

## “Dialogue and Dissent”

Strategic Partnerships for Lobbying and Advocacy.

### 1. Introduction and background

This policy framework “**Dialogue and Dissent**” sets out the guiding principles for civil society organisations wishing to enter into a strategic partnership in the area of ‘lobbying and advocacy’ with the Ministry in the 2016-2020 period. It follows on from the policy document ‘A World to Gain’<sup>1</sup> published in April 2013 and its elaboration in the letter to parliament of 9 October 2013 on cooperation with civil society in a new context.<sup>2</sup>

The Netherlands has a long tradition of supporting civil society organisations (CSOs) operating in low- and middle-income countries. CSOs are the voice of citizens at local, national and international level. They can help make government more accountable to citizens and increase its legitimacy. In doing so, they contribute to greater social cohesion, stronger and more open democracies, a better response to environmental problems, a better business climate, more opportunities for all and less inequality.

In recent years, a considerable number of low- and middle-income countries have enjoyed substantial economic growth, but this has not resulted in the same level of development for all. Often, the gap between rich and poor has only widened. Reducing inequality – not only economic, but also in the social, political, religious and ethnic domains as well as inequality based on gender and sexual orientation – is a key aim of the new policy agenda of foreign trade and development cooperation and of the vision on an international, post-2015 agenda for development.

CSOs are prominent players in this field. They can provide for checks and balances in society. In their dialogue with governments and companies, they advocate inclusive and sustainable growth and development and put these issues on the agenda. At the same time, they act as watchdogs to ensure that government and private parties follow up on agreements and commitments made.

CSOs therefore have an indispensable lobbying and advocacy role to play in society, and this policy framework sets out a strategy to help them fulfil this role, through engaging into strategic partnerships with the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (‘the Minister’).

In addition, an Innovation Fund will be established as of 2016 for organisations with innovative ideas in the area of lobbying and advocacy, which are not part of a strategic partnership. The Fund criteria will be finalised in 2015. From 2016 the Ministry will also step up direct funding of southern organisations by the embassies, through the Accountability Fund.

This policy framework comprises the following chapters:

**Chapter 2** describes the policy principles on which the new form of cooperation is based, the overall goal, and key concepts such as lobbying and advocacy, strategic partnerships, enabling environment, legitimacy, capacity strengthening and Theory of Change.

**Chapter 3** sketches the envisaged relationship between the Minister and civil society organisations selected for a strategic partnership.

**Chapter 4** describes how the selection process will take place, including the characteristics of eligible organisations.

**Chapter 5** defines the criteria that organisations must satisfy in order to qualify for a partnership. In the application format (annex 1) these criteria are elaborated.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/notas/2013/04/05/wat-de-wereld-verdient-een-nieuwe-agenda-voor-hulp-handel-en-investeringen.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2013/10/09/kamerbrief-inzake-samenwerking-met-het-maatschappelijk-middenveld-in-een-nieuwe-context.html>

**Chapter 6** describes the assessment procedure.

**Chapter 7** discusses monitoring and evaluation of the partnerships.

**Chapter 8** provides information on the financial resources available and the timetable.

## 2. Policy principles

As explained in the letter to parliament of 9 October 2013, this government is keen to see CSOs play a substantial role in implementing the agenda for aid, trade and investment.

Civil society organisations operate at the interface between state, citizens and market. Owing to their independent position and their roots in society, they link and represent the interests of a range of groups. CSOs play a range of different roles, depending on the need, context and the type of organisation. Many local organisations in low- and middle-income countries have become stronger in recent years.

Global issues are increasingly interconnected and demand coherence between local and global policy agendas. This requires an analysis of the links in the relevant chains and of the complementary roles of CSOs worldwide; this requires also new forms of cooperation between governments, research institutions, companies, CSOs and private individuals.

