

**Review of the Pool of Funding  
for Support of Network Initiatives  
and Capacity Development**

**4 November 2013**

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### **NB! All annexes are included in a separate document**

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## 1. Introduction

Since 2009, the central entity for collaboration and coordination amongst Danish NGOs working with development aid, the NGO FORUM, has been responsible for the administration and management of a pool of funds for network initiatives and capacity development as agreed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>1</sup>.

In May 2013, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with NGO FORUM, requested a review of the pool of funds. According to the Terms of Reference (Annex A) the purpose and objective of the review is: *to make a strategic analysis and assessment of the capacity development that takes place in the Danish development environment through the pool funding for support of professional networks and capacity development.*

The Review Team<sup>2</sup> commenced work in June 2013. As a first initial step, the Review Team prepared an Inception Note including a process description and work plan, which was discussed with and approved by the Review Reference Group<sup>3</sup> and subsequently by the Standing Committee of NGO FORUM. Annex B includes the agreed work plan. The Inception Note is available here: [http://www.ngoforum.dk/images/stories/dokumenter/Inception\\_Note\\_210613.pdf](http://www.ngoforum.dk/images/stories/dokumenter/Inception_Note_210613.pdf)

In close cooperation with the NGO FORUM Secretariat and individual Network Coordinators the Review Team started a process of collecting documents and background information. At the same time the Review Team prepared an online survey to be distributed amongst users of the main networks. Chapter two below includes a brief presentation of the methodology and focus of the survey. The survey was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> August and closed on 26<sup>th</sup> August. During this same period a brief and tailored survey was forwarded to a handful of Heads of NGOs.

The Review Team carried out a desk study of collected and available documentations and information. Supplemented by survey responses the Review Team organised and conducted interviews with more than 50 individuals and stakeholders to the networks between 19<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> August. A list of individuals and organisations met is included in Annex C. Between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> September Brenda Lipson, independent consultant and capacity development specialist, joined the team in Denmark and a series of meetings were conducted with Network Coordinators and individuals. Finally, the Review Team presented and discussed preliminary findings, observations and key recommendations at a round table meeting with the Reference Group to the Review.

The review report is structured according to the main objectives of the Terms of Reference. Chapter two provides an introduction to the objectives of the pool funds and the Review Team's guiding framework for analysing the approach to "capacity development" development through network and other initiatives, as well as a brief introduction to the

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<sup>1</sup> Before 2009 funds for network initiatives and capacity development was administered by the Ministry.

<sup>2</sup> The Team comprised: Jørgen Skytte Jensen (Team Leader), Christian Juulsgaard Olsen (assistant) and Brenda Lipson (Independent consultant and capacity development specialist)

<sup>3</sup> The Review Reference Group was established by the NGO FORUM and comprised: Pernille Tind Simmons, Natascha Linn Felix, Vagn Bertelsen, Erik Vitner, Naomi Christina Lydoch, Marianne Bo Paludan, Tania Detlevsen, Peter Plum Samuelson, Mikkel Balslev, Elisabeth Kiørboe, Nina Lauritsen

online survey. Chapter three includes a brief analysis of the five large networks, five smaller networks/capacity development initiatives and the two independent initiatives Global Trends (Globale Tendenser) and Professional Focus (Fagligt Fokus), applied needs assessments, core activities and key results. Chapter four provides an overview on methods used for capacity development and on the linkages between individual and organisational capacity development. Chapter five provides an assessment of the governance and administration of the pool of funds for network initiatives including an assessment of the networks collaboration and coordination with other initiatives such as Professional Focus and Global Trends. Chapter six provides the Review Team's recommendations for ways forward in particular in regard to addressing the objective of pool funds i.e. developing capacities in Danish NGOs. Chapter six also includes the Team's recommendations and three scenarios for strengthened organisational set-ups. Finally Chapter seven sums up the main findings and recommended future actions.

The Review Team would like to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals who have contributed with information and participated in discussions on the work of the networks. The Reference Group to the review as well as the current network coordinators have been key informants to the review. Naturally, these individuals have different views and ideas on the "what" and "how" in network initiatives and capacity development activities. Therefore, all views and findings in this report are solely those of the Review Team. The Review Team, however, have made an effort to propose recommendations that build on both: i) the assessment of implemented network and other capacity development activities, as well as ii) ideas and recommendations from key informants that have been presented and discussed in meetings and interviews. The intention of the Review Team, as outlined in the Inception Note, has been to prepare recommendations that provide operational and achievable changes that will strengthen the way Danish NGOs pursue capacity development through networks and other capacity development initiatives. Finally, the Review Team owes a big thank you to the NGO FORUM Network Coordinator for her invaluable support, time spent and commitment to the whole review process.

## **2. Definitions and approach**

Established in 2007 the Danish NGO FORUM is a Danish membership body for non-profit environment and development organisations (NGOs) working in international development. Today, NGO FORUM has just over 60 member organisations ranging from large organisations with a world-wide presence to smaller, specialist organisations with few staff or only based on volunteerism. The NGO FORUM was established to strengthen the cooperation amongst the Danish organisations and facilitate active engagement between the Danish civil society organisations, the politicians and governmental institutions.

In 2008 with the approval of the Danish Civil Society Strategy the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) decided to convert all funding of network and short-term capacity development activities into a pool of funds to be self-governed by Danish development organisations. Hence, since 2009 NGO FORUM has administered the pool funds for networks. The overall aim is: *to contribute towards the capacity development of Danish development organizations via funding for a central platform of networks among Danish*

*organisations with regards to capacity development of strategically important areas, where the chosen theme extends beyond the field of operation of each organisation (quote from MFA 2009).*

*The MFA suggests that funds should aim at supporting network groups and other learning forums, as well as documentation of best practice with regards to shared knowledge and learning, systematic monitoring of how knowledge and different tools are used in the organisations, involving of scientists and the practitioner form both North and South, dialogues with similar professional South-networks and communication of development issues. (op.cit)*

Chapter 3 below provides a brief overview of the actual activities of the networks, but in order to structure the assessment of what and how the networks and other initiatives are going about the purpose of developing capacity the Review Team offers the following framework and conceptualisation of capacity development. This, in no way, intends to imply that these references are, or should be, the accepted definitions within the Danish NGO sector, but the Review Team finds that such reference or framework is absent in the networks and its collaboration with other capacity development initiatives. This finding will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The Review Team suggests that **Capacity** is the ‘ability to’ and ‘power to’ do something (functional) and be something/someone (intrinsic). Capacity may be expressed in different forms<sup>4</sup>:

- Human attributes such as skills, knowledge, experience, values, attitudes and world view.
- Organisational values, processes, systems, policies, procedures.
- Relational capabilities, which may vary from the highly intangible aspects such as shared value or belief systems or trust; to the more concrete collaborative working competencies and processes, shared information management systems etc.
- Resource capabilities, for example, tangible resources such as money, buildings and computers, or intangible resources such as time and opportunity.

Hence, the Review Team sees **Capacity Development** as an organic process of capacity change, rather than a deliberate act to strengthen skills, introduce new systems, contract new people etc. Capacity development can be catalysed through diverse means - exposure to new contexts, engagement in new types of work, a change in funding etc.

**Capacity Building** then becomes one such ‘catalyst’, being the purposeful, conscious effort to bring about capacity development. Capacity Building is a structured process that is framed around the answer to the question ‘**capacity for what?**’ It has a clear purpose and set of specific objectives. When implemented with individual organisations and networks that are partners of International Agencies/NGOs then it can be referred to as ‘partner capacity building’.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Capacity Building Framework: A Values Based Guide’: B.Lipson & M.Hunt, INTRAC 2008

Both capacity development and capacity building can operate at different levels – individual (competencies); organisational; sub-sector (networks; platforms; coalitions etc); and sector-wide (civil society sector as a whole)

The Review Team uses the term *capacity building* when highlighting the purposeful, conscious effort to bring about capacity development.

In line with MFA's purpose of the pool funds the Review Team also refers to **learning** as a key element in capacity development. The Team is using the following view on learning:

- Learning is a developmental process that integrates thinking and doing. It provides a link between the past and the future, requiring us to look for meaning in our actions and giving purpose to our thoughts. Learning enriches what we do as individuals and collectively, and is central to organisational effectiveness, to developing the quality of our work and to organisational adaptability, innovation and sustainability<sup>5</sup>.

Learning may be seen as contributing to capacity development as well as shaping mission implementation (programmes, policy influencing etc.). The following provides an overview of how the Review Team has applied the above definitional framework during the review.

## **2.1 Applying the above definitional framework during the review**

The Review Team understands the purpose of the pool funding is to support *capacity development* and that a network is considered a (suitable) mechanism (or vehicle) for catalysing such development. Hence, the Review Team has focussed this assessment on the approach and methods for capacity development. This focus expresses the Review Team's understanding that the pool funding should not serve as a general funding of networks or support initiatives which do not contribute to this aim.

