at MFA and 1-2 persons per lead CSO were interviewed. In a few cases, staff from other (non-lead) CSO partners were interviewed as well. Interviews, in the form of discussions, were guided by the evaluation questions and the theoretical framework with its four characteristics of SP functioning. In some interviews, we asked partners to comment on the opinion of another partner in the same SP.

4.4 Analysis and synthesis

The analysis, done by ACE-Europe for the S-CSOs and embassies, and by IOB for N-CSOs and MFA, consisted of (i) developing judgment criteria, and scoring the SPs, and (ii) finding evidence, examples to illustrate our evaluation scores.

Judgment criteria

The theoretical framework, with its four main characteristics, each with a number of sub-characteristics, served as a basis for evaluation, but in a flexible way. Some new sub-characteristics that turned out to be important during the interviews, such as 'joint learning', were added to the framework. It turned out that other sub-characteristics were unable to distinguish between SPs, such as 'joint setting strategic objectives' between N-CSOs and S-CSOs in the South. To evaluate the SP on each sub-criterion, a score was

added from 1 (low, poor) to 5 (high, good). In order to do so, two similar scoring matrices were developed after the interviews, one for the North by IOB and one for the South by ACE Europe. These matrices were developed and filled in with generalised examples of better or worse levels of functioning, based on information provided in the interviews. The two evaluation criteria scoring matrices are presented in Annexes 3 (South) and 4 (North).

Analysis, validation and draft conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of information and the evaluation per SP were carried out separately for the Northern perspective (MFA's and N-CSOs' opinion of the whole partnership,) and the Southern perspective (embassy's, lead and other S-CSOs' opinion of the functioning in the case study country).

For the Northern perspective, information from interviews with each CSO was consolidated and used to evaluate the functioning of the SP. For the Southern perspective, an information sheet was filled in for each SP that combined all of the data (documentation, workshop notes, individual interviews with different CSOs and the opinion of the embassy on the SP). For Mali, Nepal and Uganda, country reports were compiled, with findings, conclusions, underlying causes, evaluation scores and recommendations. Moreover, a cross-country report was compiled containing the main findings from the South.

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Note that our objective was not to draw conclusions on individual partnerships – we would need more time for that – but to find patterns within the diversity of partnerships. For that reason, examples of the functioning of certain partnership aspects are presented anonymously.

4.5 Validation workshops

In order to share and discuss draft conclusions and recommendations with DSO in a timely fashion, a few events were organised that yielded intermediate reports:

- 25 February 2019: A brainstorm session with five evaluators resulted in the main findings and recommendations. These were discussed with a small group of MFA staff on 26 February 2019.
- 18 March 2019: A webinar, facilitated by the Partnership Learning Loop, with 23 participants from Southern CSOs, who discussed draft findings and recommendations. A report of this was sent to participants, and findings were included in the next set of draft findings.
- 21 March 2019: A workshop was held involving a presentation and discussion with about 45 participants, from Dutch CSOs and MFA, to discuss and validate draft findings, and jointly formulate recommendations in a World Café set-up. A workshop report was sent to participants and DSO.
- 26 April 2019: ACE Europe had analysed the interview notes and scored the SPs' functioning, and listed the main findings and underlying causes. Based on this, IOB formulated conclusions and recommendations for DSO, purely based on the Southern perspective.

Since then, IOB has scored the functioning of the SPs from the Northern perspective, and integrated the findings from ACE Europe and IOB.

4.6 Limitations of the study

This study has a number of limitations. First, this study focuses on the D&D SPs (16) and SRHR SPs (4) managed by DSO. Although the study included 3 ARC partnerships and 3 peace-building and conflict mediation SPs managed by DSH, this was more to gain a better understanding of the MFA's different types of partnerships, than to draw firm conclusions about the functioning of these two DSH partnership programmes. The main findings and conclusions of this study are therefore mainly applicable to the DSO SPs, unless indicated otherwise.

Second, this study looks at the functioning, not at the results, of the SPs. The results still need to be evaluated in the final evaluations in 2020. Each SP will organise its own independent, external final evaluation, after which IOB will do a synthesis study in 2021. An important assumption of this study is that the better an SP functions, the better the results will be. This assumption can be validated when the final evaluations of the 25 D&D SPs and the 7 SRHR SPs are done in 2020. The results can be explained in a synthesis study of these SPs by means of various factors, including the functioning of the sample of 16 D&D SPs and 4 SRHR SPs evaluated in this study. It is recommended to take the perspective of final beneficiaries as the starting point for the evaluation. A ToC can be used to validate 'backwards' the challenges experienced by the assumed beneficiaries and the changes they experienced over the last years, the roles of different S-CSOs and other stakeholders, the

role of the N-CSOs and SPs, and the role of MFA, thus also validating the legitimacy of the SP actors for the final beneficiaries.⁶

Third, this study does not compare funding through N-CSOs with direct funding of S-CSOs. Under the D&D programme, most funding is channelled through N-CSOs, except for one SP that is led by an S-CSO in a consortium with N-CSOs. In addition to these 25 D&D SPs, there is a sub-programme called 'Accountability Fund', where S-CSOs are funded directly from a fund managed by HIVOS and Oxfam Novib – not as partner but solely as a fund manager, with the objective of reaching more informal S-CSOs that are less well reached by the centrally managed D&D SPs. Similarly, under the SRHR programme, there is a sub-programme called 'Leading from the South' where S-CSOs are directly funded by 4 Southern regional funds, without passing through N-CSOs. Previously, there was a fund available for Dutch embassies to directly fund S-CSOs, which was evaluated by IOB in 2014. It would be useful to include a comparison of the results of SPs managed by N-CSOs and the results obtained from directly funded S-CSOs, to see the advantages and disadvantages, and to conclude what type of partnership and funding is advisable for what purpose and in what context. Such a comparison could be included in a synthesis study in 2021.

⁶ This proposed evaluation methodology for the final evaluation uses some elements of the Most Significant Change method, combined with validating the theory of change.

5

Results

The results chapter starts with a brief section (5.1) about the expectations as expressed during the interviews (evaluation question 1.1). This section does not summarise the expectations already reported by Van Wessel (2017) and De Weijer (2018).

It then continues with the actual functioning of the SPs, in the North between MFA and CSO, and in the South between CSOs (evaluation questions 1.2 and 1.3), and the underlying causes (evaluation questions 2.1 and 2.2). These results are organised along the four characteristics of SPs' functioning: complementarity (5.2), autonomy (5.3), funding modalities (5.4) and accountability (5.5). Each section presents Northern and Southern perspectives, and describes the underlying causes for the varying degrees of functioning.

Section 5.6 discusses the relationship between these four characteristics and the underlying causes (evaluation question 1.4).

5.1 Expectations of strategic partnerships

Main finding:

- Both MFA and the N-CSOs expected more strategic dialogue and complementarity, compared to previous programmes, but expectations were not well articulated.
- Some MFA thematic departments had expected a larger influence on where the SP would work and how they would contribute to the MFA thematic results frameworks.
- N-CSOs often had higher expectations about the MFA partnership roles.
- Some S-CSOs expected to be less dependent on N-CSOs' technical and financial support.
- Both N-CSOs and S-CSOs expected the Dutch embassies to play a larger role.

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Both MFA and the CSOs expected more strategic dialogue and complementarity, compared to previous programmes, but expectations were not well articulated.

MFA

The MFA's expectations at DSO, the department initiating the D&D and SRHR SP, were similar to the expectations of N-CSOs: to have an open, trust-based strategic dialogue, without going into details; an exchange between the CSOs in different SPs; and synergy between the SP's L&A activities and service delivery funded from other programmes. However, many MFA staff were not sure how an SP would function in practice. Some thematic departments and embassies were only involved at a later stage, and either had no clear expectations or had expected to have much more influence over the SP, in terms of where they would work, and the extent to which the SP would contribute to and report on the specific thematic results framework, or fit in with the embassies' Multi-annual Country Strategy (MLS). Too little effort has been made to come to a joint agreement on overall objectives and clarify how some of the SPs would contribute, in the short-term or the long-term, to the thematic department's results framework.

N-CSOs

The N-CSOs' expectations of the new strategic partnership were positive: more strategic dialogue with MFA as a partner, more complementarity between CSOs and MFA in joint objectives, and in the case of D&D, more acknowledgment for lobbying and advocacy with a link between local, national and international activities. N-CSOs were also uncertain: funds were being cut and N-CSOs were forced to lay off staff; uncertainty ensued as to what exactly was meant by a 'strategic partnership', whether MFA could be both funder and partner, and how this could take place in practice, especially when CSOs work in many countries, including countries without a Dutch embassy.

Some CSOs mention the potential tension between complementarity between CSOs and MFA and the CSOs' autonomy. For example, the DSH strategic partnerships in the field of peace-building and conflict mediation received 100% unearmarked funding up to 2018, which gave them full autonomy and political independence, and maximum flexibility needed for their work in unstable post-conflict situations on politically sensitive issues. Recently, a smaller part of the funding was earmarked to Countries of Common Interest, and can be accessed for programmes that are jointly developed by the Dutch Embassy and the CSOs, for example. This MFA initiative has increased the possibilities for strategic complementarity, but it limits autonomy and flexibility for the CSOs.

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An earlier study in 2016 (Van Wessel et al., 2017) showed that N-CSOs had higher expectations than MFA. N-CSO staff now confirm that some of their expectations have not materialised, and MFA staff confirmed that some CSOs' expectations were too high considering the limited MFA staff capacity.

S-CSOs

During the country visit to Mali, most S-CSOs mentioned that they did not have clear expectations of the new 'strategic partnerships'. A few S-CSOs mentioned that they had expected more capacity building, and less technical and financial dependency on N-CSOs. The difference with previous projects was not clear: S-CSOs consider the programme to be still too much led by the North, not always locally relevant and not sustainable. Both N-CSOs and S-CSOs had expected more from the Dutch embassy.

5.2 Complementarity

Main findings:

- Complementarity between MFA and CSOs started with dialogue, which created opportunities to use each other's knowledge and networks, resulting in joint activities.
- The late involvement of thematic departments and embassies reduced co-ownership of the SPs.
- Complementarity was limited by the available MFA staff capacity to play out its partnership role.

- Involvement of embassies depended on how involved they were during the inception phase, embassy priorities, staff capacity and staff turnover, and personal staff interests.
- Complementarity between CSOs in some SPs was found in a strategic choice of partners with different expertise needed for joint action.
- Only a few S-CSOs were involved in the SP proposal. More S-CSOs were involved in the inception phase, but some S-CSOs, subcontracted later, had little input in the SP programme.
- Very few SPs worked on dissent, in spite of its importance for policy coherence.

5.2.1 Overview of evaluation scores on complementarity

Overall, complementarity between MFA and CSOs (North) scores lower than complementarity between CSOs within the alliance (South). It seems that opportunities for using each other's network and knowledge, and for undertaking joint activities, between MFA and CSOs in the South are being missed. We also see considerable variation between SPs, some scoring very high, others scoring very low.

Table 5 Northern and Southern perception of complementarity in an SP*

	North (MFA-CSO)						South (N-CSO - S-CSO)				
	1	2	3	4	5	avg	1	2	3	4	avg
Joint strategic objectives	8	3	3	2	9	3.0		3	1		4.5
Strategic dialogue	2	10		7	6	3.2	1	3	3	3	4.1
Use each other's networks in North	2	10		5	8	3.3					
Use each other's networks in South	3	9	5	6	2	2.8	2		8	3	3.7
Joint international activities	5	1	4	5	7	3.4	2	5	5	2	3.5
Joint regional/local activities	3	11	3	3	5	2.8	2	5	4	3	3.5

*Distribution of SPs over complementarity evaluation criteria (1: very poor; 5: very good), distinguishing complementarity between MFA and CSOs (North) and between CSOs within the alliance (South).

There are some interesting differences between programmes and countries. The D&D (16 SPs) and SRHR (4 SPs) are similar; the DSH peace-building and mediation SP (only 3 SPs) score high on complementarity between MFA and the lead CSO, while ARC (only 3 SPs) only scores high for the project design phase, and low during the subsequent implementation phase. The observations of the peace-building and mediation SP and the ARC SP in the South were too few to draw conclusions from. Sudan, with its difficult context, in which CSOs often have to work under the radar, scores low on complementarity, both between CSOs and MFA, and between the CSOs within an alliance. Uganda scores very well, as we will see, in the presence of an embassy actively engaged in the SP.

Table 6 Complementarity of the four SP instruments compared*

	North				South			
	D&D	SRHR	Mediation	ARC	D&D	SRHR	Mediation	ARC
Joint strategic objectives	2.8	2.5	3.0	5.0	4.6	5.0	5.0	3.3
Strategic dialogue	3.3	3.3	4.5	2.0	4.1	4.5	5.0	3.0
Use each other's networks in North	3.3	3.5	4.5	2.0				
Use each other's networks in South	2.9	2.8	3.0	2.0	3.9	4.0		2.3
Joint international activities	3.3	3.0	5.0		3.7	3.3	5.0	2.7
Joint regional/local activities	2.9	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.7	3.5		2.7

* Average scores of complementarity evaluation criteria (1: very poor; 5: very good, see Annexes 3 and 4) of different SP programmes, distinguishing complementarity between MFA and CSOs (North) and between CSOs within the alliance (South).