To enable CSOs to effectively voice alternative or dissenting views in a dynamic and increasingly global context, this policy framework focuses on **strengthening CSOs' capacity for 'lobbying and advocacy'**. This role is essential for holding policymakers and companies to account, and a way for CSOs to contribute to inclusive growth and development and help reduce inequality. When strategic partners join forces and coordinate their lobbying and advocacy instruments and methods, their overall effectiveness may be enhanced.

That is why the Minister wants to enter into strategic partnerships with CSOs. These strategic partnerships must be based on mutual trust and respect for each other's identity, expertise, experience and networks, as well as respect for each other's independent roles and responsibilities. But they will also identify opportunities for joint, complementary action to effectively advocate change and influence policy.

This type of relationship demands a critical attitude among the partners. By voicing differences, partners keep each other focused. Agreements are to be formulated in general terms, leaving scope for variations and adaptations, in the interests of flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to new developments. This also implies that partners will take risks together.

### 2.1 Goal

The overall goal of this policy framework is to strengthen civil society organisations (CSOs) in low- and lower-middle-income countries in their role as advocates and lobbyists. This will enable them to fulfil that role, and – working with their national and international partners, and through their local, national and international networks – to contribute to sustainable, inclusive development for all and fight against poverty and injustice.

### 2.2 Key concepts

The key concepts of this policy framework are explained below.

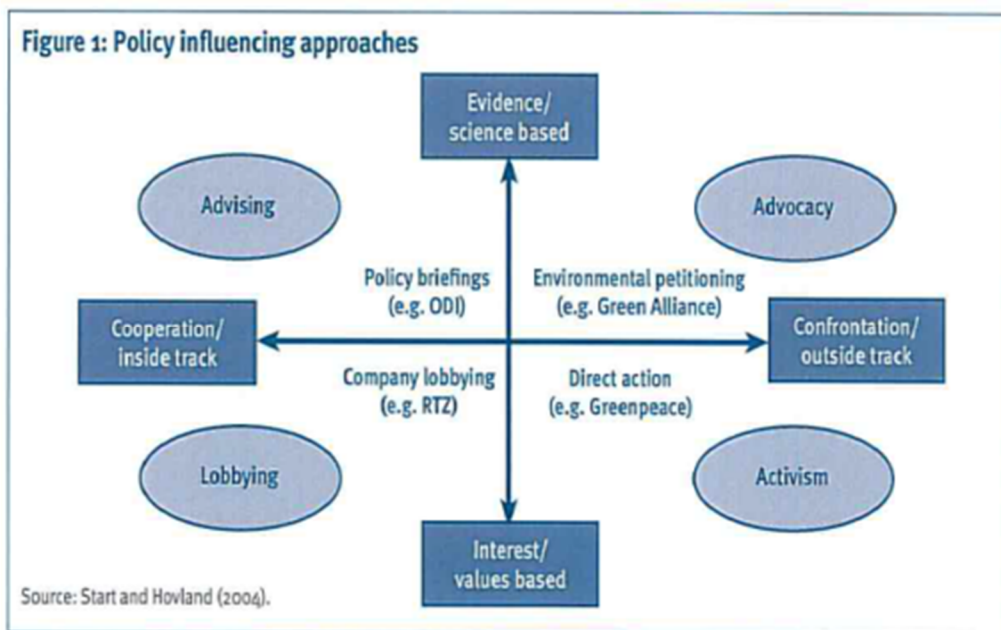
#### *Lobbying and advocacy*

In this policy framework 'lobbying and advocacy' is used to describe a variety of instruments and strategies that are used to put or keep issues on political and corporate agendas, with a view to tackling the structural causes of poverty and injustice and bringing about sustainable policy change.

The figure below illustrates the different dimensions of lobbying and advocacy.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Start, D. and Hovland, I. (2004), Tools for policy impact: a handbook for researchers. London: ODI ([www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/156.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/156.pdf))



'Lobbying and advocacy' can take place anywhere – including in the Netherlands – and at local, national, regional and international levels. Activities at these different levels often need to be connected if they are to have a sustainable impact. Lobbying and advocacy are not linear processes. Achieving results generally requires a long-term approach. In all this, strengthening capacity for lobbying and advocacy and creating enabling conditions are key.