In order to make the strategic analysis and assessment of capacity development taking place in the Danish development environment through the pool funding (ToR), the Review Team has:

- Reviewed the aspect of capacity development and change occurring at the different levels described above (individual, organisational and beyond).
- Commented on how capacity development is emerging through what the networks are doing with the funds – and in particular, whether learning and capacity building are contributing to that capacity development.

## **2.2 Online survey and interviews**

The online survey prepared and implemented was designed to provide a baseline and reference point for the interviews to be conducted.

In coordination with three members of the Reference Group to the Review the questions were designed to draw out individual perceptions on objectives, focus and value added of the

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<sup>5</sup> 'Organisational Learning in NGOs': Bruce Britton, INTRAC Praxis Paper 3, 2005

networks. Before launching the survey three representatives of the Reference Group tested the survey and provided final feed-back.

As will be argued later in this report, the various initiatives and associated capacity development processes within the networks have not been documented in a systematic and coordinated way. Therefore, during the initial phase of the review, time was invested in collecting information and documentation on network and other activities. Commencing the assignment with limited insight knowledge of the individual networks, the Review Team was challenged in establishing a baseline and an informed understanding of the “what” and the “how” of the networks, while at the same time developing and designing an online survey based on limited knowledge.

In coordination with NGO FORUM and network coordinators, email addresses were provided for individuals who were either active or semi-active participants in network activities. In total, 252 individuals from more than 80 organisations (large, medium and small NGOs) were identified through the networks’ own emailing lists. 252 individuals received the link to the survey, 131 entered the survey and 89 completed the survey. This gives a response rate of 35%<sup>6</sup> which is considered a low response rate, but still useful in order to give some guidance to some of the issues to be addressed in this review. Consequently, the Review Team has mainly used the survey responses to guide the agendas for the interviews with individuals from the networks, committees and administration of the pool funds. The following assessments of the network initiatives will refer to the survey responses in very general terms and substantiate the various levels of assessments with information received through the interviews. For more information on the survey and to access survey responses please use the following link: <https://reports1.analyzer.com/Root/Report.aspx?pubID=b8cus7t4gi>

Based on survey responses and a desk study of available materials from networks and other background documents, semi-structured interviews with more than 50 individuals were conducted (See Annex G for survey report, Annex C for people interviewed and Annex D for documents analysed). The people interviewed represent the networks (small and large), network Steering Committees and Reference Groups, and NGO FORUMs Standing Committee and sub-committees, the Secretariat, Professional Focus and Global Trends. Finally, interviews were conducted with individual consultants and former network coordinators.

The following chapters 3-5 will include findings and observations from the desk study, online survey and interviews conducted.

### **3. Networks and capacity development**

Overall, the Review Team finds that networks and other initiatives have proven to be suitable capacity development mechanisms. A significant number of events, seminars, training

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<sup>6</sup> The relatively low response rate might have been influenced by the timing of the survey i.e. launched during the summer break (1-26 August 2013). Two reminders were sent out and the deadline extended from 19<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> August.

sessions etc. have been implemented and a vast majority of people interviewed and others who participated in the online survey express their great satisfaction with the activities implemented by networks and other initiatives. However, having acknowledged that networks and other activities are suitable instruments for capacity development and results are expressed to be significant the following Chapter will argue that there is a need to improve on documenting these, to identify a more coherent understanding of concepts, approaches and methodologies for capacity development, and to strengthen learning and the organisational anchoring of capacity development initiatives.

The Review Team has been requested to assess the five large networks that received funding in 2012<sup>7</sup>, five smaller networks/initiatives<sup>8</sup> and the two independent initiatives Global Trends and Professional Focus. Annex F provides an overview of approximately 200 Danish organisations and their affiliation to the individual networks. The following include a brief presentation of the networks and independent initiatives that received funding in 2012.

### The larger networks

The five larger networks share (See Annex E for individual description of each network) more or less the same governance and organisational structure (discussed in Chapter 5) with a member base, a paid network coordinator, a Steering Committee, a host organisation and all networks receive funding from the pool fund administered by NGO FORUM.

Aggregated the five larger network initiatives received 1.925.000 DKK in grants from NGO FORUM in 2012 representing 36% of the total budget under the pool fund. They have in 2012 individually been allocated grants ranging from 238.000 - 465.000 DKK. There has been a substantial cut down in the larger networks share of the total budget. In 2011 the larger networks received a total of 4.241.000 DKK or 66% of the resources available in the pool funds. As a consequence the larger networks have experienced a reduction in allocated coordinator hours. In 2011 the networks were allocated an average of 23.5 coordinating hours and in 2012 this was reduced to 15 hours. This has posed a big challenge for the networks and the Review Team finds that the networks in general have done well to adapt to the new reality - mostly due to very competent and pragmatic network coordinators.

**Table 1: Distribution of pool funds (2012)**

Distribution of the Pool of Funding for Support of Network Initiatives and Capacity Development		
	Amount DKK	% of budget
Professional initiatives (Global Trends and Professional Focus)	1.535.000	28%
Larger network initiatives	1.925.000	36%
Smaller network initiatives and stand-alone activities	1.050.000	19%
NGO FORUM Secretariat	930.000	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.440.000</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>7</sup> Including: i) Children and Youth Network, ii) MENA Network, iii) Education Network, iv) Forum for Rights and Diversity (FORDI) and v) Danish Forum for Micro Finance,

<sup>8</sup> Including: i) Network for Health and Development, ii) Agro-ecological Network, iii) Fisheries Network, iv) LGBT in South and v) Climate Network

### **The smaller networks and informal network groups**

Five smaller networks/network groups also receive economic support from the pool funds in 2012 to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, thematic projects or stand-alone activities. The smaller network initiatives are receiving or have been receiving smaller grants down to DKK 50-200.000 per year for smaller initiatives.

The smaller networks/network groups have different structure. Some are structured around the same organisational principles as the larger networks with a host organisation, network coordinator, steering committee, member base (however often more loosely affiliated compared to the larger networks) and the decision-making body is the Annual Meeting. Others are informal groups of organisations that have applied for funds for a specific capacity development initiative that is hosted by one of the organisations and lead by a coordination group that acts as coordination- and decision making body.

### **Professional Focus (Fagligt Fokus)**

In 2011 the NGO FORUM initiated a process to formulate new strategic priorities for the pool of funds. In this process it was decided to prioritise crosscutting learning and method development as an independent initiative beyond the professional network. A yearly budget of DKK 900.000 was allocated to the initiative in 2012–2013 and CISU agreed to run and facilitate the activities under the initiative. Professional Focus differs from the networks in the sense that the initiative does not serve a membership base. A reference group consisting of six network- and NGO representatives has been established to provide guidance support to the appointed manager of Professional Focus.

Due to other events requiring substantial time and engagement of NGOs activities organised by Professional Focus did not commence before the second half of 2012. Since then Professional Focus has mainly focused activities around advocacy. Most important activities included an update of the Change Triangle (Udviklingstrekanten), an online manual for advocacy and workshops and seminars in relation to networking, Theory of Change and South-funding.

### **Global Trends**

In connection with the formulation of the new strategic priorities for the pool of funds in 2012-2014 the NGO FORUM also decided to allocate funds to the independent initiative Global Trends (Globale Tendenser) and app. DKK 1.000.000 yearly was allocated to this new initiative. Similarly to Professional Focus, Global Trends does not serve a membership base. Instead Global Trends has established working groups that follows and monitors political processes and thus providing input to in-depth discussions on how global challenges and development policy trends challenge NGOs future role. In December 2011 an academic professional was employed to facilitate and assist the working groups and to help plan relevant activities.

Up till now Global Trends has been following, influencing and writing concept notes and policy papers on the Development Effectiveness agenda, the evaluation of the Danish Civil

Society Strategy, the Post-2015 process and contributing to a political and strategic discussion of the role Danish civil society can play in terms of growth and employment.

In the following chapters Professional Focus and Global Trends will often be referred to as the independent initiatives.

### 3.1 Networks and independent initiatives activities

In line with the definitional discussion in Chapter 2, there are two ways of describing how the network and independent initiatives activities have been addressing capacity change:

- a) Looking through the ‘structured’ lens of conscious capacity building
- b) Looking through the ‘emergent’ lens of organic capacity development i.e. look at things that may not have been specifically oriented towards capacity development but that did actually lead to capacity change

The main part of this Chapter 3 is focusing on the first of these lenses, but there are some points to share about network experiences of the second, more ‘emergent’ type of capacity development. These will be referred to in the last part of this Chapter 3.

