

Culture, Development and Human Security

Development processes involve more than technological input and achievements. The population who makes up a given society also forms social and cultural structures, processes and resources capable of initiating or hindering societal change. Examples of such structures include the educational system that manages the transfer of knowledge and formal education from generation to generation; political structures and governance practices that organise and manage legislation, regulation and resource flows; local and national media and communication services that enable transport of information and knowledge and facilitate opinion building, civil society and democracy building; formation of national and ethnic identities that may serve as political platforms and as a resource base for those who belong to them; and faith-based organisations that may influence or determine developmental capacities and directions at various levels from village council to the state.

Social inequality e.g. as measured by the Gini Inequality Index is strongly associated with social conflict and collapse of growth. Seemingly sector-specific barriers to development cannot be understood within each particular sector, as has been amply documented in the case of health by the Commission on Social Determinants for Health under WHO. The commission points to structural violence in the context of gender, migration, education, citizenship, employment and welfare connected to both local violence and larger conflicts as both cause and effect. However, while often based on poverty and power struggles, such conflicts are frequently articulated in terms of categories with strong emotional force, such as ethnic identity. This is exacerbated by natural and man-made disasters affecting low-income countries more than other countries, and poor segments of their populations more than better-off population groups, thereby adding to migration movements creating serious problems for fast growing urban centres.

The initiative will help universities in developing countries both in Africa and in other parts of the world build local capacity to analyse social dynamics and their positive and negative impact on development processes, rather than having to rely on expensive consultancy input from the North. This would be possible, if the broad capacity in social sciences and humanities was strengthened in areas such as language studies, history, anthropology, sociology, communication studies, educational research, political science, economy and psychology. On this basis, and in parallel, specific research milieus that work with high priority areas such as migration studies, conflict studies and human security will gradually develop in accordance with the local needs of the country and region.

The state-building contribution of the humanities and social sciences in middle- and high-income countries is important for any society's development and should be highlighted. Certain research fields have a tradition of focusing on development-related issues, such as anthropology, certain area studies, international studies and development studies, while other disciplines have their primary focus in the North (communication studies, philosophy,

psychology, etc.). It should be noted that the latter may also contribute significantly to capacity strengthening, for example by strengthening teaching capacity in the South. Furthermore, inclusion of expertise from fields not traditionally involved in development-related partnerships, such as language studies and pedagogy, will be a major asset for Danish development assistance and its contribution to strengthening tertiary education.

Capacity strengthening activities

(a) Capacity building for education

The educational aspect of the proposal will be characterised by the integration of educational and research activities. Danish researchers have a long tradition when it comes to the production of text books and other learning tools, and the platform will contribute significantly to curriculum development and to the strengthening of production of local text books and to the development of web-based learning tools to increase utilization of and access to high-level knowledge. Exchange of faculty and teaching collaboration in courses of common interest such as research methodology and area studies will create more dynamic learning environments at graduate, postgraduate and Ph.D. levels.

In addition to strengthening core capacities in social sciences and humanities, specific courses and degrees will be developed addressing specific development issues. Such courses will be multi-disciplinary in nature and will also support the students and candidates who work with projects under the other platforms, such as health, environment or agribusiness, and with cross-cutting initiatives like the Master in human security currently being developed across humanities, social sciences, agricultural science and biology at Aarhus University, and the Master of Disaster Management at the University of Copenhagen.

We believe it to be beneficial, if such joint teaching activities are embedded in DANIDA-based university sector programmes that will both support national long-term capacity building in education and provide a basis for strategic long-term collaboration and networking among participating partner countries.

(b) Capacity building for research

Research forms the necessary basis for the development of new knowledge and for dynamic university teaching, just as all major research projects will also have educational activities, which will include Ph.D. training programmes. Also, new creative ways of opening research processes for broader learning purposes for students and the public, whenever feasible, will be developed. Research collaboration will have built-in capacity enhancement of all researchers participating, but the capacity to utilise research findings in policy-making and in the public debate will be strengthened. Knowledge translation will be integral to research activities supported under the platform. Research projects on cultural dynamics will develop communication strategies that may involve collaboration with e.g. local museums and national media as information platforms.

Specific research activities will be developed in close collaboration between researchers from the South and the North that are part of the platform. These will include both larger strategic multi-disciplinary research and smaller projects with focus on capacity building within specific disciplines. Larger research activities currently carried out by the Danish resource base include, among others, post-conflict recovery; education research, social dynamics of natural disaster; ethnicity, democracy and reconciliation.

Proposed partners

Danish universities

The initiative will seek to involve all Danish universities, and the network approach will ensure that the resource base can expand in accordance with the demands formulated by partners in the South. At this stage, the initiative involves the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University; the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Health at the University of Copenhagen; the Department of Society and Globalisation at Roskilde University and the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Southern Denmark.

It is suggested that the platform secretariat is jointly hosted by Aarhus University and the University of Copenhagen.

Partner institutions in the South

Partners in the South will be determined in collaboration with DANIDA sector programmes, embassies in DANIDA programme countries and relevant ministries in partner countries as well as universities concerned.

It is foreseen that South partner universities outside Africa may also contribute in valuable ways to this knowledge network.

Ministries and governmental agencies

The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Other partners

Strategic research institutes and NGOs.

Key persons

Associate Professor Mikael Gravers, Associate Professor Martijn van Beek, Associate Professor Lotte Meinert, Associate Professor Jens Seeberg, Associate Professor Bjarke Paarup, Associate Professor Karen Valentin and Associate Professor Venka Simovska from Aarhus University; Professor Kirsten Hastrup, Professor Susan Reynolds Whyte, Professor Karen Fog Olwig, Associate Professor Morten Axel Pedersen, Associate Professor Karsten Pærregaard, Associate Professor Birgitte Refslund Sørensen, Associate Professor Helle

Samuelson and Assistant Professor Peter Kjær Mackie Jensen from the University of Copenhagen and Professor Marianne Horsdal from the University of Southern Denmark, Associate Professor Preben Kaarsholm and Associate Professor Bodil Folke from Roskilde University.