Effective lobbying and advocacy is based on research, analysis and lessons learned (i.e. it is evidence based). What instruments, or combinations of instruments, are deployed – such as advice, advocacy, lobbying and activism – depends on the country-specific context, the current phase of change and/or policy processes, the balance of power, and the actors involved.

For instance, public campaigns can use social and traditional media, but also include public meetings, speeches and public or political debates. Mobilising citizens, involving them and raising their awareness are crucial, as is lobbying influential individuals.

Advice, advocacy and negotiation are used to influence policymakers in local or national government or at United Nations bodies, but can equally be used to influence decisions made in boardrooms. The aim is to build relationships with and win the trust of the actors involved, and to use diplomatic skills to build bridges and create win-win situations.

The situation may also be such that it is necessary to operate behind the scenes. In these cases, it is essential to have informal contacts, to seek compromises, build bridges between opposing groups, and initiate and maintain dialogue. Examples include reconciling parties formerly engaged in hostilities in a fragile state, or promoting the peaceful coexistence of different groups in society.

Sometimes, a more open, activist and confrontational mode of operation will be necessary to enforce or maintain change.

Activities by CSOs such as providing services and basic facilities are often linked to 'lobbying and advocacy' – and rightly so. Although providing certain services may win the CSO a place at the government's or company's table, the Minister has however decided to limit the scope of this policy framework to supporting the role of CSOs as advocates and lobbyists. The provision of services and basic facilities is therefore **excluded** from funding under this policy framework.

#### *Strategic partnership*

A strategic partnership is made up of the Minister and one or more CSOs (or a consortium) working together in pursuit of a common strategic goal that is difficult for a partner to reach

through individual effort. This goal must be in keeping with the Minister's broad-based agenda on foreign trade and development and with this policy framework's overall goal. The strategic partnership delivers added value and aims for a strategic goal. While the CSO is awarded a grant, the relationship between the partners is broader than a financial one only.

#### *Legitimacy*

CSOs involved in lobbying and advocacy represent constituencies and equally derive their legitimacy from universal values laid down in, for instance, UN conventions, other international treaties and codes of conduct in the areas of human rights, development cooperation and economic cooperation. Their work is based on evidence, expertise and analysis. They account for their actions to their constituencies, financial backers, society at large and government.

#### *Enabling environment: creating necessary preconditions*

CSOs can only operate effectively if certain preconditions are in place in the sociocultural, political, economic, financial and legal domains. It is vital that society recognise the importance of multiformity and the role of CSOs as advocate and watchdog. This distinct role must be enshrined in legislation, implying that the government recognises the freedom of association and of opinion.<sup>4</sup>

In countries where these preconditions are not adequately in place, cooperation between international and national CSOs will aim to improve this situation. Donors and international organisations (including CSOs) can offer support in difficult circumstances and, in turn, lobby for and advocate improvement.

#### *Strengthening capacity*

Capacity strengthening must be aimed at strengthening the expertise, management and financial management of partner organisations, as well as at developing the core capabilities and skills needed to remain relevant in a changing context and achieve results. These core capabilities are:<sup>5</sup>

- the capability to act and commit
- the capability to deliver
- the capability to relate to external stakeholders
- the capability to adapt and self-renew
- the capability to achieve coherence.

#### *Theory of Change*

A strategic partnership in the area of lobbying and advocacy must be based on a Theory of Change.

A Theory of Change<sup>6</sup> defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. The underlying analysis, assumptions, preconditions and intended results – outputs, outcomes and impact – are incorporated in a logical presentation of the change process. The Theory of Change enables the organisation to describe the interventions at each step in the change process, and identify the different roles of stakeholders. Underlying assumptions explain the connections between each step of the process and the expectations of their effect.