When looking through the first of these two lenses, the conscious capacity building effort, there is a cyclical way of looking at the interconnectivity between diagnosis of capacity, identification of existing capacity strengths and needs for further strengthening, design of appropriate response, implementation of activities, reviewing and learning about what is working, making revisions and assessing results and further needs.

This can be synthesised into the following three steps;

Step 1: engagement of stakeholders to identify capacity strengthening needs (what),

Step 2: selection, formulation and implementation of capacity building responses (how); and

Step 3: evaluation and documenting of results or effects - with the intention that the effect or outcome evaluation feeds into a learning process and a continued engagement of stakeholders for future capacity building processes.

**Figure 1: The capacity building process (synthesised version)**



### ***Engaging stakeholders on diagnosing capacity strengthening needs***

Both smaller and larger networks are serving a broad group of Danish organisations. The larger networks have a membership base ranging from 30-57 member organisations per network. The nature of these organisations is often highly heterogeneous representing the biggest NGOs in Denmark to small volunteer based organisations. Therefore, the process of engaging all members in a joint needs assessment can be quite extensive and complicated. An example is the Children and Youth Network which has 51 member organisations. These organisations fall into six different organisational categories; framework organisations (e.g. Red Cross), umbrella organisations (e.g. DMR-U), programme organisations (e.g. ADRA), volunteers based organisations (e.g. Ghana Venskabsgrupperne) institutions (e.g. CICED) and consultant firms (e.g. Sela Advisory Group). Furthermore, the networks are operating with a categorisation structure where member organisations are divided into three categories; closely affiliated, loosely affiliated and inactive.

According to Steering Committee members a major challenge for the network is to satisfy the needs of a broad membership base and in a sensible and meaningful way to provide capacity building and development for participants at different levels. Naturally, needs of the volunteer based organisation differ significantly from that of the large frame-organisation e.g. operating different portfolios and agendas at different levels in South (global, national, district and local levels). Similarly, a challenge is ways in which organisations collaborate and form learning alliances. Although the diverse composition of member organisations in a network can represent a challenge in identifying common needs for capacity strengthening and learning, the Review Team finds that the networks and independent initiatives have successfully addressed the challenge and found ways to benefit from the broad member base and the fact that different stakeholders have very different capabilities and experiences to share in the network, which in principle generates an opportunity to identify new and innovative responses to capacity needs.

Most needs assessment processes with participation of member organisations are carried out in annual planning meetings or through online survey assessments. Some larger networks have used annual membership renewal forms as means to obtain individual organisation's expressions of interests and needs. Analysis and detailing of identified needs often happens between the individual network coordinator and Steering Committee members or a Reference Group.

#### **The MENA network's annual meeting, 2012**

As part of the MENA networks annual meeting in August 2012 with the theme "How do we follow up on the Arab Spring", member organisations were assigned in groups to develop wish lists for the coming year network activities. The overall message was that the network should focus on strategic partnerships and capacity development in this area. In addition, there was also a demand for more network-generating activities. These messages were subsequently discussed at the Steering Committee and the theme was integrated into the 2013 plan.

The annual meeting is often the formal networks' highest authority and is held once a year, with the primary objective of monitoring the network's activities in the previous year and to identify the main activities for the coming year.

3 out of 5 larger networks have used online surveys to engage member organisations in needs assessments. Online survey questionnaire is in principle a very democratic method to involve member organisations and identify their capacity strengthening needs. However, the networks have experienced a low response rate on their surveys. In addition, there is no guarantee that needs identified are actual organisational needs and not mainly the needs of the individual staff member who fill in the survey. Smaller Networks most often use annual planning meetings as their preferred forum for identification of needs.

Through information received in interviews the Review Team finds that discussions in annual planning meetings most often have to do with what the members would like to do together as a network than actual questions on real organisational capacity development needs.

Furthermore, the Review Team finds that applications for pool funds hardly ever include a diagnosis of capacity and description of capacity strengthening needs (what), nor an explanation of how identified capacity strengthening needs have been established. Nor do they explain how the proposed activities reflect organisational needs, including how these differ due to the different sizes and general diversity among member organisations.

Finally, Professional Focus carried out a needs assessment in 2011 which has been used to structure the current portfolio of mainly advocacy-focused activities. Needs for establishing working groups as part of the Global Trends agenda are defined by the members of the Standing Committee.

#### ***Formulating a capacity building response or identifying a learning opportunity***

The Review Team finds that both smaller and larger network applications for pool funds are relatively weak in presenting a coherent case for how needs identified are to be addressed through capacity building. The same can be said of those applications where the aim is expressed in terms of a learning process – there is no clear analysis of the link between undertaking the learning initiative and desired capacity changes. In addition, it is difficult to see how the proposed initiatives aim to respond to the diversity of needs and structures of members *within* any network.

Formulations of responses to capacity needs, or of learning initiatives, are to a large extent described in terms of “projects” rather than “change processes” with the result that capacity change becomes secondary to the approach of implementing an activity. The Review Team finds this critical in regard to the overall purpose and objective of the pool of funds i.e. “...to support capacity development ....”.

As shown in Table 1 below the larger networks tend to favour the use of events - seminars, workshops and trainings - as their general approach to capacity building. In 2011 and 2012 the larger networks accommodated a total of 36 and 41 activities respectively. The smaller networks have aggregated accommodated 16 activities and Professional Focus hosted 9 events in 2012. Shared for all activities were that they took the form of seminars, trainings, workshops, brown bag meetings or similar. Some networks have implemented new and more innovative approaches to capacity development as described in Section 3.6 below.

**Table 2: Overview of larger network activities (2011 & 2012)**

Network	Year	Number of open meetings, workshops, trainings and seminars	Total number of participants in meetings, workshops, trainings and seminars	Number of member organisations	Percentage of member-organisations participation in activities	Allocated network coordinator hours per week 1)	Grant from NGO-FORUM (DKK)
Children and Youth Network	2011	9	160	52	42%	17.5	915.000
	2012	3	64	51	29%	11.5	320.000
Danish Forum for Microfinance	2011	12	581	53	71%	20	578.000
	2012	8	273	57	44%	15	443.000
FORDI	2011	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2012	14	303	30	77%	21	459.000
MENA Network	2011	7	231	40	35%	20	585.000
	2012	7	127	34	80%	7	238.000
Education network	2011	8	125	33	51%	26	747.500
	2012	9	241	32	50%	15	465.000

Source: NGO FORUM Annual Reports and data received from each individual network

1) These figures do not include the significant number of hours invested by host organisations and committee members

Aggregated the five larger networks received 1.925.000 DKK in grants from NGO FORUM in 2012 which amounts to an estimated average cost of 43.750 DKK per activity<sup>9</sup>. In total 1008 people<sup>10</sup> are recorded as having participated in structured network activities and an average of 56% of the member organisations participated. Undoubtedly, these different activities have had a multiplier effect and many more individuals have benefited from the trainings, seminars, information and materials produced as a result of the activities, but hardly any evidence exists. Networks are challenged in trying to explain that they do much more than just training and events and that network activities are adding value relative to “just” building or developing capacity using existing and more institutionalised training providers.

As argued above many applications have become very linear and logical formulations of “projects” with defined outputs, but with very limited reflection on capacity development outcomes and effects. Ideally, desired outcomes are identified at the annual meetings and through online questionnaire with a majority of members participating. The Steering Committee or a working group would then be expected to ensure that the formulation, design and planning of the initiative addresses these outcomes. The Review Team found very little evidence of such an approach. Time constraints, focus on the administration and other logistical tasks seems to result in very limited reflection on desired outcomes and suitable responses, within a context of capacity development. Implementation of the “project” seems to become the core and is taking people’s time often at the expense of the actual process of strengthening capacity and generating learning.

Interviews have shown that network coordinators and Steering Committee members and others responsible for initiatives funded by the pool of funds are mostly thematically skilled and trained and/or have more administrative and organisational skills. Responses to the question on “how they inform themselves on capacity development concepts, methods, good practices etc.” are often reduced to what they have experienced themselves rather than having

<sup>9</sup> Activities are often a combination of many elements such as events, training, advocacy work, knowledge sharing via newsletters and web sites, studies, reports and material developed and published, informal meetings/sharing processes e.g. the opportunity to meet other people from different organisations.

<sup>10</sup> This figure does not include the many secondary beneficiaries of information, materials, publications etc.

access to specialist knowledge and advisory support. It is the view of the Review Team that individuals in networks could benefit from having access to information and knowledge on more innovative and creative approaches to capacity development and learning.

Networks arranging crosscutting events are rare and interaction between the networks is limited. There are, however, examples of crosscutting seminars, e.g. several of Professional Focus' activities have been hosted in cooperation with FORDI and Education Network and the MENA Network has implemented activities together with FORDI and the Children and Youth Network. Additionally, the Education Network and the Children and Youth Network received funding for a joint network initiative. This was a two year initiative with focus on 'Technical and Vocational Skills Development' placed with the education network. A major event was a conference in 2012 with the title "Education for All".