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Table 7 Complementarity in the four case study countries compared

	North				South			
	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda
Joint strategic objectives	2.6	3.3	3.0	3.0	5.0	5.0	3.2	5.0
Strategic dialogue	2.8	3.5	2.0	3.9	4.5	4.4	2.5	4.9
Use each other's networks in North	2.8	3.3	2.2	4.0				
Use each other's networks in South	2.4	3.3	2.2	3.1	3.6	3.8	2.0	4.6
Joint international activities	3.5	3.3	2.3	3.4	3.8	3.4	2.0	4.8
Joint regional/local activities	2.2	3.3	2.0	3.6	3.6	3.0	2.5	4.4

The next sections present various examples of complementary roles between MFA (including embassies) and CSOs (North and South). These complementary roles are summarised in an overview table, presented in the Summary document.

5.2.2 Joint strategic objectives

Joint strategic objectives between MFA and N-CSOs

In a few cases, the MFA policy objectives and the N-CSOs' overall objectives overlapped sufficiently, or an earlier project with clear joint objectives was continued, so it was not deemed necessary to develop new joint strategic objectives. In most cases, the development and joint discussion of the ToC with DSO (D&D, SRHR) resulted in joint strategic objectives, at least between the N-CSOs and DSO.

However, some of the D&D SPs were later transferred to other MFA thematic departments, who had not been involved in setting strategic objectives. Often it was not clear how the SP results would contribute to the results framework of the thematic departments. Certain objectives (e.g. addressing child marriages) were chosen by the minister, while this was not a priority theme in overall SRHR or gender policy. This helps explain why the thematic department did not see the SP objectives or ToC as its own. Fortunately, the involvement of most thematic departments improved over time during the inception phase. Some thematic departments mentioned that they are willing to expand their results framework (with final, SDG-like results) and their ToC to accommodate the SP L&A results (intermediate, enabling results).

Similarly, embassies were not involved from the very start of the SP development, but many became involved during the inception phase of the SP country programme. The intensity of this embassy involvement depended on the embassies' priorities and staff capacities, and on whether the SP had a clear country focus and a strong country presence.

Because the MFA departments have different mandates, the SP objectives as developed by DSO and CSOs did not always dovetail. The fact that some departments or embassies did not share the objectives of some of the SPs is not necessarily negative: some SPs work through dissent on policy coherence, e.g. between trade and private sector interests, and the environment or labour conditions.

There is currently a discussion at MFA about the extent to which the SP should fit in with MFA priority regions and countries, and embassy strategies (MLS), to facilitate more complementarity, but also to reduce fragmentation and avoid spreading resources too thinly to have an impact. Although the new MLSs are supposed to include all Dutch development cooperation, including centrally managed programmes such as the SPs, there are a number of reasons, mentioned by MFA and CSO staff, and which we as evaluators subscribe to, why CSOs should not be restricted in this way: (i) CSOs should be able to choose countries where needs are high and where the CSO has the potential to address these needs. For example, a CSO specialised in community-based nature conservation should be able to work in countries where deforestation is high, even if this is not a Dutch priority country. Or, to cite another example, lobbying and advocacy is often more effective when working in more countries, regionally or even globally; (ii) complementarity works between the MFA thematic department and CSOs, also without the involvement of a Dutch embassy; and (iii) CSOs also have a 'dissent role' to play, which would be considerably

reduced if SPs had to conform embassy strategies. Nevertheless, there may be cases where MFA and CSOs, in the project proposal phase, jointly find an ideal number of countries to work in, and jointly find an ideal level of complementarity between MFA and CSOs. Some MFA staff suggested to at least make clear at the start of each SP what level of complementarity (interaction or collaboration) will be expected between MFA and the embassy, and CSOs, which can vary from keeping each other informed, at the very least, to actual tactical collaboration in joint activities.

One of the features of strategic partnerships – jointly setting strategic objectives – can only be achieved when proposals are developed in MFA–CSO dialogue, which explains why a standard tender procedure, in which the applicant is required to submit a full, detailed proposal, is inappropriate for strategic partnerships.

Joint strategic objectives between the lead (N) CSO and other (S) CSOs

According to N-CSOs, in most cases S-CSOs were not involved in the first application process between N-CSOs and MFA. S-CSOs were then selected to fulfil part of the overall plan. Some S-CSOs (often the lead S-CSO in a country) were involved in the inception phase, but others were only contracted to implement activity plans against a set budget, and had little input in the planning. Nevertheless, there was enough overlap in strategic objectives between CSOs. One S-CSO explained that the ToC lacked an actor perspective and therefore did not take into account potential complementary roles between MFA and CSOs.

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5.2.3 Strategic dialogue

Dialogue between N-CSOs and MFA in the Netherlands

There is frequent dialogue between the lead N-CSO and MFA in the Netherlands. Most N-CSOs that were also involved in the previous programme confirmed that this dialogue has indeed become more strategic, more open and trust-based. For D&D the strategic dialogue beyond DSO developed gradually over time. The review of the ToC and the results of outcome harvesting helped to sharpen the focus on strategic issues. The frequent informal meetings were considered more important than the formal annual meetings. On the other hand, some CSOs complained that the dialogue is still not strategic and forward-looking, but still focuses too much on administration and reporting and is backward-looking (especially in ARC and DSH). MFA staff noticed that some N-CSOs are still a bit afraid to discuss difficulties and strategic issues. Other N-CSOs still see MFA as a lobbying target. And yet others still have to get used to the new situation in which MFA is both donor and partner. At the same time, some N-CSOs have the impression that MFA only wants to be informed and does not necessarily want to be involved in strategy development.

In some SPs, it took some time for the right MFA staff in the thematic department to be linked to the SP, and it was only at that point that they could start to appreciate the added value of the SP. MFA staff wonder how to extend their dialogue beyond the lead N-CSO in the SP without giving the impression of interfering. There are examples where S-CSOs have come over to jointly discuss strategic and monitoring issues, which was much appreciated by MFA staff. Of the study programmes, the least dialogue takes place in the ARC programme.

While there was a good dialogue in the inception phase, when several MFA staff each had about 3-4 projects, later during the implementation only one MFA person (and later two) was available for 21 projects, so strategic dialogue became virtually impossible.

MFA facilitates dialogue between SPs through its knowledge platforms, and for the D&D SP through the international Linking and Learning events. This is much appreciated, although some CSOs think that MFA could benefit more from this strategically, beyond facilitating the exchange of information, and use this more in strategy and policy development.

MFA regularly invites several SPs working on the same theme for policy input for future MFA policies, strategies or programmes. However, there were cases of missed opportunities with several SPs working on the same theme, despite there being a knowledge platform available (SRHR, child marriages; ARC).

Examples of strategic dialogue leading to policy input: MFA thematic department DDE invited several SPs for discussions about gender and the living wage in sustainable supply chains. The thematic department IGG invited an SP for a joint reflection on the World Bank policy on energy in development.

Although N-CSOs appreciate having the room to disagree, most N-CSOs emphasised the element of dialogue. CSOs stated that discussions with MFA, and the resulting policy input from SPs, proceeded smoothly because they have common objectives. True dissent only took place in a few SPs, where CSOs brought attention to MFA's internal policy incoherencies, e.g. between the government's interest in trade, investment, and the Dutch private sector abroad, on the one hand, and labour conditions for the local population and the environmental impact, on the other. In such cases, the CSO may agree with certain departments, and disagree with others.

For example, one SP pointed out the IGG standpoint to discourage investment in fossil fuels, while MFA/DIO facilitated export credit insurance for such investments.

Joint strategic dialogue between CSOs and Dutch embassies

Most embassies facilitate the exchange of information by inviting SPs, e.g. once a year, which is valuable also for the dialogue between SPs working on similar themes, though it does not necessarily result in strategic dialogue with the embassy. Some embassies go further, inviting N-CSOs and S-CSOs for specific information or participation in a thematic workshop, and for input in the embassies' Multi-year Country Strategy (MLS). In Colombia, an S-CSO and embassy conducted a joint political analysis. Some embassies give tactical advice to S-CSOs about balancing diplomatic and activist efforts. For D&D, the involvement of embassies gradually increased. For ARC, the opposite is true: embassies were more involved in the inception phase than during implementation.

The country visits showed that some embassies are much more active than others. For example, in Uganda the embassy organised a kick-off workshop for all 22 SPs, involving also staff from the thematic departments in The Hague. The embassy in Uganda also recruited a local staff member for the coordination of SPs (and other projects) working on SRHR, organised several meetings per year, and invited the SRHR SP for input in the Multi-annual Country Strategy (MLS). By contrast, in Sudan the embassy was not even aware of some of the SPs operating in the country. In Mali, neither the embassy nor the S-CSOs are satisfied with the low level of interaction. Both the embassies and S-CSOs seemed to have difficulty approaching one another.

S-CSOs mentioned the following as the main advantage of the embassy: the exchange between SPs and S-CSOs, although most S-CSOs do not consider the exchange with the embassy to be particularly strategic. In addition to this, there are rare cases of embassies forwarding messages to the government that S-CSOs cannot forward themselves, for example, and of embassies linking CSOs to Dutch programmes/investors when CSOs voice concerns about the social or environmental impact.

Strategic dialogue between CSOs in the South

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In the South, there are good examples of strategic dialogue. For example, in Uganda and Nepal some SPs organised joint meetings at the country level for planning and budgeting, monitoring and reflection on the ToC, with all S-CSOs plus one N-CSO. This was facilitated by having a governance structure at the country level with one S-CSO as coordinator. This was made possible by N-CSOs delegating power to S-CSOs. However, there are many other examples where the lead S-CSO had some strategic dialogue with the N-CSO, which it had a contract with, while the other, implementing S-CSOs were simply subcontracted by the lead S-CSO for specific activities, and were not involved in strategic dialogue.

Underlying causes for strategic dialogue

Generally, strategic dialogue started slowly because of unclear expectations about how a strategic partnership would work in practice, and what could be expected from MFA and from N-CSOs. The combined role of donor and partner contributed to this, especially in the beginning. Another reason, in the case of D&D, was that some thematic departments and embassies were only involved later and felt less ownership of the SP.

Strategic dialogue was better when there was more overlap in terms of objectives and when the MFA departments were more involved in the development (inception phase) of the SP. According to several N-CSOs, dialogue was better when there was a particular focus on positive messages, rather than dissent, and critical activist messages, because governments and the private sector, and in some cases embassies as well, have difficulty accepting criticism. Some N-CSOs have adjusted their focus areas and themes, looking for more overlap with MFA's interests (e.g. one SP moved to a new area with its theme, protection of civilians, MENA). On the other hand, without dissent, critical messages and activist efforts certain objectives may not be reached at all. In the case of D&D, the SP contributed clearly to the DSO objectives, but less clearly to the results frame of other thematic departments. For some themes (in particular DSH themes) the SP's unclear contribution to MFA's thematic

results frameworks was problematic both for MFA and CSOs. For other themes (e.g. IGG and DDE themes), this has motivated parties to look for overlap between the SP ToC and the thematic ToC, and to look for links between the enabling SP results and the longer-term SDG-level thematic results.

Certain policy incoherencies, e.g. between DGIS and DGBEB, were effectively addressed by an SP that allowed for a more activist stand. It helped to address incoherencies that apparently could not be solved within MFA (according to DSO and two SPs).

An important constraint for strategic dialogue with N-CSOs is the MFA's staff capacity in The Hague, in terms of number of staff, thematic expertise and staff rotation. As one N-CSO explained: strategic dialogue, like the strategic partnership itself, requires those involved to invest time and it also requires continuity. Dialogue was better when MFA and N-CSO staff knew each other from previous project phases.

According to N-CSOs, strategic dialogue with N-CSOs and S-CSOs in the South was better when embassies had specific staff to work on the partnerships, e.g. a general SP focal point, or specific SRHR or security and rule of law (S&RL) focal point. In many cases, MFA staff capacity was considered insufficient and staff rotation too high to play the role of strategic partner well. One CSO even felt that MFA was an unreliable partner. One of the reasons why the Uganda embassy was so actively involved in the SP is the overlap in priorities (SRHR) and the presence of a dedicated staff member for this purpose. Some of the reasons why involvement was less active in Sudan and Mali were the lack of overlap in priorities and possible synergy between the embassy programme and the SP, the lack of clarity regarding what the SP expected from the embassy, and the low involvement by the embassies in the early stages. A major constraint is staff capacity, in terms of number of staff, staff turnover and expertise at the embassy.

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5.2.4 Using each other's knowledge and networks in the North

In several cases, MFA introduced N-CSOs to international organisations, for example to ILO in the discussion of the living wage and child labour in sustainable supply chains, or to other N-CSOs working on similar themes. In many cases, MFA opened doors for N-CSOs by inviting them to lobby in international forums, for example on integrated water resource management or gender. In their turn, N-CSOs organised training of MFA staff, for example in conflict sensitivity or sexual harassment. Committed MFA staff and good complementarity in terms of N-CSO expertise (research, legitimacy) contributed to the better use of each other's knowledge and networks.

5.2.5 Using each other's networks in South

Complementarity between CSOs and embassies

Embassies often play a facilitating role in linking CSOs affiliated to different SPs, and sometimes to other Dutch-funded projects, in information and exchange events at the embassy. Embassies invite CSOs to provide information, which the embassy can use in its dialogue with the national government. Conversely, MFA can also advise CSOs about the political feasibility of their objectives and how best to approach the government or other forums.