It is not easy to measure the success or results of a strategy for lobbying and advocacy. When can an achievement be attributed to lobbying and advocacy? Or to a specific actor? In what cases did a particular change come about mainly as a result of other factors? In order to monitor and evaluate the effect of lobbying and advocacy as accurately as possible, it is essential that the Theory of Change demonstrates convincingly that the lobbying and advocacy activities will result in changes in policy, structures and processes, and ultimately in people's lives.

### 2.3 What organisations are eligible?

- Dutch civil society organisations (independently or as part of a consortium) with proven quality and track record in the area of lobbying and advocacy, and experience in strengthening the lobbying and advocacy capacity of organisations in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

---

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Transnational/DCS\\_Report\\_Second\\_Edition\\_English.pdf](http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Transnational/DCS_Report_Second_Edition_English.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Baser, H. and Morgan, P. (2008) Capacity, Change and Performance: Study Report. Maastricht: ECDPM.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theoryofchange.org/>

- Civil society organisations whose head office is in a low- or lower-middle-income country, participating in a consortium comprising of at least one Dutch CSO as defined above, which aims to strengthen the lobbying and advocacy capacity of organisations in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The organisations have proven quality, a track record in the area of lobbying and advocacy and experience in strengthening the lobbying and advocacy capacity of organisations in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

Organisations can apply independently for a partnership or join a consortium of organisations, one of whom makes the application as lead party. A consortium is a partnership between two or more civil society organisations as defined above which have signed a partnership agreement or a joint declaration of intent. All parties contribute to the final objectives and deliver added value, both individually within the consortium as well as collectively as a consortium. Some organisations add value in several themes, others focus on a single theme. Niche organisations can also apply to become a strategic partner.

International civil society organisations (INGOs) may be a partner in a consortium, but are **not** eligible as an independent applicant or lead party under this grant policy framework.

Civil society organisations seeking independent partner status or acting as lead party of a consortium can submit only one application in such a capacity, meaning they can be selected only once as a partner. They may however be a member in one additional consortium.

## 2.4 Thematic scope

Content wise the strategic partnerships must be connected with the broad policy agenda of foreign trade and development cooperation, as set out in the policy document 'A World to Gain'. Potential partners can address any of the issues identified in that document.

## 3. Description of the relationship

Through this policy framework, the Minister aims to enter into up to 25 strategic partnerships with CSOs or consortia of CSOs. The strategic partnerships will be based on confidence in the organisations' proven qualities, past results and strategic potential.

A strategic partnership is more far-reaching than the relationship between grant provider and grant recipient.

The selected organisations will partner with the Minister in order to achieve a jointly defined strategic goal. This requires actual cooperation, alignment and commitment from both sides. A shared analysis leads to a shared vision on the added value of the partnership. Partners' activities can take place in the international arena, in individual low- and lower-middle-income countries, or in the Netherlands.

The partners selected must submit a programme proposal to the Minister in 2015, on which the grant award will be based. The goals and results formulated in this proposal must be related to the strategic goal and to strengthening the capacity for lobbying and advocacy of CSOs in low- and middle-income countries. Subsequently, partners are free to work out the details of the activities of the programme themselves, within the rules of this policy framework. Detailed activity plans or budgets need not be submitted beforehand.

A limited portion of the total available budget will be set aside to be disbursed flexibly each year, for instance for issues related to current affairs and demanding an immediate response. Such issues may be put forward by either the Minister or the partner.

Each partner in the partnership has its own networks, experiences, qualities and instruments. Joint learning and using each other's qualities boosts the partnership's chance of success. Combining expertise and capacity – i.e. the Ministry's diplomatic experience, contacts and networks with CSOs' specific expertise, contacts and networks – is an effective means of adding value. Partnerships are aimed at achieving results that the partners could not achieve on their own.

At the same time, partners will retain their own identity and respect each other's fundamental independence. Agreements will be made about roles, tasks, responsibilities and communication.

The different roles are determined by the partners' characteristics and of course by the context within which they operate. Partnerships are characterised by reciprocity and equality, which means that partners can hold each other to account, and ask each other to carry out or abstain from certain types of interventions depending on the situation.