Finally, survey responses and interviews indicate that the current supply of activities have reached a "saturation point". Staffs time to participate and engage in network and other activities is considered a challenge and most networks experience that a significant number of people who have signed up for events, seminars etc. actually do not show up. It is similarly mentioned that members of Steering Committees find it hard to allocate the time required to attend regular planning meetings. Consequently, the Review Team recommends that instead of aiming to increase supply of activities networks and independent initiatives should focus effort at consolidating and improving the existing supply.

### **3.2 Results: monitoring, documentation and reporting**

As mentioned above networks and other initiatives are perceived to deliver important results and contribute to members' capacity development. Survey responses and interviews conducted shows that the three most important results of network activities are:

1. The ability to meet and build relationships with people from other organisations with similar thematic or professional interests
2. The opportunity to gain new information and knowledge from participation in training courses and seminars; and
3. Strengthen skills and competencies relevant to a portfolio of projects or a programme.

In order to exemplify results from networks the Review Team requested the five larger networks to forward a case story on a completed capacity development initiative to be included in this report. The Review Team received four cases which are included in Annex E<sup>11</sup>. The following provides a brief summary of the four cases and some of the key achieved results.

The Children and Youth Network submitted a case describing the learning and capacity development process following their mini-study "Life Skills Among Vulnerable and Marginalised Children and Youth", which was designed in close cooperation with 7 member organisations and their South partners. One of the guiding principles for the study was that the method should involve both member organisations and their partners in the South. *The*

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<sup>11</sup> The Review Team is thankful to the effort of the four representatives of the four networks. Their effort to provide a summary of a long and complex initiative is to be acknowledged.

*Life Skills* study by the Children and Youth Network exemplifies the added value networks can bring to capacity development when the networks experiment with innovative methods. The strength of *The Life Skills* study is that it involves the entire aid chain from Northern membership organisation to South-partner and from South-partner to the local community, thereby establishing learning platforms at all levels. The network served as a platform for planning and coordination of the study and the member organisations and their Southern partners providing quantitative and qualitative data. The method went beyond the traditional seminar-approach to learning, however, a follow-up evaluation by an external consultant concluded that it was difficult for her to define what had been done in regard to sharing and transmitting the learning from the study to the organisational level of the member organisations and the consultant recommended to pay more attention to the full process and not just seeing the study report as the result. This points to a pending challenge for the networks on how to ensure that capacity building excels beyond the individual level and brings about capacity development and change.

The Education Network has shared a case story that describes the value of long term processes, working across networks and forming partnership between NGOs and private companies. Since 2008 the Education Network has had focus on Youth, Technical Vocational Skills Development (TVSD). Their case illustrates the value a network can add when a theme is systematically explored over a longer period, however, it also describes the challenges this brings in terms of change in direction because of alterations in the e.g. political context, change in the needs of capacity in the individual member organisations because of change in policy, strategies and staff. The main results highlighted in the case is the valuable collaboration with the Children and Network concerning TVSD, comprehensive reports and materials published, a series of lobby activities in relation to the Africa Commission and Danida and initiatives to explore new partnerships between NGOs and private Danish companies in regard to building vulnerable young people's skills in the South.

In 2012 some of FORDIs member organisations chose to establish an institutionalised cooperation with the aim to share experience, learning and policy dialogue and formed FORDIs Policy Group (FPG). FPG has been very active in providing input and recommendations to political processes, guidelines, policy papers, reports etc. In the process of screening the Danida policy papers for a coherent HRBA, the group has experienced that there is a need for better instruments and methods to do so. Consequently, the group is currently developing new methodologies that can do the job. These methods have the potential to add value to the NGO sector as a whole. FORDI's case story emphasizes the value of doing policy work and how advocacy can lead to learning, innovation and capacity development while establishing new relations across the NGO sector.

The case contribution from the Danish Forum for Micro Finance (DFM) illustrates the value of trainings and guidelines when these are exploring new paths and based on a thorough needs assessment. In November 2011 DFM published a guide/manual for working with saving/loans groups (VSL) and advocacy. Subsequently, the guide was presented at a very well attended three-day training. Up to this point advocacy in micro finance had been a largely untreated topic. The new innovative angle to development work on microfinance

generated a lot of interest among Danish NGOs and the success of the guide/manual led to DFM conducting a similar learning process about another unexplored aspect of micro finance - the question of external financing for VSL. DFM's seminars and guidelines development have indeed added new value to both members and the wider sector in general.

The cases above demonstrate key results arising from network activities. Presenting documentation of a capacity development case story was, however, difficult for most of the networks again iterating the finding that results are not always documented and easily accessible to the wider audience.

Similarly, the Review Team has overall experienced general difficulties for networks to document actual outcomes in capacity development, capacity change and actual learning beyond a lift in individuals' skills and competencies. Interviews shows that network coordinators and their Steering Committees are well aware of the challenge, but that they have not been in a position to find a systematic way to deal with it. In fact, they have very limited insight to what happens in member organisations after a seminar has been conducted. Naturally, network host organisations become the biggest beneficiaries of a network initiative, but it needs to be stressed that they also contribute with substantial staff and management time.

Overall the Review Team finds that documentation and reporting on network initiatives and its outcomes in capacity development is very limited and often reduced to a few lines in Annual Status Reports or Completion Reports.

Looking through the lens of 'emergent' capacity development, it is possible to identify one or two examples of where there has been capacity change as a result of an initiative which initially was not explicitly framed around capacity development outcomes. For example, the development of a new method for screening HRBA, which emerged from the advocacy work of FORDI. However, the original framing of the policy group initiative was not one about capacity change as such. The network wanted to engage in policy influencing. It was in the course of the policy group initiative that the need emerged to develop a new method, and then subsequently to seek to disseminate this amongst others. This is an important and valuable experience of 'emergent' capacity development, however more can be done to both stimulate this and to ensure that reflection and learning is built in to the design of the action proposed.

The Review Team finds several reasons for why networks and independent initiatives are challenged in presenting actual outcome-based scenarios. The absence of advisory support or a unit to collect and generate knowledge and learning on good practices, (new) methods and learning approaches is one, another is the current approach on applying for funds through a "project" formulation rather describing a capacity change process. Thirdly, the large dependency on network coordinators as administrative and logistical front runners rather than committed and self-resourced networks with a legitimate mandate from member organisations to pursue common interests adding value to all members and to find means and methods of common capacity development through a pool of funds, which has been made available for this specific purpose.

In conclusion, it is the view of the Review Team that networks and the independent initiatives are very active, enthusiastic, dedicated and committed to deliver on results. The Review Team also finds that a lot of results have been produced through well-organised seminars, workshops and trainings, however, as the case descriptions highlight network initiatives are not solely confined to these methods - examples of innovative capacity development exist, but are limited and not very well documented. Both survey responses and interviews conducted indicate that participants in networks perceive the networks and independent initiatives activities as important and adding value to their daily work. Especially, participants have highlighted the value that relational networking has added to their work. The Review Team acknowledge how well the networks and independent initiatives have delivered on this important aspect of capacity development. However that said, the Review Team finds that the networks and independent initiatives could improve their supply of activities and benefit from a more structured approach to capacity development.

In conclusion **the Review Team recommends** the following actions to be taken:

- That instead of aiming to increase supply of activities, networks and independent initiatives should focus effort at consolidating and improving the existing supply;
- That member organisations particular organisational capacity development needs are analysed prior to and subsequently incorporated into the discussions on needs and priorities at annual network planning meetings;
- That applications for pool funds include a diagnosis of capacity and description of capacity development needs (what), an explanation of how identified capacity development needs have been established and how the proposed activities reflect and address the diversity of members and their particular organisational needs;
- That documentation and reporting on capacity development outcomes from network initiatives and other initiatives is strengthened in Annual Status Reports or Completion Reports.

In Chapter 4 the Review Team will address these challenges and offer an assessment of the actual methods and means used to pursue capacity development through networks.

## **4. Methods, means and institutionalisation of learning**

### **4.1 Methodological observations**

The Review Team has chosen to work with the definition of capacity development as an organic process of capacity change which can be catalysed by a diverse range of events, processes, strategies and activities. Following this, a number of conclusions can be reached.

Overall, as presented in previous chapters, there is limited evidence of such an understanding of capacity development in the networks. It is, however, also the view of the Review Team that there is no alternative definition provided to networks, therefore, hardly any of them use methodologies that could frame the initiatives in a way which set out to capture the 'emergent' capacity changes.