CSOs mentioned that the embassies show varying degrees of interest: some embassies frequently ask CSOs for information and advice, while others have a different assignment and hence other priorities and are more interested in their relationship with the national government and the Dutch private sector than they are in civil society, human rights or the environment.

Complementary expertise between CSOs in SPs

In many cases, S-CSOs that joined an SP at a later stage were selected on the basis of their expertise and experience, and often also on the basis of their complementarity to other SP actors. In a few cases, a strategic prospective study was conducted to see what expertise would be needed. However, in a few other cases, the N-CSO simply continued working with the S-CSO they worked with before, without reviewing the required complementary expertise. For lobbying and advocacy, a combination is sought that includes local legitimacy and member organisations, research, local advocacy and international advocacy.

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5.2.6 Joint international activities in the North

The strategic dialogue and the use of each other's knowledge and network has resulted in joint, or coordinated and complementary, activities, both in the field of policy and strategy formulation in the Netherlands, and in joint policy advocacy in international organisations and forums.

The strategic dialogue has resulted in N-CSO and S-CSO input in MFA policies and strategies. For example, several SPs contributed to a joint theory of change for gender inclusivity in sustainable supply chains. Another SP, which has been critical of MFA's policy incoherencies and often disagreed with DGBEB, contributed to the new MFA 'trade policy'. Another example is a joint workshop on women and land rights.

MFA and N-CSOs often coordinated efforts for joint policy advocacy in international organisations and forums.

Several examples of joint MFA–CSO lobbying initiatives in SP:

One SP and MFA worked on an Energy Coalition of governments, the private sector and CSOs, linking local to international organisations. Partners from Kenya and Nepal took active part in this energy coalition. The Energy Coalition has more clout than a CSO alone, and lobbying efforts with the World Bank, the EU and other international organisations resulted in the formation of a coalition of the willing and helped to prepare UN documents on renewable energy. The World Bank believed that the private sector alone could handle the energy transition, but the coalition lobbied for a stronger role and more funding for local governments.

One SP invited an S-CSO to Geneva to participate in a UN discussion for guidelines on business and human rights. The guidelines were an initiative of Ecuador, but Russia and China tried to keep their private sector out of scope. The SP collaborated with the Dutch Permanent Representative (PV) in Geneva, and made a joint analysis and plan. MFA and the CSO had joint strategic objectives, and complemented each other tactically. The Dutch PV clearly understood the political potential, while the CSO had the local evidence and legitimacy.

MFA thematic department IGG involved an SP in international forums for climate negotiations. The SP input has sharpened the focus on resilience, and the link between the international discussion on the climate and local development initiatives on resilience. The SP is now internationally recognised as an expert in this field.

IGG and an SP collaborated in writing two joint papers: ‘Gender and inclusivity in WASH’, and ‘Gender and inclusivity in IWRM’. This was a follow-up of the joint preparation of the Stockholm water week. The papers were presented during the ‘Blue Deals’ workshop.

In the Access to Justice conference in January 2019 Minister Kaag was co-chair of the ‘Access to Justice’ task force. One SP was asked by the Netherlands to lead one of the working groups on transitional justice. The resulting paper will be presented in international forums and the UN.

Crucial for these joint coordinated activities were agreements on the strategic directions of at least one MFA department, the willingness to collaborate and understanding of complementarity: credible evidence and local legitimacy, access to international forums and linking local to international L&A. Nevertheless, some N-CSOs mentioned that opportunities for joint action were missed because some MFA departments showed little interest, in spite of thematic overlap (DSH), or certain MFA staff were wary of getting involved in more activist, confrontational lobbying (IGG).

DGBEB, the MFA directorate for foreign economic relations that deals with international trade and Dutch interests abroad, is least comfortable with the activist approach of some SPs. This is partly inherent in the tension that can arise between international trade and the interests of the Dutch private sector, and local concerns about environment, working conditions and human rights. It is even more related to the activist, public approach taken to address such policy incoherencies: whereas DGBEB would prefer internal communication

and negotiation, N-CSOs see the need to bring issues out into the public domain and parliament to get things changed. When this does happen and when CSOs can put the minister in an embarrassing position, DGBEB would prefer this to be part of a completely autonomous CSO activity than part of a strategic partnership that MFA is involved in. However, N-CSOs have responded by saying that this would also reduce the amount of valuable MFA–CSO dialogue.

5.2.7 Joint local activities in the South

Collaboration between embassies and CSOs

The joint activities/added value of MFA and CSO collaboration in the South are quite often related to the space created for civil society, advocacy for human rights & labour conditions, and environmental issues. These activities complement an embassy's focus on government-to-government relations and support to trade and the Dutch private sector. A specific case of a joint activity is the protection of S-CSO activists by embassies.

An example of collaboration for human rights: All countries are obliged to report the killing of journalists through their commitment to UNESCO and recently the SDGs. By distributing the letter from UNESCO through Dutch embassies, the number of reported killings increased, from 28 to 78. This embassy effort complemented the SP's support to journalists.

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Several CSOs mentioned the important role embassies have played in protecting S-CSO staff, for example pleading for free press and journalist protection, and lobbying for the re-opening of a CSO office in Uganda that was closed by the government; organising a safe space for LGBT organisations in Zimbabwe after S-CSO staff had been arrested; and protecting activists, or asking the government to free them following their arrest in DRC, Uganda and Nigeria.

An example of an SP supporting MFA's diplomatic dialogue: In the palm oil sector, MFA became aware that palm oil was not particularly inclusive for smallholder farmers, but it has no seat at the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). MFA then discussed the issue with an involved CSO, which successfully lobbied for a more smallholder-friendly RSPO. On the same subject, there was irritation in the South about the current EU anti-biofuel discourse, because this would undermine farmers' income. Indeed, MFA was not able to successfully achieve its objective of signing an MoU with the Malaysian government on sustainable palm oil. MFA asked the involved CSO to engage in a policy dialogue with four Southern countries, assuring that sustainable palm oil would not undermine smallholder farmers' income. This resulted in a (renewed) commitment by Southern governments and the private sector to the declaration of 'only sustainable palm oil by 2020'.

Two examples of MFA–CSO collaboration for labour conditions and the environment: In Uganda, IFAD supported the development of two oil palm areas. However, the environmental

assessment was done poorly. Therefore, the Dutch embassy asked the environmental CSO for advice. The CSO commissioned an additional study that showed the negative environmental impact. As a result, IFAD is currently reorienting their investment, and Dutch banks that were ready to invest in oil palm have been forewarned by this assessment.

In Kenya, the government wanted to open a coal power plant using with an AfDB loan. IGG and the CSOs were against investing in fossil fuels, but the N-CSO and S-CSO are not allowed to openly criticise. The CSO and IGG informed MFA, who is party to discussions at AfDB and can voice its opinion against coal power plants.

An example of CSO dissent contributing to MFA's policy coherence: In Kenya, there were problems with labour conditions in the flower sector, where Dutch companies are involved: low wages, sexual harassment and exposure to pesticides. For-CSOs it is difficult to get in contact with private sector. Through the embassy, the CSO was introduced at a round table with the private sector. This resulted in the set-up of a 'Living wage lab' consisting of CSOs, the private sector and ILO, which has started a pilot project with a few Dutch flower companies.

According to CSO, opportunities for joint action were missed, partly because embassies have different priorities, and, according to MFA, also because embassies have limited influence.

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A good example of the limited influence of embassies comes from Ghana, where the minister was reluctant to sign for the protected status of Atewa Forest, because China was interested in mining bauxite there. Initially, the Dutch embassy had good connections with the government, because it was an important donor in the Ghana water sector. Ever since the embassy stopped funding the water sector, however, the Ghana government has shown less interest. The CSO wanted to visit the Ghanaian minister with the Dutch ambassador, to argue in favour of gaining an alternative, more sustainable income from this forest. However, the ambassador did not see this as a priority, after which the CSO stopped lobbying.

Some opportunities were missed because there was no coordination between the different persons in same embassy responsible for different SPs. For example, in Indonesia, one SP works with a company on oil palm in Sumatra, while another SP lobbies against this company because of deforestation. The embassy took no action to call this to a halt.

Underlying causes

Joint action in the South depends significantly on the embassy's interest and staff capacity. Successful cases are characterised by the complementarity of diplomatic efforts by the embassy, who are more credible if the embassy also provides other, service delivery-oriented support, and by the efforts of CSOs to mobilise local evidence and ensure local legitimacy through grass-roots organisations. In some cases, joint efforts are more effective if linked to activist efforts in the Netherlands and EU (e.g. in the case of biofuels).

Some embassies put more emphasis on their trade and private sector agenda, and do not want negative publicity about the local government or the Dutch private sector. As a result, they are less willing to team up with CSOs. In such cases, CSOs can decide to play a more activist role, locally or through N-CSOs in the Netherlands, and to collaborate with like-minded thematic departments in The Hague. In some cases, embassies manage to link politically sensitive issues to broader, more neutral events. Again, having dedicated staff at the embassy as a focal point for SPs or SRHR is extremely helpful.

Collaboration between N-CSOs and S-CSOs

Collaboration between N-CSOs and S-CSOs varies from top-down contractual implementation relations to more equal joint planning relations. Several SPs have made an effort to delegate power to S-CSOs. This also depends on whether or not the SP is characterised by hierarchical bilateral vertical relationships: from one CSO to one lead CSO, who in turn contacts other S-CSOs; or by horizontal coordination relationships involving all SPs. In the latter case, N-CSOs often participate in joint S-CSOs' planning and budgeting meetings in the country in question.

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For lobbying and advocacy the combination of N-CSOs and S-CSOs has many advantages, because they complement each other in terms of capacities, as well as access to local communities, networks, policymakers, MFA and embassy, and international forums. Often, Southern evidence is used by N-CSO in international advocacy, but rarely are the results fed back for the sake of local advocacy. Recognition of each CSO's specific added value in the alliance, including the S-CSO's knowledge of the local context, for example, increases equality in the partnership, beyond the obvious inequality caused by financial dependency.

Collaboration between S-CSOs

DSO observed that the coordination among N-CSO alliance members is often easier than coordination among S-CSOs. We conclude that more effort is needed to set up a good Southern coordination mechanism, of which some good examples were found in the country studies. In the South, collaboration between S-CSOs in the country depends on the SP governance structure at the country level, and the delegation of decision-making power from N-CSOs to S-CSOs. In some SPs, locations are divided among S-CSOs, or each S-CSO is only in contact with its funding N-CSO. In such cases, there is hardly any collaboration between S-CSOs at the country level. In other SPs, S-CSOs plan together and complement each other at the country level: for example, one may collect evidence that the other can use for advocacy purposes. In such cases, collaboration between S-CSOs is more advanced.

Two examples of collaboration between S-CSOs: In Uganda, several S-CSOs working in two SPs on sustainable value chains jointly advocated a new 'tea policy'. In Nepal, an SP with 15 platform members ensured the exchange of information and planned joint SRHR advocacy activities at the national and international levels.

Collaboration is facilitated by (i) a selection of partners based on complementarity, (ii) a clear governance structure that invites the SP members to participate in joint planning, and (iii) the involvement of member-based network organisations.

5.3 Autonomy

Main findings:

- N-CSOs feel their autonomy is respected by MFA.
- Some S-CSOs, especially those in the lead at country level, part of a network organisation or a country-level governance structure, feel increased ownership and autonomy, also thanks to the elaborate inception phase.
- Other S-CSOs, especially those subcontracted after SP programme development or with a bilateral contract with one N-CSO, feel less autonomous.
- CSO autonomy and flexibility was strengthened by the focus on outcomes and trust, which was more felt by N-CSOs and lead S-CSOs than by S-CSOs that were subcontracted later.
- N-CSO autonomy can be undermined by MFA's aim to achieve complementarity, and may require MFA to give CSOs more spaces.
- N-CSO autonomy benefited from MFA's trust, which was built by joint learning and staff continuity.
- S-CSO autonomy benefited from diversified funding, though this was not always an explicit intention of the SP.
- S-CSO autonomy was strengthened by capacity development support if it addressed organisational and institutional capacities.

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5.3.1 Overview of evaluation scores on CSO autonomy

As explained in the methodology, the interview results regarding autonomy allow us to create an impression of the appreciation on a scale from 1 to 5. These impressions are presented in the tables below and will be referred to in the text.

Table 8 Northern and Southern perception of SP autonomy

	North						South					
	1	2	3	4	5	avg	1	2	3	4	5	avg
Operational and tactical autonomy		2		8	15	4.4	1		7	5	11	4.0
Flexibility to adapt, local context			1	12	11	4.4		8	1	6	8	3.6
Capacity building S-CSO			9	2	1	3.3		9	2	7	1	3.4
S-CSO ownership, involvement in SP dev.		2	5	7	1	3.5		4	2	9	9	4.0

Generally, N-CSOs and MFA staff are more satisfied about autonomy and flexibility than S-CSOs. Nevertheless, S-CSOs do feel ownership and are reasonably satisfied about their involvement in the development of the SP programme. Building the capacity of S-CSOs is a weakness in the majority of SPs.