It is not always possible or necessary for partners to work together in all matters. Cooperative conflict can also be part of a partnership, since there will always be elements of dissent: it keeps everyone on their toes, and the energy created by friction can lead to change. In principle all parties aim to achieve the same goal, but situations may arise in which they do not operate as one.

When partners enter into a partnership they must make clear agreements at strategic level while ensuring sufficient freedom for all parties at operational level. This should not, of course, negatively affect the way in which activities that contribute to the achievement of the formulated objectives and results are implemented.

A partnership requires regular, active, open consultation about ongoing developments, with the embassies and/or with the Ministry. In addition, progress and results are discussed annually at strategy policy consultations, based on the Theory of Change, the programme developed and the developments presented using the IATI standard.<sup>7</sup> Partners hold each other to account for the results achieved.

This policy framework sets a ceiling of 25 partnerships to ensure the quality of each partnership while at the same time doing justice to the many themes in the policy agenda.

#### **4. Selection of partners**

Partners are selected on the basis of quality and strategic potential. They possess relevant experience, capacity and expertise. They are strong innovators. They have a vision on and are committed to inclusive growth and development and to combating poverty and injustice. Their activities in the area of lobbying and advocacy are carried out in a professional way. They have experience in developing the capacity of partner organisations in terms of the five core capabilities described in section 2.2.

Effective lobbying and advocacy demands specific expertise and experience, and the use of planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) instruments aimed specifically at lobbying and advocacy interventions. The CSO must have an adequate administrative organisation and be capable of proper financial management. It must work in a transparent and accountable manner vis-à-vis society and finance providers. The organisation's pursuit of clearly defined objectives is evidence based. The organisation has a network of relevant contacts.

Contrary to a normal tender procedure, applicants or consortia applying for a strategic partnership do not need to submit detailed programme proposals, but a track record and one or more Theories of Change on which they want to build the partnership. Applicants or consortia are also asked to provide a number of references.

#### **5. Selection criteria and selection procedure**

CSOs and consortia wishing to enter into a strategic partnership with the Minister must satisfy various criteria and must be able to demonstrate sufficient experience and strategic potential.

1. Threshold criteria: criteria which all applications must meet. Applications that do not satisfy all the threshold criteria will not be considered further.
2. Criteria relating to the quality of the track record of the organisation or consortium: the track record should give information about past results in the areas of lobbying and advocacy and strengthening the lobbying and advocacy capacity of CSOs.
3. Criteria relating to the quality of the Theory of Change underlying the organisation's intended goal for the partnership. The Theory of Change must be accompanied by a sound

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://iatistandard.org/>

vision on the respective roles of the organisation/consortium and the Minister in the strategic partnership.

Applications for participation in a strategic partnership must be made using the enclosed format application form, which is part of this policy framework.

## **6. Assessment procedure**

There are two stages of assessment, resulting in a decision on the eligibility for a strategic partnership.

The first stage consists of a check of the threshold criteria.

The second stage consists of checks of the organisation's/consortium's track record and Theory of Change. References are also checked at this stage.

The partners selected for a strategic partnership will receive an invitation to discuss and formulate a joint strategic goal with the Minister. Based on this strategic goal, partners will be invited to submit, in outline, a programme proposal, including a budget.

Organisations or consortia that are selected for a partnership are not automatically awarded a grant. This depends on whether the potential partner and the Minister succeed in formulating a joint strategic goal, with the envisaged results, and on the final programme proposal.

### **6.1 Stage 1: threshold criteria check**

The threshold criteria are criteria that all CSOs must meet. If any of the criteria are not satisfied, the application is rejected and not processed further. Threshold criteria concern the objectives and working methods of the applicant or lead party. The organisation or consortium must also demonstrate that they are capable of proper financial management.

The seven threshold criteria are listed and described in part II of the attached format application form.