In the interviews there were examples shared where ‘organic’ capacity changes have occurred, but these have not been documented or systematised. For example:

- Relational capacity has been strengthened amongst participants in the MENA network via peer support initiatives e.g. a lunch club called to discuss ways forward in dealing with visa issues.
- Advocacy skills development for individuals who do not normally play an advocacy role: the ‘learning by doing’ experience of members of the Education and FORDI networks who engaged in policy influencing activities.

The Review Team finds that there is no common pattern to the methods used to identify and design the initiatives that are proposed by networks for grant funding. The Review Team finds that the actual shaping of the initiative primarily have been a result of collective negotiations within the network, rather than resulting from the use of any specific method to help analyse and identify the kinds of changes being sought and the possible paths to achieve these (whether changes in policy, learning objectives, changes in capacity etc.). Interviews document that networks have limited access to advisory support or guidance on systematic and tested capacity development approaches. CISU is probably the only place with a more systematic approach on how to define capacity building and capacity development, but networks are not familiar with these or do not always find them relevant or appropriate to their planned activities. Networks are in most cases hosted by one of the larger or medium size NGOs who traditionally have had very limited technical/professional collaboration with CISU.

Similarly, when looking at the methods used to help individuals decide whether to participate in a specific initiative, it would appear that there are a variety of sources. The survey responses indicate that around half of the member organisations do have strategic planning processes or use information from programme evaluations to identify capacity development needs. Interviews, however, show that there is no direct link between these individual organisational capacity development needs assessments and needs assessments implemented by networks.

In terms of methods used to define any specific capacity building component of the initiative i.e. the conscious, structured effort to achieve capacity change, the Review Team finds that it is not evident that there has been a rigorous method used to define or describe desired capacity changes. The references in the application forms tend to be descriptions in general terms rather than a process plan identifying how to achieve desired outcomes or a “theory of change”. Furthermore, it appears difficult to ascertain an explicit methodological connection between the desired changes and the capacity building methods chosen in most cases. The data indicates a predominant reliance on one-off events (training, workshops, conferences) but there were some references in interviews to the desire to move beyond this with, for example, the decision to supplement formal inputs with ‘coaching’ in between sessions. There are initiatives in this direction but based on very limited documentation.

With regard to learning about the effectiveness of the initiative, some networks have made use of the ‘reaction level’ evaluation method which is common to most training or workshop events (end of event questionnaire). However, no follow up monitoring or evaluation appears to have taken place whereby the network could gather information about the usefulness of the event, or how the information/skills were being applied back in the organisations.

Documentation of these events are more accountability driven i.e. number of participants, their level of satisfaction etc. with very little analysis and documentation on actual application of learning.

The Review Team acknowledges that learning methods were in evidence in a couple of initiatives. One in particular (the Life Skills study initiated by the Children and Youth Network) was in fact shaped around a peer learning initiative using case study research. This was externally evaluated at the end, with a conclusion that “*The study unites the Danish NGOs, strengthens the collaboration across organisations, facilitates experience exchange, and extracts common learning by identifying similarities in dilemmas and by finding common solutions.*” As mentioned earlier a challenge has been identified in “...*defining, facilitating and requesting more precise intended learning objectives for Danish organisations from the outset*” of this study. This year the Children and Youth Network has continued working and improving the methodology and the Review Team finds that this may indeed be applied to other network initiatives.

The Review Team has noted that initiatives implemented by networks in cooperation with Professional Focus (Fagligt Fokus) have had great cross-over potential, but the Review Team also finds that there appears to have been little consideration on how to maximise cooperation between network initiatives and Professional Focus. This has been the case in the work to strengthen advocacy capacity and, most particularly in the work implemented by Professional Focus to strengthen Danish NGO understanding of advocacy and networks. A very valuable effort was undertaken to bring and share the ideas and experiences of a Dutch networks specialist, but little contact or coordination made with the Danish networks or the NGO FORUM in doing so. It is the view of the Review Team that the methodological separation of the cross-cutting ‘how’ and the professional sector ‘what’ appears to be leading to lost opportunities.

#### **4.2. Linking capacity change at individual and organisational levels**

The Review Team has been presented with examples which illustrate a network’s intentions to reach out and bring benefits to the member organisations, beyond the engagement of individual staff in the network initiative. An example is Forum for Micro Finance’s initiative to produce concrete Guidelines to be shared with member organisations and their partners. Similarly, FORDI’s intentions to bring a Training of Trainers approach to developing skills in Budget Monitoring, and thus reach out to a wider audience via a ‘cascading’ methodology; and the Children & Youth network’s convening of a two day “case clinic”, where participating organisations with external facilitation were invited to reflect on their cases (which had formed part of the project) with a view to identify new approaches/ways of following up within the member organisations.

The Review Team also finds that in initiatives where there is a concrete product at the end of the initiative, it has proved easier for the network to be thinking about how to reach the member organisations with that output. However, there remains a greater challenge where the capacity changes are located at the level of skills, knowledge and when attitudinal changes are occurring *within* the individual participants. The survey responses indicated a heavy reliance by individual participants on informal means of communicating and channelling the

newly acquired information, awareness etc. back into their organisations. Very few people indicated that they actually take a structured approach to feed back of knowledge to their own organisation via e.g. workshops, seeking to adapt and apply the knowledge, skills etc. in the specific organisational context. Similarly, few indicated they fed back via written means and some indicated that they have no mechanism whatsoever to feed back to their own organisation. The Review Team finds that there is an important task for networks to find a modality and method to address the channelling of information, knowledge and learning.

Lessons learnt from other contexts (PSO in the Netherlands) would appear to show that this challenge needs to be carefully considered from the outset of a capacity building initiative. The facilitating factors identified by PSO include the organisation and its management in the intake process and through their written commitment to the process and the intended change; an explicit selection of participants that have the position in the organisation and the personal capabilities to act as change agents in their organisation; and explicit coaching of the participant to act as a change agent. For further reading please see:

[https://partos.nl/webfm\\_send/16504](https://partos.nl/webfm_send/16504).

The Review Team points to the experience above that obtaining the ‘buy-in’ of senior management is a strategic step that interviewees during this review consistently stated was a challenge. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter 5, but certainly this is an area for attention if there is to be effective linkages made between capacity changes at individual and organisational levels.

### **4.3. Competency development within the networks**

The Danish NGO sector has given some thought to the question of the value-added of seeking to strengthen learning within networks. There are conceptual and methodological references to be found in the early papers of other external consultants for example by Hanne Lund Madsen (2005 and 2007), and the recent visit by ODI researcher Enrique Mendizabal also served as an opportunity to explore some aspects of this question. In the practice, there is a mixed picture and possibly a number of lost opportunities. A few conscious efforts have been made to either structure the whole initiative around a learning dynamic, or to build in reflection moments within a structured activity. However, there is no use of a conscious, and collective action-learning approach which would be something that the networks could excel in and certainly something that a training centre would not be in a position to provide.

Interviewees and survey responses generally do indicate that there is seen to be a value-added in engaging in competency development via networks. Strengthening relationships were identified by individuals in the survey as the top area of interest, and was also the highest scoring in terms of results for the survey respondents at the individual level. Knowledge sharing, developing new ideas and improving programme/project management skills were the next highest.

In effect, the networks provide the optimum context for establishing and developing relational capacity – at the individual and collective levels. Individual participants gain an opportunity, over time, to build confidence and trust in engaging with participants from very

diverse organisations. Examples were shared of where some barriers were broken down (big/small organisations in particular). Coordinators spoke of consciously ‘building in’ the open, flexible relationship time when planning their events.

Survey responses and interviews document that networks are effective in linking professionals from organisations within more informal networks or groups, which is an important element and justification for having networks relative to “just” sending staff to individual training courses and skills development seminars through more classic training providers. Networks provide the opportunity to maintain a momentum in a learning process and are suitable mechanisms for relationship building, knowledge sharing and cross-organisational problem solving. Therefore, the Review Team strongly supports a continuation of a pool of funds to support capacity development through network initiatives.

In conclusion **the Review Team recommends** the following actions to be taken:

- That networks together with other capacity development initiatives, with the aim to investigate and learn, jointly explore and define a common understanding and conceptualisation of the “what” and “how” in capacity development i.e. good practice capacity development methods for network;
- That networks with other initiatives find a suitable modality and method to address the channelling of information, knowledge and learning into participating member organisations.
- That executives or leaderships of NGOs assume greater responsibility for own organisational learning as an outcome of their staffs participation in networks and other initiatives. Greater accountability mechanism might be applied.

The following Chapter 5 presents a discussion on the current organisational set-up for the management of the pool of funds and some of the other capacity development initiatives in the NGO FORUM.

## **5. Governance and Coordination**

### **5.1 (Self-) Governance of NGO FORUM and the Pool of Funds for Network Initiatives**

As mentioned above NGO FORUM and its self-governance of the Pool of Funds was established in 2009. Annex H includes an illustration of how the current organisational set-up and the management of pool of funds including the NGO FORUM Secretariat, a Pool Committee (Puljeudvalg), a Grants Committee (Indstillingsudvalg) and the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee as the decision making entity within NGO Forum.