Table 9 *Autonomy of the four SP instruments compared*

	North				South			
	D&D	SRHR	Mediation	ARC	D&D	SRHR	Mediation	ARC
Operational and tactical autonomy	4.4	4.0	4.5	5.0	4.1	4.5	5.0	2.7
Flexibility to adapt, local context	4.5	4.3	5.0	4.0	3.6	4.3		2.7
Capacity building S-CSO	3.4	3.0	3.0		3.8	2.8	5.0	2.0
S-CSO ownership, involvement in SP dev.	3.6	3.0	3.0		4.1	4.5	5.0	2.0

Differences between programmes are mainly seen in the South. S-CSOs involved in ARC have very little autonomy. S-CSOs involved in the DSH Peace-building and mediation SP feel autonomous (although this is based on very few interviews).

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Table 10 *Autonomy in the four case study countries compared*

	North				South			
	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda
Operational and tactical autonomy	4.6	4.6	4.3	4.3	4.0	4.4	4.2	4.0
Flexibility to adapt, local context	4.4	4.7	4.0	4.6	2.2	4.8	3.5	4.0
Capacity building S-CSO	3.3	3.0	3.3	3.7	3.8	3.2	2.8	4.0
S-CSO ownership, involvement in SP dev.	3.5	3.0	3.8	3.4	3.8	4.2	3.5	4.3

Differences between countries are not that large. In Sudan, S-CSOs feel fairly autonomous, in spite of the limited room given by the government.

5.3.2 Operational and tactical autonomy

N-CSO

N-CSOs feel that their autonomy is respected by MFA. The N-CSO's perception of autonomy is reportedly influenced by its experiences with other donors (e.g. USAID) and by the expectations regarding the relationship that are raised at the launch of the instrument. For example, ARC partners had lower expectations and were pleasantly surprised by the degree

of autonomy, whereas in the SP D&D expectations were high and therefore their appreciation was slightly less.

Many N-CSOs used the preceding MFS-II instrument as a reference and concluded that current SPs favour bottom-up strategy development and planning, make it easier to work with autonomous CSO networks, reduce differences in power and increase the space for equality and mutual respect. In comparison to MFS-II, in the SP instruments the roles and relationships between CSOs and MFA are no longer uniform, but can be adapted to the context.

S-CSOs in the lead at country level

Some of the S-CSOs, in particular the lead S-CSO of an SP at country level, sometimes country offices of international CSOs, or S-CSOs that are part of a network or joint governance structure, feel that their autonomy is well respected in the SP. The elaborate, in-country inception phase has contributed to this as it allows parties to adapt their strategic choices to the local contexts. The extension of the inception phase during the start-up of the SP, up to about 10 months, has made it significantly easier for the country teams and S-CSOs to participate.

An example of how the delegation of power increases S-CSO autonomy: The steering committee of an SP in Nepal consists of representatives of its 15 regional members. This means that the Southern stakeholders can really be in the driver's seat: 'It really is our programme and very valuable. People feel a shared "agency" and we make sure they can act on it. Even the local governor is full of praise.'

Subcontracted S-CSO

Still, the autonomy and flexibility that MFA intended for the CSOs is not always transferred from the lead N-CSO to S-CSOs. Some S-CSOs, in particular the 'implementing' S-CSO, are subcontracted later, after the SP agreement has been signed and therefore have less influence at the strategic level and more at a programme's operational level. Moreover, S-CSO autonomy is restricted by existing procedures between N-CSOs. Lead S-CSOs and subcontracted S-CSOs related to funding modalities and accountability. These two issues are discussed separately below.

Underlying causes for CSO autonomy

The autonomy of the partners in an SP is obviously bound by the MFA-designed partnership frameworks and their underlying assumptions. Some of these assumptions are challenged by CSO realities: is it realistic to assume that an implementation programme only temporarily financed by MFA that provides evidence of L&A will have an autonomous, prolonged presence? Is it realistic to expect an S-CSO to maintain its position if its service-delivery component, which prescribes its mandate, cannot be subsidized under the SP? Can we only address the globally shrinking space for civil society by funding CSOs, or should we consider addressing the issue through N-CSOs' funding of S-CSOs, Southern governments and Southern private sector activities?

In some cases (related to human rights and a free press) CSOs felt that the embassies showed much more commitment, while respecting CSO autonomy, than before. The gender-related SP members reportedly perceive 'deep' ownership, shared responsibility and accountability (with the embassies) as the keys to a successful strategic partnership. It depends on personalities, according to CSO: 'The presence of an NL embassy is in itself not an asset. Much depends on the individual commitment of embassy staff.'

Other examples of more implicit MFA assumptions that limit autonomy were mentioned during the interviews: How can the context-specific activities of hundreds of CSOs in 70+ countries be monitored by means of aggregated indicators in 'thematic result frameworks' owned by The Hague? Is the dilemma: 'Do I work with professional L&A organisations in order to be effective' versus 'Do I support the L&A capacity development of emerging and innovative S-CSOs' best solved at the local level, or does it require two distinct instruments? Are S-CSOs really interested in being directly funded and being more independent from N-CSOs? Are S-CSOs increasingly reducing their vulnerability by working through international CSO networks?

Likewise, the perceived autonomy is also influenced by the local context and cultural reality of the S-CSO: depending on the adopted L&A strategy, it is often important to maintain some critical distance from donors. This is most obvious with activism (as anticipated in the dissent option), but also in peace-building and mediation, where earmarked funding is perceived as a threat to an organisation's neutrality.

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Another complicating factor is that in many cultures it is inappropriate to voice dissent with your funding partner, and in fragile and dictatorial contexts it is even dangerous to be seen with a representative of a foreign embassy as it will undermine the legitimacy of the S-CSO.

*An example of a CSO not wanting to be openly associated with the Dutch government:
The fishing community in Jakarta did not want to engage in a consultation with Dutch embassy staff, because of Dutch support to Dutch dredging companies, who were causing trouble in the fishing community.*

The autonomy of individual N-CSO organisations within an institutional N-CSO–MFA relationship is reportedly positively influenced by the development of a shared L&A or knowledge development agenda and the availability of liaison staff that know how to build trust. The high staff turnover at all levels has a negative effect on trust.

N-CSOs have less autonomy when the organisation is highly dependent on MFA funds. In some cases the existing 75% criterion does not sufficiently motivate N-CSOs to actively diversify their funding, leading to them to play a service-providing role rather than be the equitable partner MFA is looking for. Likewise, the ownership and autonomy of S-CSOs depend on their financial dependency on this SP: some CSOs have multiple donors and

multiple projects, and are therefore more autonomous. Southern partners that have diversified their funding sources are better at expressing themselves in an SP.

MFA is increasingly focusing on fragile contexts, but the subtleties of fragility are not always an integrated part of the ToC. As a consequence, some thematic departments still consider CSOs as linear service providers, whereas others consider them solely as organisations that emancipate citizens. In reality S-CSOs are almost always a mixture of both.

5.3.3 Flexibility to adapt to the local context and changing realities

As the global ToC of the SPs was initially conceived in the North as part of a Northern SP agreement, it has taken time for S-CSO teams to get out of their logframe mode and realise that a donor would be willing to adapt its intervention logic on the basis of lessons learnt.

The inception phase has made it possible to develop country plans locally, which has proven to be a good thing. Monitoring systems can produce meaningful data for the operational level to facilitate S-CSOs' adaptive management and organisational learning. The annual monitoring of results and effects (*outcomes*) and reflection on the ToC have had a positive effect on the flexibility and autonomy of S-CSOs. In the end, the flexibility – to change the focus and action plans after the start of the programme – is often more limited by N-CSO internal procedures than by the MFA SP framework. Although some thematic directorates, such as DSH, tried in retrospect to better link the results of the SP programmes to their own result frameworks, MFA actors still consider the SP's flexibility to be substantial. Occasionally the autonomy of N-CSOs is affected by the short-term political agenda in The Hague – e.g. Syria becoming a priority, while the N-CSO does not have a network there. Unearmarked funds, provided on the basis of a shared vision and trust, have the most flexibility and allow N-CSOs to set their own course. The challenge is to find the ideal balance between strategic funding and non-strategic funding in each situation.

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Peace-building and mediation requires some critical distance and considerable flexibility between mediators and donors in order to have a chance of succeeding. Earmarked funding can make CSOs feel that they have an obligation towards donors.

SPs have the tactical flexibility to target different groups simultaneously, if necessary. A number of 'sustainable trade' SPs typically consist of two parts: a) sustainable chain development with farmers and companies; and b) developing an enabling environment: influencing policies and public sector actors. It also happened that within an SP the S-CSO put pressure on the local company while the N-CSO was in contact with the importing company in the Netherlands.

The flexibility regarding the day-to-day management of the SP activities is highly appreciated by the large majority of CSOs in all four programmes. And the South feels that the possibility of aligning the SP with an organisation's own mission, priorities and subsequent ownership is significantly high. Some CSOs adapted their own objectives and result frameworks after the inception phase, thus fully embracing the partnership.

The flexibility to adapt the programmes exists (within certain limits) but is felt more at the level of the S-CSOs that take the lead in the country, than at the level of other S-CSOs, who are often subcontracted after the SP has been designed. The latter S-CSOs often work according to annual action plans and funding based on activities with little flexibility.

Two examples of the benefits of flexibility:

In Ethiopia, following a disturbance in the relationship with the government, the programme was moved to another geographical area without complaints from the funding agency.

In India, where some N-CSOs were blacklisted by the government, their peers took over the implementation and the SP coalition was given a free hand to adapt the programme accordingly.

Ultimately, an annual cycle of re-planning on the basis of ‘after-action review’ tools and ‘Outcome Harvesting’ make it possible to adapt the ToC in the local context. This is extremely important in fragile contexts.

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5.3.4 Possibility of catering to CSO capacity needs

Examples were found on the opposite ends of the spectrum, including broader, organisational and institutional capacity development, and limited, functional capacity building:

- In some SPs, S-CSOs were given more responsibility, operated in a (national) platform, and were able to learn from other CSOs. S-CSOs were given the possibility to shop among N-CSOs and other service providers, and were able to strengthen their institutional and operational capacities.
- In other SPs, S-CSOs were not given much responsibility, were tightly bound to bilateral contracts, received payment based on activities, and only received capacity building that was useful for specific activities, not for overall organisational or institutional capacity development.

The strategic choice of the D&D SP to focus on strengthening L&A capacity may be cost-effective from an MFA/DSO perspective, but it also creates hurdles for emerging citizen organisations and innovative citizen initiatives. Also, the bigger emphasis on Southern leadership requires capacity development support to S-CSOs that goes beyond L&A. On the other hand, not all S-CSOs in the CSO alliance need to be professional: the experiences with the FLOW programme, for example, show that although S-CSOs may not pass the due diligence test on paper, they are an invaluable asset in L&A initiatives.

Some N-CSOs state that working with a ToC is in itself an important way of increasing a CSO’s capacity to work in complex environments. The Linking and Learning events

contribute to the development of a joint capacity to effectively engage in lobbying and advocacy through a strategic partnership. Some D&D SPs seem to result in more capacity development than the previous programme MFS-II since there is clearly more investment in training and learning than before, while others have not explicitly budgeted for learning activities. The question remains to what extent training contributes to specific L&A capacities, and to organisational and institutional capacities.

Various N-CSOs reported that MFA's initial perception of capacity development was limited to increasing the L&A capacity of S-CSOs. Some N-CSOs have created a special Advocacy Department that supports L&A capacity development. The policy dialogue and Linking and Learning activities have led to more capacity development support being directed towards Southern and international CSO networks, to multi-stakeholder systems and to emerging citizen movements.

5.3.5 S-CSO ownership and involvement in the development of the SP

Overall, whether working with established or new partners, the existence of an inception phase during which strategies are contextualised has an enormous added value. This implies that programme development is no longer a linear process, but a cyclical process that has to be accommodated by the funding agency.

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As mentioned above, in the case of the D&D SP, most S-CSOs got involved after the signature of the SP contract. Many S-CSOs were recruited on the basis of the potential added value they could provide to the SP. Although the inception phase allowed them to focus on their own strengths in their context, their influence on the philosophy of the SP instrument has been limited.

In some cases the participatory identification of relevant result indicators has led to more Southern ownership. For example, the Community Score Card used by CARE leads to empowerment, dialogue and reciprocity in the N-CSO–S-CSO relationship. The MFA thematic result frameworks do not always accommodate the outcome of such participatory processes. The DSH peace-building and mediation partners involve their local partner CSO in the planning of activities.

5.4 Funding modality

Main findings:

- Long-term and flexible funding made it possible for N-CSOs and some S-CSOs to invest in partnerships for transformative processes.
- Many S-CSOs are often still bound to annual contracts and inflexible, activity-based budgets, without covering overhead costs.
- One reason for lead CSOs (North or South) to use short-term, inflexible funding is the S-CSOs' lack of financial management capacity.

5.4.1 Overview of evaluation scores on funding modality

Table 11 Northern and Southern perception of the funding modality in an SP

	North						South					
	1	2	3	4	5	avg	1	2	3	4	5	avg
Duration of the commitment			4	10	7	4.1	4	2	3	9	5	3.4
Flexible funding		2	10	10	3	3.6	7	3	4	6	3	2.8
Income diversification	1	1	12	1	1	3.0	3	12	3	4	1	2.5
Overhead costs for S-CSOs							5	5	3	8	1	2.8

N-CSOs benefit from long-term commitment and flexible funding, but S-CSOs benefit less from this. S-CSOs also have a limited budget for overhead costs. There has been little effort to diversify S-CSOs' income.