### **6.2 Stage 2: assessment of the quality of the track record and Theory of Change**

#### **6.2.1 Assessment of the track record**

The track record should describe the organisation's or consortium's experience in and success with lobbying and advocacy. It should describe, with reference to minimum three to maximum five cases:

- expertise and effectiveness;
- flexibility and learning capacity;
- transparency, accountability and constituency;
- inclusiveness;
- sustainability;
- added value of the organisation or consortium;
- importance of 'lobbying and advocacy' in the organisation/consortium's total programme;
- quality of the PME in the area of 'lobbying and advocacy'.

The quality of the track record will be assessed using the detailed criteria set out in part III-1 of the attached format application form.

#### **6.2.2 Assessment of the Theory of Change**

The Theory of Change should demonstrate convincingly that the potential partner – independently or as part of a consortium – has a vision on entering into a strategic partnership related to one of the issues identified in the policy agenda for foreign trade and development cooperation. The Theory of Change should also present a vision on the organisation's own position in the partnership and the Minister's role in the partnership. The Theory of Change must include:

- a long-term strategic goal and the intermediate steps to achieve that goal;
- sound underlying assumptions and analyses;
- a description of the relevant actors;
- measurable process and impact indicators;

- a risk analysis.

The quality of the Theory of Change will be assessed using the detailed criteria set out in part III.2 of the attached format application form.

### 6.3 Outline of the assessment procedure

The threshold criteria check will be carried out by Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff.

The track record and the Theory of Change will be assessed by an assessment committee made up of Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff and external experts. The assessment will include a verification of the references provided and an interview with a panel of assessment committee members. The interview is intended as an opportunity for the organisation or consortium to explain their application in more detail.

An external advisory committee will monitor the quality, consistency and objectivity of the assessment process.

This stage will lead to the selection of up to 25 partners. The selection is based on the assessment of the track record and the Theory of Change of the potential partners as outlined in the criteria in part III of the model application form. To be eligible as strategic partner the assessment of the track record as well as the Theory of Change needs to be at least 'satisfactory'. Those organisations/consortia, who qualify best, are the first eligible. The final selection will also take into account the need for an even distribution of the partnerships over the different topics as set out in the policy agenda for foreign trade and development cooperation.

After the selection partners will be invited to flesh out the details of the strategic partnership, by discussing and formulating a joint strategic goal and envisaged results with the Minister. Agreements will also be made about each party's roles and responsibilities. The partners selected must then draw up a programme proposal on which the grant award will be based.

## 7. Monitoring and evaluation

Accountability will take place through the provision of open data in accordance with the IATI standards as in effect in 2016. Partners in the strategic partnership will be asked to follow IATI developments closely and adapt their accountability procedures accordingly. In addition, audit reports must be submitted annually for the purposes of financial accountability. Routine progress monitoring will take place on the basis of the agreed Theory of Change and the programme developed.

Each partnership will present an independent evaluation in 2018. Funds must be set aside for this purpose in the partnership's budget. The Ministry's Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) will conduct an overall evaluation based on the individual evaluations in 2019.

## 8. Financial resources and timetable

### 8.1 Financial resources

The size of each grant will be at least €2 million a year but no more than €20 million a year.

The grant ceiling and the way in which available resources will be disbursed will be announced within a month of the partners being selected.

Each year 99% of the available resources will be awarded to the partners in the form of a grant. The remaining 1% will go into a flexible fund that can be used for current issues which demand an immediate response by one or more partnerships. Issues on which immediate action is necessary can be put forward by the Minister or a partner.

## 8.2 Timetable

Applications for a lobbying and advocacy partnership must be submitted no later than 12.00 (CET) on 1 September 2014.

The threshold criteria check will take place in the month of September. If one or more threshold criteria are not met a rejection will be issued and the application will not be assessed further.

Applications that pass the threshold criteria check will encompass assessments of the track record and Theory of Change.

The final decision on the selection will be communicated no later than 31 January 2015.

### **ANNEXES**

- Application form