NGO FORUM is governed by a General Assembly (Årsmøde) with representation of all members of NGO FORUM (just over 60 organisations – see Annex F). The General Assembly selects a Standing Committee (Stående Udvalg) with representation of the larger and medium size frame NGOs, umbrella organisations (DH, DMRU and CISU) and

representation of smaller NGOs. The Standing Committee currently has 20 members comprising mainly CEOs or Heads of International Departments.

The Standing Committee has established several reference groups and sub-committees hereunder the Humanitarian Committee, as well as two sub-committees to manage the applications from NGO networks. The Campaign “The World Best News” was also initiated by the NGO FORUM.

The Pool Committee (Puljeudvalg) receives and reviews concept notes from applications with a budget exceeding DKK 200.000 per year. The Pool Committee’s main task is to ensure that the concept note for a network initiative is within the strategic priority areas identified by the Standing Committee and thereby eligible for funding. If not, the network will not be invited to develop a full proposal or be requested to redefine a proposed initiative. If assessed eligible for funding, the network prepares an application to be appraised by the Grants Committee (Indstillingsudvalget). Smaller network initiatives with applications below DKK 200.000 forward their applications directly to the Grants Committee.

The Grant Committee is comprised of four appointed members of NGOs representing one framework NGO, one umbrella organisation, one small NGO and a representative from CISU. The Grants Committee with support from an independent consultant carry out desk appraisals of applications and prepare appraisal notes with recommendations for either funding or rejection for the Standing Committee to decide. Throughout this process the Network Coordinator at the NGO FORUM Secretariat provides secretarial and advisory support to application procedures, formats and processes.

The Review Team finds that there might be more efficient to merge the Grants and the Pool Committees into one Grants Approval Committee. This committee would appraise both the technical and strategic elements of an application.

Overall, The Review Team finds that the set-up of NGOs themselves governing and administrating the pool of funds is working satisfactory. The Review Team considers the above described set-up relatively efficient and professional<sup>12</sup> from an operational, administrative and pool management point of view. There is general satisfaction with the administration of the procedures for pool funds and the level of advisory support given to networks during the administrative procedures of applying for funds. Besides servicing networks in administrative and procedural matters, the NGO FORUM Network Coordinator is also assuming administrative support tasks for the Standing Committee and other committees, leading the coordination of coordinators, organising and administrating events and meetings, etc. Therefore, there is very limited time to analyse and systematise results and outcomes reported from networks. The NGO FORUM Secretariat has not been given a formal mandate or resources to provide advisory support on capacity development or facilitation of capacity development processes.

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<sup>12</sup> Procedures are similar to those of CISU and DH.

People interviewed have, however, expressed a concern that due to the Standing Committee's often busy agenda there is very limited time for its members to engage in the substance and strategic focus of the proposed network initiative. Therefore, a perception is that there is limited ownership by the Standing Committee to networks and their initiatives. Members of the Standing Committee argue that they have great confidence in the appraisal carried out by the Grants Committee and therefore give priority to other more strategic issues and often approve applications with no remarks.

It is the view of the Review Team that there is a need for members of the Standing Committee to take greater ownership of networks relative to their own organisational capacity development plans and strategies. A greater ownership at this level would not only facilitate a clearer message to the networks as legitimate suppliers of capacity development, but also how network initiatives are addressing particular organisational capacity development needs.

## **5.2 Use of coordinators and available human resources in the formal networks**

Steering Committees to the networks are often active players in the formulation of applications. Steering Committees are the networks' boards and it is often the 6-7 most active organisations that are members of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee meets approximately once each quarter to take stock on ongoing activities and to plan future activities, monitor budget, discussing themes, advocacy strategies, workflow/methods and how meetings, workshops and seminars should be designed and conducted.

The key driver, according to all networks consulted, is the Coordinator of the particular Network. There has been an ongoing debate between NGOs themselves, with external review consultants and MFA about how much of the Coordinators' time could or should be funded by the pool funds. Since the NGO FORUM started administrating the pool funding coordinators' time has been reduced. One network (FORDI) has a 32 hours paid coordinator whereas the remaining coordinators have between a few hours per week (smaller networks) up to 22 hours per week. A key argument from the larger networks throughout the review has been that the level of activity of each network can only exist if the network has a paid Coordinator and preferably 20-37 hours per week.

The Review Team sees this heavy dependency of the networks on a paid coordinator as a challenge to the actual legitimacy of a given network. The Review Team is of the opinion that the existence of a network should be based on a common interest to a subject, theme, issue or similar which should be the binding glue of the network for it to meet and carry out activities accordingly. The Review Team sees the pool of funds to be a supplement and an opportunity for a network to pursue specific and tailored activities and processes in the area of capacity development and learning, but not be the source for administration and general network coordination. The Review Team is aware that this view - i.e. does a network exist due to a common professional/thematic interest or due to opportunity of funding? - is rather controversial and in discussions with networks it does create tension and resistance. However, some networks are in agreement with the Review Team.

In the current set-up the Review Team finds that the network coordinator indeed plays a pivotal role in ensuring ownership and commitment of a network initiative activity. In cooperation with the host organisation and the Steering Committee the coordinator is pushing agendas, organising and providing logistical support to ensure overall implementation of activities. A key question in this context is then around whether the ownership of network activities is in the hands of a few individuals rather than a group of member organisations representing a common interest to a sector or theme. The larger networks are heavily dependent on the paid coordinator and the host organisation who takes ownership due to own vested interest in the agenda of the network. Steering Committees do take on responsibilities and steer the coordinator according to an agreed agenda, but Steering Committee members offer very limited advisory support on capacity development and processes of capacity change and learning. Similarly, very limited time seems to be invested in documentation and systematisation of results and lessons learned or even coordination and exchange of lessons learned between networks. Monitoring of network activities is at the discretion of each individual network and often happens during a Steering Committee meeting, but without a structured approach and very limited analysis, reporting and documentation. NGO FORUM Secretariat is producing an Annual Report including highlights from each larger network, some smaller networks, Global Trends and Professional Focus.

Finally, there has been significant turn-over in coordinator positions which provide a challenge for a systematic documentation and coordination of lesson learned.

Overall, the Review Team finds that the current governance set-up of formal networks offers very limited technical and strategic guidance on the “what” and the “how” in capacity development processes. Most networks themselves do not have the expertise, NGO FORUM Secretariat is not resourced or given the mandate to be a centre of expertise and the governing entities (Standing, Pool and Grants Committees) do not have capacity development expertise and provide limited technical advisory support doing screening and approval of proposed activities. Hence, the Review Team finds that the current set-up is weak in both monitoring and leadership on capacity development processes.

The Review Team finds that there is a need to strengthen networks way of approaching both the application process, but also the way of providing annual or status reporting. There is a need for network to focus more on outcome mapping or telling a “story” of a capacity development process of change and learning. As argued previously, applications have become small “projects” with a list of activities and anticipated results offering very little narrative on how purposeful capacity building and emergent capacity development will be managed. Annual reports, even though the reporting format does encourage the network to discuss and provide an analysis of achieved outcomes and effects, the Review Team finds that these reports mainly focus on implemented activities and deliverables.

### **5.3 Overall collaboration and coordination**

Both survey responses and interviews show that there is very limited coordination and collaboration between the networks but also with the two other initiatives i.e. Professional Focus (Fagligt Fokus) and Global Trends. Some networks are cooperating with knowledge

centres such as universities (researchers), institutes, private sector and international NGOs (including South partners). However, the Review Team finds that the current set-up offers limited oversight, analysis and coordination between networks or other initiatives identified needs and subsequent supply on capacity development. As mentioned above some joint events have been implemented, but overall there is very limited coordination and collaboration between the different network initiatives supported by the pool funding and other initiatives i.e. Professional Focus and Global Trends. Consequently, there is limited joint reflection on capacity development in general and methodologies, learning and outcomes in particular.

In conclusion the Review Team finds that the overall self-governing set-up of the NGO pool of funds for network and capacity development initiatives is working satisfactory. However, the Review Team finds that there is a need to strengthen the ways in which technical and leadership support to networks and the other two initiatives is provided. There is a need to identify and promote a more coherent and collaborative approach also to avoid the current more "silo-based" set-up.