Table 12 Funding modality of the four SP instruments compared

	North				South			
	D&D	SRHR	Mediation	ARC	D&D	SRHR	Mediation	ARC
Duration of the commitment	4.1	4.0	4.5		3.3	3.8	5.0	3.0
Flexible funding	3.5	4.0	4.0	3.0	2.8	3.3		2.0
Income diversification	3.2	2.5	3.0		2.3	2.8	5.0	2.3
Overhead costs for S-CSOs					2.7	4.0	2.0	1.7

Differences between programmes are mainly in the South. S-CSOs involved in the DSH peace building and mediation SP have more favourable funding modalities than S-CSOs involved in ARC, who receive less flexible funding, obtain little assistance in income diversification, and have little budget for overhead costs.

Table 13 Funding modality in the four case study countries compared

	North				South			
	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda
Duration of the commitment	3.8	4.3	4.0	4.6	2.8	4.0	3.6	3.6
Flexible funding	3.7	3.9	3.3	3.7	1.8	3.0	3.3	2.6
Income diversification	2.6	3.0	3.3	3.1	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.6
Overhead costs for S-CSOs					2.4	3.8	1.8	3.1

Differences between countries are mainly caused by the bilateral contracts, between S-CSOs and the lead CSO or the N-CSO field offices used by several SPs in Mali. As will be presented later, many of these bilateral contracts are short-term and have little flexibility.

5.4.2 Long-term commitment

N-CSOs

According to N-CSOs, five years is a good time frame for achieving some intermediate process results, but more time is needed for lobbying and advocacy to make an impact, especially when working indirectly through the capacity development of Southern organisations. Several partnerships, or parts of them, already existed in a previous project phase. In particular the DSH peace-building and mediation SPs appreciated MFA's long-term commitment. One CSO explained the tension between the desired long-term commitments within a partnership and the desired flexibility to replace poorly performing partners with new, better partners.

S-CSOs

According to S-CSOs, five years of funding is longer than what most other donor programmes provide. However, S-CSOs do not always benefit from long-term funding. A few S-CSOs have multi-annual contracts for the whole project period, which makes it easier for them to build good relationships with other implementing S-CSOs, develop their capacities, and create a sense of ownership. It also helps them to create good relationships with communities. A few SPs have moved from annual to two-year contracts with their S-CSOs. Several S-CSOs have an MoU that ensures long-term commitment, with annual contracts. Many S-CSOs – not the lead S-CSO in a country but the subcontracted S-CSOs – only have annual contracts, and some face bureaucratic hurdles such as not being able to transfer leftover funds to the next year and slow annual procedures resulting in periods without funding at the start of the new year. Some S-CSOs are hired for specific, short-term activities. Uncertainty may also arise as some S-CSOs must wait for government approval, as is the case in Nepal. The lack of long-term commitment compromises S-CSOs' autonomy, as well as the possibility of investing in organisational capacity and ensuring continuity of activities and staff, and it also makes it difficult for them to be involved in long-term processes such as lobbying and advocacy. The differences in commitment towards S-CSO seem to be caused by the N-CSO partnership policy or attitude.

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5.4.3 Flexible funding

N-CSOs

All N-CSOs agree that the flexibility in funding is positive, given the nature of L&A activities, for example, and the unstable context. This flexibility makes it possible to build a network, including emerging, promising S-CSOs. It also makes it possible to adjust to changing contexts, for example by giving additional financial support to women's organisations in a time when civic space is shrinking.

One N-CSO mentioned the positive effect that flexible funding had on complementarity, especially when opportunities for joint international (global) L&A activities came up. On the other hand, flexibility and autonomy may reduce complementarity between CSOs and MFA. The five DSH peace-building and mediation SPs are a case in point: they enjoyed the most flexibility and autonomy up to 2018 as a result of 100% unearmarked funding, but there was

less complementarity with MFA, especially at the country level. Therefore, MFA opted to earmark part of the funding, for activities in countries of common interest, and contribute to the DSH results framework. Although not all involved CSOs are convinced that this is desirable, because it reduces their autonomy and flexibility, it does create more options for complementarity with MFA.

S-CSOs

The way this flexibility is transferred to the South varies: often there is a lead S-CSO in the country, who has more autonomy and flexibility, and works with several other, implementing S-CSOs, who are more restricted. S-CSOs often work with detailed budgets, following a detailed activity plan. This, together with the use of annual contracts, strict financial procedures and slow approval processes, restricts flexible funding for S-CSOs. Apparently, funds not spent by one partner are not transferred to another partner in the same SP, which would have increased flexibility. This stringent contracting and limited flexibility for S-CSOs has various causes, which are discussed under accountability, in the section about financial accountability.

For S-CSOs, there is little or no transparency in the overall funding within the SP, so S-CSOs have little opportunity to discuss and negotiate budgets more strategically. Some S-CSOs suspect that too much money is being spent in the North. The embassy in Uganda confirmed that most S-CSOs have insufficient financial flexibility and autonomy.

An example of a short-term budget and its negative consequences: An N-CSO visited Sudan to find out why there was budget underspending, even though the implementing S-CSO had ran out of money, and had been waiting for a long time for money from the bureaucratically organised lead S-CSO. The implementing S-CSO regularly runs out of money, has to discontinue activities, and has difficulty retaining staff.

An example of the positive effect of long-term and flexible funding: An interesting effect of more flexible funding from the Dutch SP, mentioned by an N-CSO in Sudan, is that they can combine this with funding from other donors to develop a longer-term coherent country programme.

There are a few good examples where N-CSOs involve all S-CSOs per country in the annual planning and budgeting exercise, or where the lead S-CSO has autonomy and flexibility over their country budget. During the workshop with MFA and N-CSOs in March 2019, there was agreement on the need to work towards such delegated country-level governance structures. There are other good examples where N-CSOs do not require detailed activity reporting.

A constraint mentioned by several S-CSOs is the lack of funds for hardware and service delivery, which is often not understood by the local population and local authorities in a post-conflict situation such as Sudan.

5.4.4 Income diversification

N-CSOs

Many N-CSOs already had different funding for different programmes, and different donors, before the strategic partnership started. One N-CSO mentioned that the D&D SP has generated interest and funding from other donors. Some SPs are in the process of fundraising for the SP secretariat, in addition to funding individual CSOs.

One concern, for many CSOs and MFA, is the need for service delivery for local buy-in and legitimacy to complement lobbying and advocacy activities. For certain SPs, this is not a problem, because they have different funding for service delivery activities, from MFA or other donors. But for other SPs the lack of funds for service delivery is problematic. On the other hand, most N-CSOs appreciate dedicated funding for lobbying and advocacy, because other donors hardly support this, and without dedicated funding, L&A would receive much less attention.

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S-CSOs

Some N-CSOs are building S-CSOs' fundraising capacity, while others have plans to do so, and some S-CSOs have already acquired different funding. For example, several S-CSOs for sex workers in Vietnam are being supported by the Vietnamese government.

Financial sustainability and income diversification for S-CSOs do not seem to have been explicit objectives in the SP. Some SPs have made an effort to train and assist S-CSOs, or even the SP country secretariat as a whole (at the country level) to develop a financial strategy and to diversify funding sources. The MFA funding for the peace-building and mediation SP helped S-CSOs to attract funding from other donors. Several lead S-CSOs are already involved in projects funded by other donors, but the SP is not helping them to diversify income. S-CSOs with diversified funding are stronger, financially less dependent, and have a longer-term horizon.

5.4.5 Overhead costs for S-CSOs

The budget for overhead costs varies from rare cases of 25% to more frequent cases of 7%-15%, to some cases without any overhead budget. Many S-CSOs that are not the lead CSO in the country receive funds for programme implementation, with a budget linked to activities, which leaves them little room for overhead or contingency costs. S-CSOs have the impression that too large a share of the SP budget is spent in the North. For some S-CSOs it is still not clear what constitutes a legitimate cost. Especially in difficult areas, such as Sudan, a contingency budget is needed. Most S-CSOs have no overview of the budget and current balance of the SP as a whole.

5.5 Accountability

Main findings:

- Generally, N-CSOs appreciated the more flexible MFA results reporting requirements.
- Some MFA thematic departments applied results frameworks that are inappropriate for SPs.
- Many S-CSOs are still faced detailed activity and financial reporting requirements.
- Joint learning was well organised in D&D, but poorly organised in ARC due to limited staff.
- Shared responsibility for outcomes evolved over time, and was facilitated by the CSO alliance governance structure.
- There is little feeling of shared responsibility, by MFA and CSOs, for agreed outcomes.
- Accountability remains mainly upward.

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5.5.1 Overview of evaluation scores on accountability

Table 14 Northern and Southern perception of the accountability in an SP

	North						South					
	1	2	3	4	5	avg	1	2	3	4	5	avg
Trust-based accountability		6	4	7	6	3.6	1	10	3	6	3	3.0
Joint learning agenda	2	7	1	6	3	3.1	4	2	5	10	2	3.2
Shared responsibility outcomes	9	9			1	1.7	5	11	1	2	4	2.5
Two-way accountability	4	8	1	1		1.9	4	11		5	3	2.7

About half of the SPs have experienced trust-based accountability between MFA and N-CSOs. This is less the case in the South between N-CSOs and S-CSOs. Between MFA and N-CSOs, there is clearly little feeling of shared responsibility for agreed-on outcomes, and there is little downward accountability from MFA to N-CSOs. This is only slightly better between N-CSOs and S-CSOs, although there are a few excellent examples.

Table 15 *Accountability of the four SP instruments compared*

	North				South			
	D&D	SRHR	Mediation	ARC	D&D	SRHR	Mediation	ARC
Trust-based accountability	3.9	3.3	4.5	2.0	3.1	3.5		2.0
Joint learning agenda	3.2	3.3	4.0	2.0	3.4	3.3		1.7
Shared responsibility outcomes*	1.8	2.0	2.0	1.0	2.5	2.8	5.0	1.3
Two-way accountability	2.0	1.7	2.0		2.6	2.8		2.7

Differences between programmes are in line with earlier findings. As expected, given the results on funding modalities, both N-CSOs and S-CSOs see ARC as a programme with a control-based accountability system, with no shared responsibility and little joint learning.

Table 16 *Accountability in the four case study countries compared*

	North				South			
	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda	Mali	Nepal	Sudan	Uganda
Trust based accountability	3.6	4.0	3.2	4.1	2.6	3.4	3.3	2.6
Joint learning agenda	3.0	3.4	2.4	3.7	3.2	4.2	2.2	3.4
Shared responsibility outcomes	1.5	1.7	1.3	2.4	3.0	3.0	1.8	3.0
Two-way accountability	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.8	2.0	3.6	2.5	2.9

Differences between countries are less pronounced. Perhaps CSOs use a more trust-based accountability system in countries where they have more operating space.

5.5.2 Accountability system: trust-based versus control-based

Below, we make a distinction between results reporting and financial reporting. First, we describe our findings in the North, then those in the South.

Results reporting in the North

For the D&D SP and the SRHR SP, DSO required short annual reports with a focus on outcomes⁷ and a reflection on the ToC, without details on activities. In addition, all SPs had to report through IATA.

⁷ The focus on outcomes allows flexibility in activities and outputs. However, the chosen outcome indicators should say something sensible about project progress, i.e. the focus should be more on intermediate short-term outcomes that can convincingly be linked to project activities. The risk of reporting on long-term outcomes is that they cannot be attributed to the project, that they are not externally validated, and that they present a much too positive picture of the actual project results.

All N-CSOs appreciate the more flexible reporting requirements, with the focus on outcomes and the reflection on the theory of change, which is appropriate for long-term processes such as L&A. It allows more flexibility at the activity level. Requirements are much more modest than in the preceding MFS-II phase. However, in addition to the short annual reports to MFA, all SPs report in IATI (see section 5.5.6 below). Many D&D SPs use 'Outcome Harvesting', which was new (for most S-CSOs as well), but it encourages internal learning and dialogue with MFA. Some partners have started Outcome Harvesting in other programmes as well. One CSO is experimenting with 'Narrative Assessment', which goes beyond Outcome Harvesting in validating the links between activities and outcomes.

Initially, DSO did not require any indicators for D&D to be reported on. Later, DSO extracted six indicators from the first set of D&D activity reports, and asked all 25 D&D SPs to report on them. This is not a constraint for CSOs: some find it useful, but others doubt what these indicators, aggregated by DSO and reported to parliament, really mean.

However, MFA reports annually aggregated results to parliament, and wishes to include SP results. The trend in MFA is towards increased accountability on SDG-level results to parliament and the Dutch public. In the case of D&D, most SPs were transferred to other thematic departments, who have their own results framework. For example, DMM does not have its own results framework so does not require additional reporting from the D&D SP. Other thematic departments, e.g. IGG, have a results framework that focus on SDG outcomes and a limited number of intermediate 'enabling' results. IGG does not require 'its' SP to report on IGG indicators. Although some IGG staff regret that SPs do not clearly contribute to the IGG results framework, other IGG staff see possibilities for matching the two ToCs and linking the SP results as additional intermediate results to the IGG framework. Other departments, DSH in particular, have more elaborate results frameworks that reflect their full ToC at different levels: long-term outcome, outputs and processes, each with a DSH selection of indicators. Inevitably, other output and process indicators are conceivable that also contribute to the DSH outcomes, which are not included in the DSH framework. DSH wants 'its' allocated SP to report at least on one of the DSH indicators, or if that is not possible, to jointly agree on what SP indicator can be reported on, with a plausible story of how this contributes to DSH's long-term outcomes. Unfortunately, in the chain between MFA/DSH, the Dutch-based N-CSO, the N-CSO field office, and S-CSOs, what was meant to be a dialogue ended up being an imposition of inappropriate indicators for certain S-CSOs. The final result reflects what the DSO D&D ToC document (2017) describes as a clash between the transformative development view and the managerial development view, partly caused by MFA's aim to report results annually, and partly by the relation between N-CSOs and S-CSOs.

More generally, this journey has been a search, and many CSOs were confused about the changes in reporting requirements. Some CSO and MFA staff proposed to have one single MFA department to report to, rather than having to report to both DSO and another thematic department.

For ARC, according to an implementing CSO, the results framework developed by consultants and MFA was not practical. It reflected four abstract policy objectives but did not reflect the country context or reality. MFA wanted to have uniform indicators so results could be aggregated, but these aggregated result figures do not make sense.

For the DSH 'peacebuilding and mediation' SP, up to 2018 when all funding was unearmarked, the core donor report was sufficient, after which the overall results were presented. Part of Dutch funding has been earmarked since 2018, which will require detailed plans and detailed reports, for activities in Dutch priority countries. These reports need to show that all of the activities contribute to at least one indicator of the DSH results framework, which is not considered a constraint for the CSO. From the Dutch perspective of wanting to report on what Dutch funding has achieved in Dutch priority countries, this is understandable, but for CSOs this means more work and less flexibility and autonomy.

Some CSOs mentioned that they hardly get any feedback from MFA on their reports, and opportunities for dialogue are missed. The long chain between N-CSOs, the I-CSO field office and S-CSOs does not help to solve the feedback problem.

N-CSOs are still looking for the right balance between asking their Southern partners for enough and not too much reporting. Generally, N-CSOs require much more detailed reports, linked to a detailed plan and budget, from their S-CSOs, than what MFA requires from the SP. The reason N-CSOs require detailed reports is related to the confidence in the S-CSOs' administrative and financial management capacities.

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Results reporting in the South

The idea behind the SP was that CSOs would report to MFA on outcomes, with very few pre-determined indicators, and not on detailed activities: i.e. more trust-based than control-based accountability. Most SPs introduced the Outcome Harvesting approach, which was much appreciated, also by S-CSOs. It makes it possible to reflect carefully on results, the ToC and how to adjust the plan. Some D&D SPs use the MFA/DSO 7 main indicators; other D&D SPs have their own indicators, which could be linked to these 7 DSO indicators, however.

The reporting requirements from some MFA thematic departments have been frustrating in some cases. For implementing S-CSOs, the MFA/DSH outcome indicators were too remote from their activities and reality; it was not clear to them how their work contributed to these.

An example of an inappropriate results framework for S-CSOs: A D&D programme in Sudan, implemented by an S-CSO, was happy with its own innovative 'community score card' monitoring tool. Then a consultant, invited by the N-CSO, came and developed an additional list of indicators, which were not considered appropriate by the S-CSO. Later, the N-CSO requested the S-CSO to report on MFA/DSH indicators, which even changed a number of times. The S-CSO effort now focuses on doing as much as possible to meet the MFA/DSH requirements, and use the indicators proposed by the consultant as little as possible. Their own M&E, including the community score card, has not been integrated into the new M&E system yet.

Many SPs identified their own set of programme indicators, which were further defined at the country level, often with the participation of the S-CSO. As a result, S-CSOs still face the task of providing meticulous activity reports with a detailed list of predetermined indicators: more control-based than trust-based accountability.

Financial reporting in the North

Unlike the modest requirements for results reporting, MFA still has strict requirements for financial reporting. Some N-CSOs see this as their own fault, having submitted a detailed budget. Some have no problem with it, and in fact appreciate MFA's flexibility in finding solutions. Other N-CSOs find MFA's requirements too strict, stricter than those of other donors, because MFA wants expenditures to be traceable up to the S-CSO level. Some N-CSOs have complained that MFA processes financial reports slowly. Some MFA staff question the accountability of international activities that are not linked to a country programme.

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Financial reporting in the South

Most N-CSOs have strict financial reporting requirements to S-CSOs and want to control the books. One dilemma for N-CSOs is that S-CSOs which are strong in financial reporting may not necessarily be the right S-CSO, or social movement, for L&A work.

In follow-up discussions with a few lead S-CSOs (in some cases Southern field offices of N-CSOs) that subcontract other S-CSOs, they explained that they had to be strict in activity reporting because of the link with financial reporting. Financial reporting is considered a risky weakness of many S-CSOs, because of their poor administrative capacity and lack of internal checks and balances.

Moreover, some lead S-CSOs run various projects funded by different donors with different reporting requirements. For them, it is easiest to apply the most stringent bookkeeping system for all their operations, which they then impose on all of the other S-CSOs. In Uganda, about half of the SPs use a more trust-based accountability system, while the other half use more of a control-based accountability system. Old habits and pre-existing N-CSO partnership policies may also have contributed to the strict reporting requirements for S-CSOs.

5.5.3 Joint learning agenda

N-CSOs

Several N-CSOs and S-CSOs mentioned that it could be more beneficial if a smaller group of CSOs (not limited to D&D) working on the same theme would be invited to learning events, e.g. at the country level. Examples are the 3 SPs working on child marriages. One CSO explained that the ToC is insufficiently used for validating assumptions, which is best done by inviting an SP working on the same theme.

According to both MFA and N-CSOs, there is a wealth of untapped experience in the 21 ARC projects, which MFA could explore and share across projects, and use in the policy dialogue. The main constraint is staff time at DSH/BU. Initially, MFA did not even require an MTR from the 21 ARC projects. Even the DSH knowledge platform was not sufficiently equipped with staff or relevant learning questions to make optimal use of the ARC SP's experiences. One N-CSO found the research agenda too academic. Some learning does take place between ARC projects in the same countries, without MFA's involvement. MFA tries to extract lessons from the project progress reports, and use this as input for DSH and MFA, but these lessons are not systematically shared or discussed with the other ARC projects. One N-CSO suggested that the split in DSH between the policy unit and the DSH implementation unit may be one of the reasons why there is a poor learning loop and a lack of feedback from implementation to policy.

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S-CSOs

S-CSOs appreciate the SP's role in knowledge brokering and learning. Joint learning is a strong feature of D&D and SRHR SP, which includes learning both within the SP and between SPs. The workshops organised to reflect on the ToC, combined with outcome harvesting, helped to identify lessons learned. There are regular meetings, more at the national level than the international level, to share lessons learned. In Nepal, one SP organised webinars for exchange and learning, which the S-CSOs appreciated. The ARC programme has a learning agenda with MFA, but S-CSOs have not benefited from this yet. In countries with more than one ARC SP, some active N-CSOs and lead S-CSOs organise exchange and learning meetings at the country level themselves.

5.5.4 Shared responsibility for agreed outcomes

MFA

Initially, thematic departments, for example DDE and IGG, did not feel ownership of the D&D SP, partly because the SP results did not match the MFA end results. This has changed: both DDE and IGG appreciate the D&D results as important intermediate, enabling results for the DDE and IGG SDG-level results. These thematic departments now do feel responsible for their D&D outcomes.

S-CSOs

In the South, there are two levels of shared responsibility: First of all, a narrow one, determined by bilateral contracts between one N-CSO (or lead S-CSO) and one S-CSO within a larger SP. Examples of this are found in Mali, where different S-CSOs within the same SP each report individually and hardly know anything about each other's progress. Second, a wider one, where all SPs belonging to the same SP in one country jointly plan, monitor and report on outcomes.

Examples of a horizontal governance structure of S-CSOs: In 3 SPs in Uganda and Nepal, the CSOs have a joint government structure at the country level, and in 2 cases a steering committee with rotating participation. The S-CSOs do joint planning, divide the country budget and discuss progress. All S-CSOs are well-informed about the others, have a strong sense of joint responsibility, and when needed tasks are redistributed among the partners.

In Uganda, the SRHR focal point took the voluntary initiative to organise joint monitoring and reporting of all Dutch-funded SHRH initiatives. However, joint reporting has been difficult, partly because of poor CSO capacity, differences in the timing of monitoring, and partly because some S-CSOs do not want publicity – which, incidentally, is not always taken into account sufficiently by N-CSOs.

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We found no cases of shared responsibility for the whole SP that also involve S-CSOs. This is due to the governance structure: at the country level it is possible to involve S-CSOs in joint planning and monitoring; at the international level this becomes complicated, nor is it perhaps desirable.

5.5.5 Two-way accountability, to donors and to Southern stakeholders

Accountability to MFA is discussed in previous sections. The question here is: are MFA and N-CSOs also accountable to Southern stakeholders? There are a few positive indications of this. Many N-CSOs try to be accountable to S-CSOs, by sharing information during conferences and workshops, for example. One N-CSO explained that downward accountability is ensured by collaboration with Southern (faith-based) organisations with a constituency, where there is considerable trust between partners.

An example of an SP holding MFA to account: The SP informed Dutch parliament and the Dutch public about policy incoherencies, between serving the interest of Dutch companies and trade, and environmental and social effects of these activities in the South.

One N-CSO explained that accountability has improved under D&D: the local country network of S-CSOs is accountable to the member S-CSOs, more than under the previous MFS-II phase. Other N-CSOs admit that downward accountability is still weak and plan to improve this.

Accountability in the South is mostly upward. Subcontracted S-CSOs report to the lead S-CSO, who reports to the N-CSOs, who report to MFA. S-CSOs complain that they receive little or no feedback on their reports.

An example of downward accountability: in Sudan, a first step in downward accountability was the way progress monitoring was done, by involving beneficiaries and local authorities in interviews and focus group discussions, and progress and results. An interesting side effect of this was the increased trust between local communities and local authorities.

Downward accountability is stronger when member-based S-CSOs participate, when they inform their members and final beneficiaries or when S-CSOs have a link to local authorities that hold them accountable. Downward accountability within the SP is stronger in more horizontal governance structures, where lead CSOs or N-CSOs report to the S-CSOs at the country level. Often, S-CSOs are not informed about the overall progress of the SP, at the international level, other than through public global SP progress reports.

5.5.6 IATI

MFA asks all N-CSOs to report in IATI, requiring a great deal of quantitative data. N-CSOs consider IATI a great deal of work that requires good skills. Most N-CSOs and MFA staff do not consider IATI reporting useful, nor appropriate for L&A activities. For certain SPs, IATI could even be viewed as dangerous for S-CSOs and activists that have to work under the radar of local government, but in such cases, CSOs apply a non-disclosure policy. There are no indications that MFA or S-CSOs use the IATI data.

6

Reflections on the functioning of SPs

Main findings:

- Strategic partnerships require a careful balance between complementarity and CSO ownership
- The funding modality and accountability requirements affect autonomy and complementarity
- A vicious circle of short-term support and limited capacity development keeps some S-CSOs in an unequal partnership role
- A horizontal governance structure between CSOs at country level improves how SPs function
- Despite some progress in the functioning of SPs compared to previous programmes, some of the weaknesses found in the evaluations of previous programmes (2014 and 2015), in particular regarding limited autonomy, short-term support and stringent reporting requirements for S-CSOs, still need to be addressed today.

6.1 Balance complementarity with autonomy

In the previous chapters, a number of examples were given that illustrate how the aim to increase complementarity could reduce autonomy:

- The option, proposed by a few of MFA's staff, to limit SPs to Dutch priority countries where there is an embassy, and to prioritise the themes of these embassies, would reduce CSOs' autonomy. Some CSOs are moving into Dutch priority themes. Both CSOs and MFA see the need to look for opportunities for more complementarity, but without compromising CSOs' autonomy.
- Some CSOs criticise Dutch policy incoherencies, e.g. through campaigning. Although some MFA staff see this autonomous CSO work as a lack of collaborative action, other MFA staff acknowledge the importance of this dissent aspect of complementarity.
- Up to 2018, the funding received by the DSH peace-building and mediation SP was 100% unearmarked funding, which gave these SPs full autonomy. However, DSH felt there were missed opportunities for complementarity, and a small portion of the new funding is earmarked, meant for joint initiatives, e.g. by embassies and SPs in Dutch priority countries. This does reduce autonomy.
- S-CSOs that are part of a CSO network are more autonomous than S-CSOs that depend on a bilateral contract with one donor. This CSO network also helps in identifying complementarity in joint actions with other CSOs.

6.2 Funding modality and accountability requirements affect autonomy and complementarity

In the previous chapters, there were numerous examples of S-CSOs working with annual contracts and activity-based funding, which reduced the autonomy of S-CSOs. They have less possibility to develop and stick to their own mission and strategy, and focus on delivering the services they are paid for. Some S-CSOs even have difficulty retaining staff, due to short-term funding and delayed payments. This short-term and activity-based funding also leads to a more control-based type of accountability, with less focus on strategic dialogue on outcomes and long-term planning. This limits the complementarity of the S-CSO within the SP.

6.3 The vicious circle, or self-reinforcing circle, regarding S-CSOs' organisational and institutional capacities

The previous findings show how the relation between funding modality, accountability, autonomy and complementarity can form a vicious circle for S-CSOs with weak organisational and institutional capacities, and can form a self-reinforcing circle for S-CSOs that are more professional and well connected in an international network. The key is the extent of the S-CSO's investment in organisational and institutional development. Relatively weak S-CSOs do not have the luxury to invest in their own capacities and network, while relatively strong S-CSOs have many more opportunities. It comes down to the dilemma of whether CSOs are a means to an end (for example for lobbying and advocacy), or whether their political role has an intrinsic value for society. Although we acknowledge that some informal grass-roots movements and community-based organisations are better off being linked to administratively stronger S-CSOs than they would be if they were formalised and professionalised.