To strengthen the overall governance of the pool of funds **the Review Team recommends** the following actions to be taken:

- That the Grants Committee (Indstillingsudvalg) and the Pool Committee (Puljeudvalg) merge into a Grants Approval Committee (Bevillingsudvalg) more or less following the structures and procedures of CISU and other grants approval entities;
- That the Standing Committee hands over all technical and strategic appraisal and approval/rejection responsibility to the proposed new Grants Approval Committee (Bevillingsudvalg) comprising both technical staff selected from member organisations and representatives of the Standing Committee;
- That application and annual reporting procedures are reviewed with the aim to facilitate and focus more on outcome mapping and/or telling a "story" of a capacity development process of change and learning;

Chapter 6 below will include recommendations for future scenarios.

## **6. Key Recommendations with Three Proposed Scenarios**

The Danida Pool Funding represents a huge opportunity for the sector as a whole, as well as for the networks in particular. There are very few, such flexible arrangements between NGO sectors and their governments elsewhere. Whilst the primary focus of this Review has been the capacity development of the sector via the networks, it is important to locate this within the broader context of diverse efforts to strengthen Danish NGO capacity. Thus, looking ahead it is suggested that there are scenarios for working in ways, which simultaneously seek to strengthen the sector's capacity development *and* do so in a less fragmented fashion.

However, it is important to recognise the particular characteristics of the broader NGO 'ecosystem' within which this work is taking place. The Review is taking place at a time of

redefinition of how the Danish NGOs wish to express their collective identity via their Platforms, Networks etc. Initial indications are that there may be greater opportunities to implement some of the review recommendations in a new, more cohesive environment. Given the current process initiated by the NGOs themselves rethinking their platform for future collaboration and coordination, the following recommendations comprising three scenarios in which the current governance set-up including the pool funds is somehow deconstructed and subsequently re-established. In this context **the Review Teams three broad recommendations** are:

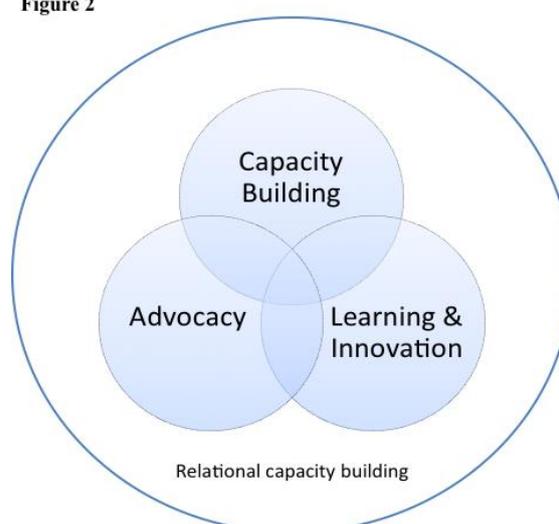
1. To reinforce the identity of networks as autonomous expressions of Danish NGO collaboration.
2. To ensure a robust and effective approach to the capacity development of Danish NGOs, principally by reinforcing a coherent approach to capacity development.
3. To maximise the use of available human resources and ensure that more technical advisory support and facilitation of capacity development approaches and methodologies is provided to networks and other capacity development initiatives.

In addition, the Review Team finds that the capacity of networks to present initiatives demonstrating strong linkages between capacity building, learning & innovation and advocacy needs further strengthening. Therefore, the **Review Team recommends:**

4. To strengthen the NGO networks initiatives' focus on the following four elements:
  - Concrete collaborative action to influence policy or raise public awareness (Advocacy)
  - Collaborative efforts to reflect upon practice, identify lessons learnt, develop new approaches etc. (Learning and Innovation)
  - Conscious, structured efforts to secure changes in specific capacity areas (Capacity Building)
  - Working in a way which will strengthen the linkages and relationships amongst the actors engaged in work on the specific Professional sector/theme (Relational Capacity)

These can be expressed in a visual model (**Figure 2**), which locates the first three elements as interlocking circles within a wider context which is that of strengthening relational capacity. It is proposed that initiatives which show the *greatest linkages* across the elements are those which have the greatest potential for impact. It is also proposed that initiatives presented for funding which are solely focused on the Advocacy area, without explicit linkages to any other elements, are not accepted for funding.

Figure 2



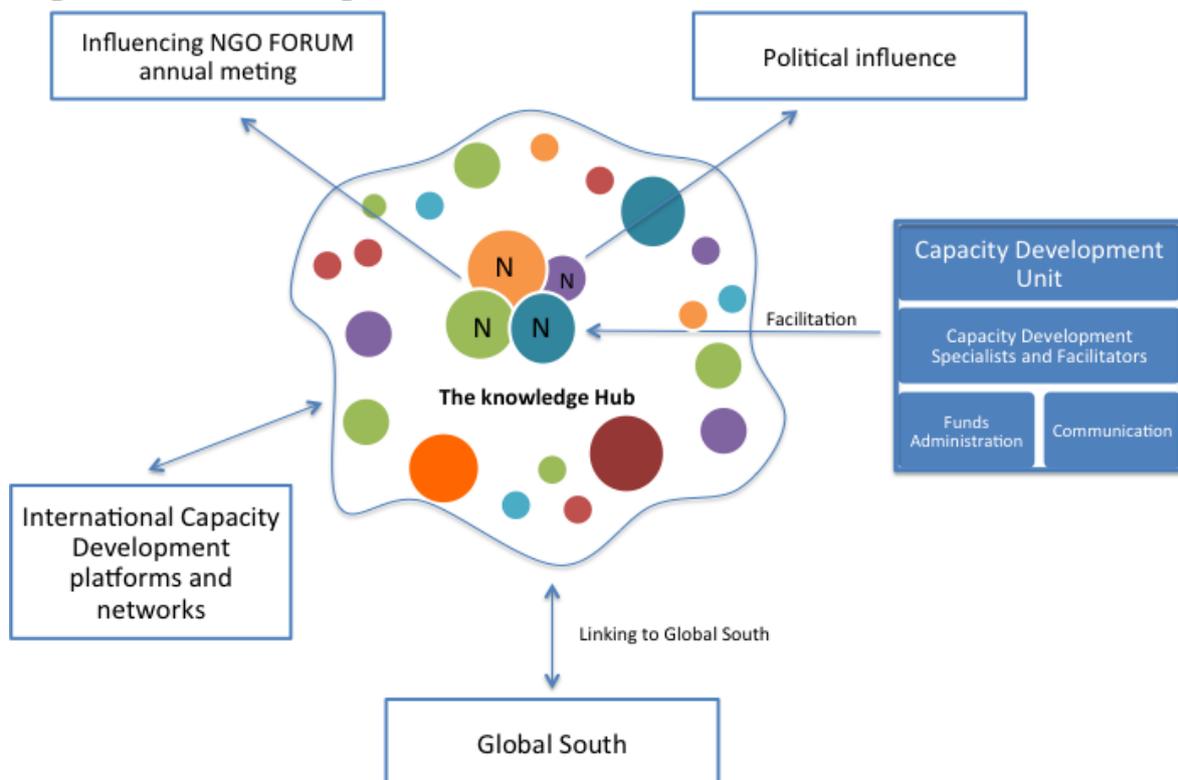
Based on the findings of the review included in this report the Review Team recommends the following three scenarios for the future support to capacity development for Danish NGOs. The Review Team suggests that the NGO Reference Group to the Review take the lead and discuss and agree on their preferred approach to be presented to the members of the Standing Committee for their final endorsement.

**Scenario 1.**

The first two scenarios are based on the model illustrated below (Figure 3). The model puts networks in the core of what is called a “knowledge hub”. Such “hub” could be a space which brings together actors engaged in what are currently fragmented and “silo” initiatives around capacity change. Participants in the “hub” would be diverse, but unified by their interest in and practical academic engagement in capacity change efforts. Thus, there may be individuals from platforms; staff from NGOs working on partner capacity building; individuals from support institutions (e.g. training centres; independent consultants, individuals from academic institutions) etc.

Topics of attention would be defined by the participants, with topic-focused ‘communities of practice’ emerging and disappearing as interest levels wax and wane. An emphasis may be placed on learning and innovation, if the participants so determine. Syntheses of lessons emerging from practice or from research may be disseminated in easily accessible forms, if the participants so determine. Linkages with other, similar knowledge “hubs” elsewhere may be developed, if the participants so determine. In sum, it would be an organic, participant-led process.

**Figure 3: The “Knowledge Hub”**



There are some previous Danish and international experiences of similar initiatives to collectively share and build knowledge about capacity change within civil society, and it would be worthwhile investing in an initial exercise to identify lessons learnt from these. The PSO Learning Programme in Netherlands is one reference; and others include the INTRAC Praxis Programme; the Impact Alliance; and the International Forum on Capacity Building.

It might be appropriate to explore this idea with an open event, jointly convened by NGO FORUM and CISU, to discuss potential interest levels; purpose and added value; mechanisms of functioning etc. Initial discussions could be initiated between NGO FORUM and CISU regarding the in-principle idea of a capacity development “knowledge hub”. If in-principle agreement is reached, NGO FORUM and CISU could jointly convene an exploratory event with key actors engaged in capacity change initiatives from a broad spectrum of approaches and origins. A synthesis of lessons learnt from previous/existing initiatives that are similar in nature could then be prepared for that exploratory event.