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6.4 Governance structure facilitates good functioning of S-CSOs in SPs

A few SPs stand out in the way they organise CSOs at the country level, which has facilitated all aspects of the SPs' effective functioning. They are characterised by the fact that they combine more professional S-CSOs with newer and less experienced ones, in an equal platform setting. This also gives opportunities for peer-to-peer capacity building, and S-CSOs can also refer each other to other CSOs and N-CSOs for capacity building. In some specific cases, the chair or secretariat S-CSO was chosen by the member S-CSO. Planning was done jointly, and tasks were divided according to the different capacities and complementary roles in this joint programme. The country budget was divided, in a joint decision, according to the outcomes that each S-CSO was to deliver. Joint progress and

monitoring sessions created the opportunity to reallocate tasks and the budget over different S-CSOs if needed. There was a clear shared responsibility for joint results. This governance structure at the country level was only possible because the N-CSO had sufficient trust and delegated part of its decision-making power from North to South – and this changed the rules of the game.

In sharp contrast, there are a few SPs where each individual S-CSO has a bilateral contract with one lead CSO or N-CSO field office, and has no idea what the other CSOs in the SP are doing. These S-CSOs feel that they are more of a subcontracted service provider CSO than an equal partner, participating at strategic level, in a larger SP.

These examples show how the governance structure can encourage or discourage all aspects of SP functioning, resulting in either an unequal, subordinate partner role, or a more equal, strategic partner role.

6.5 Progress since earlier IOB evaluations

Chapter 2 presented an overview of the main findings and recommendations from two earlier IOB evaluations (2014, 2015), related to the functioning of partnerships that we considered in this study. Some aspects have improved and some recommendations have received follow-up, the most important points being:

- In terms of complementarity, MFA and CSOs now pursue more of a common goal, and there are clearer complementarities between MFA, N-CSOs and S-CSOs, and between S-CSOs at country level, in several SPs.
- In terms of autonomy, N-CSOs have regained trust and are engaging in open dialogue with some S-CSOs again, and have involved them in the elaboration of SP country programmes. Several SPs are coalitions of CSOs, including S-CSOs with a local constituency. Some SPs have delegated power to a country level CSO governance structure, reducing power asymmetries.
- In terms of learning, the SPs use a ToC to reflect on results and assumptions, and learn more from other SPs.
- In terms of financing modality and accountability, N-CSOs appreciate the duration and flexibility of funding, and reporting requirements that are more focused on results than activities.

However, there are other weak aspects that still need to be addressed, and some recommendations are still valid today, the most important being:

- In terms of complementarity, some S-CSOs still feel there is a mismatch between international L&A and local needs. Complementarity is still constrained by limited MFA staff capacity.
- In terms of autonomy, several S-CSOs, especially when they were subcontracted after the SP has been designed, still feel little ownership of the SP programme beyond their own activities. Their financial dependency sometimes restricts their potential to increase autonomy. Power asymmetries between N-CSOs and S-CSOs are insufficiently addressed in some of the SPs.
- In terms of financing modality and accountability, many S-CSOs are still constrained by short-term contracts, activity-based inflexible budgets, and detailed reporting requirements. Accountability is still mainly upward, towards donors.

In some aspects, it seems that certain trends have been reversed, but the effects of this are not clear:

- The focus of capacity development has shifted from organisational and institutional development – with sometimes unclear effects on S-CSOs’ ability to address SDGs – to capacity development for L&A – with a sometimes limited effect on S-CSOs’ organisational and institutional capacities.

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Annex 1. Programme budgets (in million euros)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
3. Social progress	756	717	725	725	726
3.1 SRHR, HIV/AIDS, total	424	418	418	417	417
Subsidies central (<i>ind. SRHR SP</i>)	169	167	175	176	176
3.2 Equal rights for women	58	44	53	52	52
Subsidies central	45	32	42	42	42
3.3 Strengthening civil society	230	221	220	221	221
SP D&D	225	218	218	218	219
3.4 Education and research	43	35	35	35	35
4. Peace and security	786	714	397	400	400
4.1 Humanitarian aid	247	220	205	205	205
4.3 Rule of law, reconstruction (<i>including peace-building and mediation SP, and ARC</i>)	354	334	192	195	195
4.4 Humanitarian aid fund	185	160			

Annex 2. List of 26 SPs in study sample: SP description and interviewed organisations and departments

No.	SP instr.	SP name	Interviewees
1	D&D	Advocacy for Change Solidaridad 1. Transformation of international value chains focused on inclusive and sustainable economy 2. Sustainable landscape policies 3. Accommodating investments in a sustainable and inclusive economy	CSO: Solidaridad MFA: DDE
2	D&D	Building Capacity for Sector Change Utz Strengthen the L&A capacity of CSOs in sustainable production, farmer groups, gender equality, climate and water, child labour and living wage.	CSO: Utz MFA: DDE
3	D&D	Citizens Agency Consortium Hivos, ARTICLE 19, IIED Develop the trends 'open' and 'green' in four areas: 1. Sustainable diets: Green food production and consumption 2. Green and inclusive energy 3. Women@Work in horticulture	CSO: Hivos MFA: DSO, IGG
4	D&D	Civic Engagement Alliance ICCO, CoPrisma; Edukans; Kerk in Actie; Wilde Ganzen; CNV Internationaal 1. Political space for civil society organisations 2. Realizing the right to adequate food and nutrition 3. Small producer empowerment and inclusive markets 4. Moving towards a sustainable private sector	CSO: ICCO MFA: IGG
5	D&D	Conducive environments for effective policy NIMD The partnership aims to contribute to a conducive environment in which political and civic actors can effectively lobby and influence political and policy processes to advocate for inclusive and equitable social change.	CSO: NIMD MFA: DSH
6	D&D	Count Me In! Mama Cash; AWID; CREA; JASS; Urgent Action Fund-Africa A safe and inclusive, enabling environment for women's rights organisations, movements and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) through a local, national, regional and international approach.	CSO: Mama Cash MFA: TFCG

**Organisations and persons interviewed in the South are presented in the country reports, which are not made public. Between 2 and 30 persons were interviewed, or participated in the workshop, per SP.*

Annex 2 *continued.* List of SPs in study sample. SP description and interviewed organisations and departments

No.	SP instr.	SP name	Interviewees
7	D&D	Every Voice Counts CARE Contribute to inclusive and effective governance processes in fragile settings. Inclusion of women in governance processes is the key to stability and development in all countries.	CSO: CARE MFA: DSH
8	D&D	Fair Green and Global Alliance Both ENDS; Action Aid; the Clean Clothes Campaign; Milieudedefensie; SOMO; TNI The Fair Green and Global Alliance focuses on the promotion of social justice, inclusive and (environmental) sustainable societies. The focus is on addressing governance gaps in corporate conduct, trade and investment, and financial and tax systems.	CSO: Both ENDS, SOMO MFA: DSO/MO, IMH (DGBEB)
9	D&D	Freedom from Fear Pax; Amnesty International (NL) This alliance works on structural (behaviour) change in fragile and conflict-affected situations. The alliance focuses on promoting and protecting local communities and human rights. A key element of this is the dialogue between civilians and government.	CSO: Pax MFA: DSH
10	D&D	Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action FCAM (Nicaragua); Mama Cash; Both ENDS Green Alliance for Gender Action (GAGA) aims to strengthen and unify the capabilities of grass-roots groups to lobby and advocate with and for women to claim their rights to water, food security and a clean, healthy and safe environment.	CSO: FCAM MFA: DSO
11	D&D	Green Livelihoods Alliance Milieudedefensie; IUCN; Tropenbos Internationaal Strengthen the capacity of CSOs, together with communities, to stand up for their rights and to effectively advocate for forest restoration, management/conservation and improved livelihoods.	CSO: Milieudedefensie MFA: IGG

Annex 2 *continued.* List of SPs in study sample. SP description and interviewed organisations and departments

No.	SP instr.	SP name	Interviewees
12	D&D	<p>No News is Bad News Free Press Unlimited; European Journalism Centre The general mission of FPU/EJC is 'making reliable news available to everyone' with the motto: 'People deserve to know'.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen conditions for free press 2. Further the role of journalists as advocates for citizens and their role to act as a watchdog for citizens 3. Further the professionalism of journalists and media actors 	<p>CSO: FPU MFA: DMM</p>
13	D&D	<p>Partners for Resilience Nederlandse Rode Kruis; Care; Cordaid; Red Cross Climate Centre; Wetlands International The partnership promotes the application of Integrated Risk Management (IRM) to strengthen and protect the livelihoods of vulnerable communities. The partnership focuses primarily on climate-related natural hazards.</p>	<p>CSOs: NRK, PFR secretariat, Wetlands International, CARE, Red Cross Climate Centre MFA: IGG</p>
14	D&D	<p>Prevention Up Front GPPAC The partnership's civil society networks aim to create, improve and implement conflict prevention mechanisms in ways that are locally grounded and inclusive, in order to resolve conflicts before violence escalates.</p>	<p>CSO: GPPAC MFA: DSH</p>
15	D&D	<p>Right Here, Right Now. Rutgers; ARROW; Choice; Dance4Life; Hivos; IPPF; LACWHN Protection, respect and fulfilment of young people's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), including girls, young women and young lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBT).</p>	<p>CSO: Rutgers MFA: DSO/MO</p>
16	D&D	<p>Watershed – empowering citizens IRC; Akvo; Simavi; Wetlands International The consortium focuses on improving governance for sustainable access to water based on the human right to water and sanitation.</p>	<p>CSO: IRC, SIMAVI MFA: IGG</p>

Annex 2 *continued.* List of SPs in study sample. SP description and interviewed persons

No.	SP instr.	SP name	Interviewees
17	SRHR	Bridging the Gaps II Aids Fonds; AFEW; COC Nederland; GNP+; Mainline; Global Forum on MSM & HIV; Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP); Tides Center (Tides/ITPC) HIV/AIDS prevention through rights and protection of key populations, i.e. groups that have a higher risk of becoming HIV+, marginalised and criminalised: men having sex with men, sex workers and injecting drug users.	CSO: Aids Fonds MFA: DSO/GA
18	SRHR	Get up, Speak Out: For Youth Rights Alliance (GUSO). Rutgers; CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality; Dance4Life, IPPF; Simavi; Stop Aids NOW! All young people, especially girls and young women, are empowered to realise their sexual and reproductive health and rights in societies that are positive towards young people's sexuality.	CSO: Rutgers MFA: DSO/GA
19	SRHR	Her Choice Alliance Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland (SKN); UvA; Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR); ICDI; The Hunger Project Nederland The long-term goal of the Her Choice Alliance is to give girls the freedom to decide if, when and who to marry. In pursuing this goals special attention is given to girls hiding at home, disabled girls, children of minorities and the poorest of the poor.	CSO: SKN MFA: DSO/GA
20	SRHR	More than Brides Alliance Save the Children; Oxfam/Novib; Simavi; Population Council Combating child marriage, access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), Access to adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights services. Promoting rights-based policy and legislation.	CSO: Save the Children MFA: DSO/GA
21	Mediation	Interpeace* Its resilience-to-conflict-based approach identifies and builds on the existing capacities that communities have for handling conflict without recourse to violence.	MFA: DSH CSO*
22	Mediation	International Alert (IA)** Strengthening community relations; establishing citizen-state relationships; strengthening gender relations; inclusive and sustainable economic development; peaceful management of natural resources and climate change; reducing crime, violence and instability.	CSO: IA MFA: DSH

* CSO only interviewed in South ** CSO only interviewed in North

Annex 2 *continued.* List of SPs in study sample. SP description and interviewed persons

No.	SP instr.	SP name	Interviewees
23	Mediation	International Centre for Transitional Justice** Through measures of acknowledgment, accountability and reform, the dignity of victims is recognised and respected, and measures are taken to prevent the recurrence of violations.	CSO: ICTJ MFA: DSH
24	ARC	Building Constituencies for Peaceful Change in Sudan Saferworld; Sudia Building Constituencies for Peaceful Change in Sudan. The programme will make a direct contribution towards strengthening social cohesion and contributing to renewed social contracts across Sudan.	CSO: Saferworld MFA: DSH
25	ARC	Enhancing stability through community resilience ZOA; World Relief Enhancing stability through community resilience. Addressing the root causes of conflict, instability and migration, and contributing to increased human security, increased resilience and improved sustainable livelihoods.	CSO: ZOA, World Relief MFA: DSH
26	ARC	Human Security Approach to Address the Root Causes of Conflict and Violence in Mali Norwegian Church Aid (NCA); ICCO; Human Security Collective Addressing the root causes of armed conflict and violence in Mali through a human security approach.	CSO: NCA MFA: DSH

Annex 3. Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the South, between CSOs in the alliance

A. Complementarity

	++	+	+/-	-	--
Agreed strategic objectives	All ++				
Strategic dialogue	Joint meetings Joint reflection ToC Discussion on strategies Good governance structure	Joint meetings and reflection of ToC but quality of dialogue affected by weaker or less functional governance structure	No joint meetings at programme level but strategic dialogue at project level (per IP)	Joint meetings mainly focusing on operational issues and programme monitoring but not at strategic level	No joint meetings, mainly bilateral dialogue
Collaboration in country	Many examples of collaboration (joint action, peer-to-peer support, joint advocacy, etc.) and added value of IPs	Some examples of joint action or linking different interventions, contributing to joint advocacy	Collaboration mainly related to sharing experiences with examples of adaption by other IPs Several operational bottlenecks to facilitate collaboration	Limited collaboration, no examples of joint action, some exchange of experiences and lessons learned	No collaboration
Collaboration N-S	Many examples of collaboration, including joint advocacy at international level, alignment of advocacy agenda's N-S	Some examples of collaboration, including joint advocacy at international level (but limited to showcasing)	Collaboration mainly limited to CD support strengthening the A&L competencies of IPs	Limited collaboration, mainly limited to exchanging lessons learned and experiences	No collaboration
Complementary expertise	IPs selected for their complementary expertise strategically used and visible in ToC	IPs selected for their complementary expertise, but not strategically used	IPs not selected for their complementary expertise but for their relevancy in contributing to the programme's objectives	Every IP contributes to one specific outcome, not many opportunities for collaboration	No clear complementary expertise

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*The scoring matrix used in the South was developed by ACE Europe.

Annex 3 *continued*. Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the South at country level, between CSOs in the alliance

B. Autonomy

	++	+	+/-	-	--
Alignment own mission, own priorities	All ++				
Ownership	Strong sense of ownership by all IPs IPs already involved during application process Strong involvement or commitment of leadership	Strong sense of ownership by all IPs IPs strongly involved in design of programme Ownership growing through programme implementation and revision of ToC	Mixed feelings of ownership among IPs IPs involved in programme design but not feeling ownership of the entire programme (rather for parts of the programme)	Some feeling of ownership but IPs indicate they feel like a service provider	No feeling of ownership
Operational and tactical autonomy	IPs feeling that they can make their own choices, which are being discussed at programme level with other IPs and leads (governance at programme level)	IPs feeling that they can make their own choices, which are respected	IPs can initiate proposals but everything needs to be agreed by the contracting party (bilaterally, not level of programme)	IPs feeling like service provider, with a certain level of operational autonomy	No feeling of autonomy
Flexibility to adapt	Flexibility to adapt within certain boundaries Shared decision- taking power (at country governance level)	Flexibility to adapt within certain boundaries, decision taken by Northern partners, rapid response	Flexibility to adapt within certain boundaries, decision taken by Northern partners, slow and bureaucratic procedure	Flexibility to adapt but every change requires approval from Northern partner	No flexibility to adapt
Capacity building S-CSO	CD for advocacy also including OD and ID processes IPs own the CD plan	CD for advocacy also including OD and ID processes	CD mainly instrumental for delivering on the objectives, clear CD plans	CD mainly instrumental, mainly ad hoc interventions	No CD

Annex 3 *continued.* Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the South at country level, between CSOs in the alliance

C. Funding modality

	++	+	+/-	-	--
Long-term commitment	Multi-annual contracts signed	Annual contracts with the guarantee of a long-term commitment	Annual contracts, but well managed, timely payments	Annual contracts, suffering bureaucratic procedures and delays in payment	Funding for project activities
Flexible funding	Conditions are met for flexible funding (easy transfer of money between budget allocations, activities years, partners, level of transparency, etc.) and Joint decision-making on programme budget	Conditions are met for flexible funding (easy transfer of money between budget allocations, activities years, partners, level of transparency etc.) But no joint decision-making on programme budget	Flexibility is allowed but several bottlenecks (no transfer of money between years, partners) Approval from the North but quick response	Flexibility is allowed but several bottlenecks (no transfer of money between years, partners) Lengthy bureaucratic procedures	Activity-based funding, no flexibility
Income diversification	Financial sustainability strategies developed and successfully implemented	Some attention to strengthen financial sustainability	No explicit attention to strengthen financial sustainability strategy but SP conducive for attracting other funding	No attention to enhance financial sustainability	No attention to enhance financial sustainability and funding of SP counter-productive
Overhead costs for S-CSO	Sufficient budget allocated for overhead costs in budget for all IPs (more than 10%)	10% overhead costs in budget of all IPs	Some budget for overhead costs, but very limited	No overhead cost but contribution to some salaries of support staff	No overhead costs and no payment of support staff

Annex 3 *continued.* Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the South at country level, between CSOs in the alliance

D. Accountability

	++	+	+/-	-	--
Trust-based accountability system	Trust-based accountability Lean M&E, no formats or indicators imposed, respect for endogenous M&E systems, focus on outcome	Trust-based accountability: no formats imposed, focus on outcome, IPs provide information on a set of indicators jointly agreed upon	Some elements of trust-based accountability Formats and indicators imposed, focus on outcome and output level	Control-based accountability: detailed reporting, imposed reporting formats and indicators	Control-based accountability: very detailed activity reporting, imposed reporting formats and indicators
Joint learning agenda	Joint learning at national and international level Joint learning agenda identified and linked to ToC	Joint learning at national and international level	Regular meetings to share lessons learned, but mainly at national level, weak link with learning at international level	Some sharing of lessons learned	No joint learning agenda
Shared responsibility for agreed outcomes	Shared responsibility Joint M&E and reporting at alliance/ programme level and decision-making power to adapt the programme, incl. division of responsibilities	Joint M&E and reporting at alliance/ programme level, and decision-making power to adapt programme	Joint M&E but separate reporting and bilateral accountability lines	No joint M&E and reporting, bilateral accountability lines, but awareness of what other partners are doing	No shared responsibility, no joint M&E, no joint reporting, bilateral accountability lines, not much info on what other partners are doing
Two-way accountability	Upward and downward, equally important	Upward and downward, but upward is dominant	/	Only upward, but regular feedback on reports	Only upward and no feedback on reports sent

Annex 4. Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the North, between MFA and CSOs

A. Complementarity

	++	+	+/-	-	--
A 1 Joint strategic objectives	Clear from the start: agreed strategic objectives. Same ambition level For D&D: agreed with DSO and thematic dept.	Clear from the start: agreed strategic objectives. But different ambition level For D&D: Agreed with DSO	Unclear at start, but during implementation: agreed strategic objectives For D&D: Agreed with DSO, and thematic dept.	Unclear at start, but during implementation: agreed strategic objectives For D&D: Agreed with DSO (not with thematic dept.	Unclear up to now, no agreed strategic objectives between MFA and CSO
A 2 Strategic dialogue	Frequent discussions (>monthly). Includes joint reflection ToC Discussion on strategies MFA advises CSO AND CSO advises MFA	Less frequent meetings. Joint reflection ToC Discussion on strategies. CSO advises MFA OR MFA advises CSO	Annual strategic discussion. In between mainly operational discussions, problem solving	Frequent meetings, but not really on strategic issues, more on operational, problem solving.	No frequent meetings. No feedback from MFA on strategic issues raised by CSOs
A 3 Use each other's knowledge and network in North	CSO uses CSO network for policy advice to MFA AND MFA informs CSO about international forums	CSO uses CSO network for policy advice to MFA OR MFA informs CSO about international forums	CSO inform MFA with recommendations for action	CSO inform MFA, unclear or no follow-up	MFA hardly aware of CSO activities
A 4 Use each other's knowledge and network in South	Embassies introduce CSO to others AND CSO introduce embassies to others	Embassies introduce CSO to others OR CSO introduce embassies to others	CSO inform embassies about CSO network, with recommendations for action	CSO inform embassies about CSO network, no recommendations for action	No introduction to each other's network

Annex 4. *continued.* Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the North, between MFA and CSOs

A. Complementarity

	++	+	+/-	-	--
A 5 Joint international activities	MFA adjust policies, approaches, due to CSO input AND CSOs invited by MFA to international forums: joint action AND Link local to international	MFA adjust policies, approaches, due to CSO input OR CSOs invited by MFA to international forums	Exchange MFA and CSO, with agreed follow-up action	Exchange MFA and CSO, without agreed follow-up action. (ad hoc follow-up may happen)	No coordination of activities (beyond info sharing)
A 6 Joint regional/local activities	Embassy uses CSO ideas in embassy plans AND Embassy diplomacy efforts for CSO: joint action AND Link local to international	Embassy diplomacy efforts for CSO OR Embassy uses CSO ideas in embassy plans	Exchange info on activities between embassy and CSO, with agreed follow-up action	Exchange info on activities between embassy and CSO, without agreed follow up action. (ad hoc follow-up may happen)	No coordination of activities (beyond info sharing)

Annex 4 *continued.* Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the North, between MFA and CSOs

B. Autonomy

	++	+	+/-	-	--
B 1 Operational and tactical autonomy	CSOs set their own agenda, and do not adjust to, or wait for, wishes from MFA on how or with whom to work.	CSOs have their own mission, and look for overlap with MFA wishes. MFA explains their priority areas, but does not expect CSOs to adjust	CSOs have their own mission, and look for overlap with MFA wishes. MFA only asks CSOs to adjust tactics in case relations with government are at risk	CSOs have their own mission, and looks for overlap with MFA wishes. MFA asks to work within MFA (or embassy's) priority areas, with certain partners, with certain approaches	CSOs actively asks MFA for priority areas, partners, approaches. MFA expects CSOs to adjust plans (operational, tactical) to MFA wishes.
B 2 Flexibility to adapt to the local context and to the changing realities over time	N-CSO have the time and flexibility for detailed planning in local context. Flexibility to adapt interventions and partners during implementation	N-CSOs have the time and flexibility to involve Southern stakeholders in detailed planning in local context. Partner choice cannot be changed	N-CSOs have flexibility and time for local planning; local partners: limited involvement	N-CSOs have limited time and flexibility for local planning. Only annual adjustments, with local partners	N-CSOs have no time for planning in local context. Local partners not involved in planning (adjust during implementation)
B 3 Possibility to cater to the capacity needs of the N-CSO	Innovation and learning as separate budget line with no geographic limitations	Innovation and learning as separate budget line to be used locally	Linking and Learning integrated in SP set-up	Budget available for N-S learning sessions	N-CSO CD must be financed out of overhead
B 4 Involvement of S-CSO in the development of the SP	Local ToC owned by local alliance of partners	Involvement in joint local strategy development	Involvement in participatory planning	Contractual/ transactional relationship on the basis of Northern programme	Involvement as information sources (international programme using grass-roots evidence)

Annex 4 *continued*. Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the North, between MFA and CSOs

C. Funding modality

	++	+	+/-	-	--
C 1 Duration of the commitment	Multi-annual contract building with a view to extension, enabling delivery on impact	Multi-annual contract enabling delivery on outcomes (building on long-lasting relationship)	Multi-annual contract enabling delivery on intermediate results (partner-consortium)	Annual funding contracts, sufficient to deliver outputs	Funding too short to deliver on outputs
C 2 Flexible funding	100% core funding	Partly core funding and partly outcome-based funding	Outcome-based funding with large budget categories	Outcome-based funding with detailed budget lines and geographic focus Cumbersome procedures for shifting between countries and budget lines	Output-based funding with no possibilities to transfer money between years, partners Lengthy bureaucratic procedures
C 3 Income diversification	Joint fund-raising by MFA and N-CSOs for joint activities	Sharing of intelligence on opportunities for financial sustainability of the individual SP partners	No explicit attention to strengthen financial sustainability strategy but SP conducive for attracting other funding	Check of the 75% rule in the course of the SP	Check of the 75% rule at the start of the relationship

Annex 4 *continued.* Scoring matrix for SPs functioning in the North, between MFA and CSOs

D. Accountability

	++	+	+/-	-	--
D 1 Account-ability system	Trust-based accountability Lean M&E, no formats or indicators imposed, respect for endogenous M&E systems, focus on outcome	Trust-based accountability: no formats imposed, focus on outcome, N-CSOs provide information on a set of indicators jointly agreed upon	Some elements of trust-based accountability Formats and indicators imposed, focus on outcome and output level	Control-based accountability: detailed reporting, imposed reporting formats and indicators	Control-based accountability: very detailed activity reporting, imposed reporting formats and indicators
D 2 Joint learning agenda	Joint learning at national and international level Joint learning agenda identified and linked to ToC	Joint learning at national and international level	Regular meetings to share lessons learned, but mainly at national level, weak link with learning at international level	Some sharing of lessons learned	No joint learning agenda
D 3 Shared responsibility for agreed outcomes	Shared responsibility Joint SP M&E and reporting at international level	Joint M&E and reporting at country level	Joint aggregation of separate reports from S-CSO and embassies in the Netherlands	No joint M&E and reporting, information exchange only	No shared responsibility, no joint M&E, no joint reporting
D 4 Two-way accountability	Upward and downward, equally important	Upward and downward, but upward is dominant	Upward and peer-to-peer	Only upward, but regular feedback on reports	Only upward and no feedback on reports sent
D 5 IATI	Dashboard accessible to S-CSOs/beneficiaries	Shared dashboard MFA-SP	Separate dashboards MFA and N-CSO	Administrative obligation (N-CSO no dashboard)	Not used

Published by:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie (IOB)
PO BOX 20061 | 2500 EB The Hague

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Cover photo: Hindu women in Bangladesh

Layout: Xerox/OBT | The Hague
ISBN: 978-90-5328-999-0

© Ministry of Foreign Affairs | September 2019

Published by:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie (IOB)
PO Box 20061 | 2500 EB The Hague

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