Putting the networks and the “knowledge hub” in the core they should be the main driver in influencing the Annual Meeting (Årsmøde) and other political spaces.

In addition, in order to reinforce a more coherent approach to capacity development among Danish NGOs and in networks, as well as to maximise the financial resources available from the pool of funds for human resources the model includes a Capacity Development Unit (CDU).

The Capacity Development Unit could comprise a Pool Funds Administrator/Coordinator, a Capacity Development Specialist and two-three Capacity Development Facilitators, and a support staff e.g. a student assistant to coordinate a web site and systematise information, documents and learning. The CDU would report to the Standing Committee. A Grants Approval Committee (Bevillingsudvalg) would provide the technical and strategic appraisal of applications for pool funds as recommended in previous sections of this report.

The main consequence of this Scenario 1 is that network initiatives would no longer have access to a paid coordinator<sup>13</sup>. A network initiative would in their application for pool funds incorporate paid hours of the capacity development specialist and a facilitator to support a process of capacity development. The Scenario also suggests merging Professional Focus into the CDU.

Facilitators can be situated physically around different locations in Denmark and report to a network Steering Committee and to the CDU. In this way facilitators would be able to exchange and coordinate knowledge and learning between network initiatives and jointly with the Capacity Development Specialist preparing and disseminating good practice capacity development methods to all active networks.

The CDU would require 4-5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff. Currently, the available human resources funded by the pool funds include:

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<sup>13</sup> A Network can decide to pay a Coordinator with own funds raised e.g. through membership contributions.

NGO FORUM Secretariat Pool Fund Coordinator:	1,0 FTE
Network Coordinators (5 x 15 hours + 3 x 5 hours per week):	2,5 FTE
Professional Focus (Fagligt Fokus)	0,5 FTE
<u>TOTAL (approximately)</u>	<u>4,0 FTE<sup>14</sup></u>
+ a student assistant	0,5 FTE

Specific Terms of Reference and job profiles would be required for the CDU staff.

### **Scenario 2.**

Scenario 2 is similar to Scenario 1 in set-up that is having the networks at the core in a “knowledge hub” with a Capacity Development Unit (CDU) supporting a common conceptualisation of capacity development and coordination of methods, documentation and learning.

In Scenario 2 the CDU would include a Pool Funds Administrator/Coordinator and a part time Capacity Development Specialist and two part time Facilitators with support from a student assistant. In this set-up it is similarly anticipated that Professional Focus is merged into the CDU.

Networks would be able to incorporate paid hours for a network coordinator, but only up till approximately 10 hours per week<sup>15</sup>. The Network Coordinators would be placed in the CDU and thereby be in a position to benefit from each other’s knowledge and experiences. CDU staff and network coordinators would work as a team to support network and other capacity development initiatives with best practice methods and approaches. The aim would be to maximise on coordination and utilise a common space as the main platform for development of capacity development methods and to ensure a more coordinated learning approach.

This Scenario 2 requires approximately 2 FTE for the CDU and 2 FTE for network coordinators. A student assistant would support all systematisation of information, documentation and learning.

### **Scenario 3.**

Scenario 3 is a continuation of the existing set-up where networks continue to have access to pool funds for a part time paid coordinator (up till approximately 15 hours per week). The NGO FORUM Secretariat would provide administrative and advisory support to networks in their applications for funds similar to the existing set-up. The Grant Approval Committee would provide the technical and strategic appraisal of applications.

In order to strengthen the focus on creating a more coherent approach to capacity development a redesign of the role of the coordinators role and responsibilities would be required. A platform for coordination and discussion on good practice capacity development methods should be established with a formal requirement of network coordinators using a percentage of their paid hours to provide inputs and share experiences, document applied methods and learning from capacity development initiatives, and participate actively in a common platform for knowledge sharing.

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<sup>14</sup> This figure does not include the Academic staff employed to support the Global Trends agenda set by the Standing Committee (1 FTE).

<sup>15</sup> Networks can decide to top-up hours by using funds from membership contributions or similar sources.

A decision should be made if Professional Focus continues as a separate entity with a work plan and agreed purpose or if the NGO FORUM Secretariat assumes the role would be more beneficial for the overall aim of strengthening cross-organisational learning and development of good practice capacity development methods.

As mentioned above the Review Team recommends that the Reference Group to the review continues the discussion on their preferred scenario and in a joint proposal present their ideas and recommendations for a final endorsement by the Standing Committee.

## **7. Main Findings and Recommended Future Actions**

Overall, this review finds that the self-governing system in which the Danish NGOs themselves are managing and administrating pool funds for network and capacity development initiatives is suitable and appropriate. The NGO FORUM Secretariat with support from grants and other committees have established adequate and efficient procedures for the administration and management of pool funds.

Similar, a key finding of the Review Team is that networks have been and still are an important mechanism for Danish NGOs to initiative common capacity development activities. Many good results have been achieved over the years. Participants in network initiatives are general satisfied having the opportunity through networks to meet with professionals from other organisations, to gain access to new knowledge and experiences, and to boost their skills and competencies in particular thematic areas. There is similarly general agreement that the level of supply and number of activities should not be increased. Time to participate and actually apply learning and new skills comprise a significant challenge for all members and participants.

The Review Team also concludes that there is a pressing need to provide a more coherent approach to the “what” and the “how” in capacity development and capacity change. There is very limited documentation on applied methods and approaches, lessons learned and what is good practice capacity development.

The above is interlinked with the finding that the current set-up with paid network coordinators and with Professional Focus somehow not sufficiently linked to the coordination and management of networks is not offering a needed technical advisory support or facilitation support to networks on issues such as good practice capacity development methods. The cross-organisational learning needs further strengthening and the application of new capacity from participation in networks in member organisations similarly needs to be strengthened. Greater impact could be achieved through a strong focus on outcome mapping and defining how to provide a process of change in capacity in and for member organisations.

Finally, the Review Team finds that in order to address the constant challenge of networks and other initiatives mainly benefitting individuals and not reaching a level of organisational learning, there is a need to build in some kind of accountability mechanisms in which the executive and leadership levels of NGOs assumes a greater responsibility for applying new learning and methods in their own organisations.

The following provides a summary of main recommendations made by the Review Team. The Review Team suggests that the Reference Group to the review prepare a detailed Process Action Plan in which the Reference Group addresses those recommendations that best suits

their chosen future scenario for the strengthening of networks and other capacity development initiatives.

Within the **four broad recommendations**:

- To reinforce the identity of networks as autonomous expressions of Danish NGO collaboration.
- To ensure a robust and effective approach to the capacity development of Danish NGOs, principally by reinforcing a coherent approach to capacity development.
- To maximise the use of available human resources and ensure that more technical advisory support and facilitation of capacity development approaches and methodologies is provided to network and other capacity development initiatives.
- To present initiatives showing stronger and coherent linkages between capacity building, learning & innovation and advocacy.

**The Review Team recommends** the following actions to be taken:

- That instead of aiming to increase supply of activities, networks and independent initiatives should focus effort at consolidating and improving the existing supply;
- That members particular organisational capacity development needs are analysed prior to and subsequently incorporated into the discussions on needs and priorities at annual network planning meetings;
- That applications for pool funds include a diagnosis of capacity and description of capacity development needs (what), an explanation of how identified capacity development needs have been established and how the proposed activities reflect and address the diversity of members and their particular organisational needs;
- That documentation and reporting on capacity development outcomes from network initiatives and other initiatives is strengthened in Annual Status Reports or Completion/Lessons Learned Reports.
- That networks together with other capacity development initiatives, with the aim to investigate and learn, jointly explore and define a common understanding and conceptualisation of the “what” and “how” in capacity development i.e. good practice capacity development methods for network;
- That NGOs participating in networks and other initiatives assume greater responsibility in finding suitable modalities and methods to address the channelling of information, knowledge and learning into their own organisation i.e. that greater accountability mechanisms are applied for executive staff (CEOs, Directors) within participating NGOs
- That the Grants Committee (Indstillingsudvalg) and the Pool Committee (Puljeudvalg) merge into a Grants Approval Committee (Bevillingsudvalg) more or less following the structures and procedures of CISU and other grants approval entities;
- That the Standing Committee hands over all technical and strategic appraisal and approval/rejection responsibility to the proposed new Grants Approval Committee

(Bevillingsudvalg) comprising both technical staff selected from member organisations and representatives of the Standing Committee;

- That application and annual reporting procedures are reviewed with the aim to facilitate and focus more on outcome mapping and/or telling a “story” of a capacity development process of change and learning.