



# **STRATEGIC GUIDANCE NOTE FOR DANISH SUPPORT TO DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Research plays a critical role in generating knowledge and informing societal understanding of how to drive transformational sustainable development. Contextually relevant and impactful research is essential for guiding decision-makers and communities in effectively addressing both existing and emerging sustainable development challenges.

Support for development research has been an important component of Danish development cooperation for more than 40 years. The mandate to provide support to development research is given in the International Development Cooperation Act §7 which says “With a view to strengthening research capacity in the developing countries and creating new knowledge to address development challenges, the Minister for Development Cooperation may provide grants for research”. ‘The World We Share’, Denmark’s current development cooperation strategy, furthermore highlights the importance of partnerships between Danish universities and research communities in the Global South.

This strategic guidance document aims to outline the guiding principles that underpin the choices and prioritisation of funding in Danish support to development research. It clarifies the objectives and anticipated outcomes, the results areas, the modalities of support, management set-up, and monitoring and evaluation. The aim of the document is twofold, i) to enhance communication about the type of development research which Danida wishes to support and the modalities through which it is supported, and ii) to guide collaboration and strategic discussions among stakeholders.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The overall **objective** of Danish funding for development research is to strengthen research capacity and support high quality research in the Global South that produces evidence to address sustainable development challenges and informs decision-making by policymakers and other users of research outputs.

The anticipated outcomes of Danish support to development research (further elaborated in section 4) are:

- Production of new knowledge that is applied in practice
- Strengthened capacity at individual-, partnership-, and institutional-level
- Strengthened research networks and collaborative learning

## 3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DANISH SUPPORT TO DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

The **thematic and strategic focus** of the support is aligned with Denmark's strategy for development cooperation. In 'The World We Share' (2021-2025), focus is on fighting and preventing poverty and inequality along with conflict, displacement, and irregular migration while strengthening resilience towards climate change. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, serve as a comprehensive framework for development cooperation and development research. The two main themes of the research supported is climate change (for research funded on a competitive basis and support to international research) and conflict and fragility (for support to capacity development of universities in the South)(further described in section 5).

The **geographic focus** of support to development research is aligned with Denmark's expanded and targeted partnership countries, with a particular focus on Africa and low-income countries. In countries with expanded partnerships, Denmark implements comprehensive development activities and engages with a wide range of relevant stakeholders and actors across society. In countries with targeted partnerships, Denmark's involvement may be narrower and focus on specific issues of particular relevance to Danish interest and expertise. Support to development research in the two types of partnerships reflects this difference of broader thematic coverage versus more focused themes for the research.

In addition to the thematic and strategic priorities of Denmark's overarching strategy for development cooperation, this document presents seven guiding principles that underpin Danish support to development research.

**Seven guiding principles** outline the type of development research that Danida wishes to support, i.e. development research which

- Aims to produce high-quality scientific knowledge that addresses sustainable development challenges. It emphasises the practical application of research findings with a focus on informing policy and practice for transformational change.

- Pays attention to contextual relevance and stakeholder engagement. It recognises the importance of addressing the specific needs and priorities of the countries where the research takes place. It pays close attention to the local context and involves relevant communities, to ensure that research is ‘fit for purpose’ and responsive to their concerns and insights.
- Acknowledges the multidimensional nature of sustainable development challenges. Interdisciplinary approaches are often required to bridge understandings of and tackle complex issues, considering interconnected factors and systems that influence sustainable development outcomes.
- Aligns with the principle of leaving no one behind and takes a human rights-based approach. It ensures that research practices are consistent with international human rights norms and principles. It is gender-responsive, inclusive towards vulnerable populations and engages with local knowledge. Potentially negative consequences and outcomes for populations affected by the research are carefully considered.
- Recognises the crucial role of researchers and universities in the Global South as providers of scientific knowledge and innovation, research-based education, and advice to society. It integrates local knowledge systems and involves researchers and institutions that are instrumental in generating and applying knowledge in the Global South.
- Requires equitability in research partnerships. Equitable partnerships prioritise mutuality, reciprocity, respect and mutual learning among research partners. It acknowledges and addresses power differences and inequalities in North-South relations, striving for fairness in research partnerships.
- Critically examines development efforts to learn from mistakes. Critical research is an essential component in the iterative process of improving development cooperation, structures and partnerships. It contributes to an ethos of learning to design more effective and impactful development engagements.

In short, the development research that Danida wishes to support:

- Is of scientific excellence and practical relevance
- Is contextually relevant and engages stakeholders
- Pays attention to the multidimensional nature of sustainable development challenges
- Focuses on inclusion, human rights and local knowledge
- Supports Global South institutions and capacities
- Requires equitable research partnerships
- Involves critical reflection on development engagements and learning

#### 4. RESULTS AREAS

Danish support to development research is based on a holistic approach to supporting research ecosystems, i.e. strengthening the research capacity of both individual researchers and the environments they conduct research in, for example through research partnerships and institutional support to

universities and research institutions. The anticipated results are achieved through three main modalities further described in section 5.

The three broad results areas of Danish support to development research are: i) production of new knowledge as well as its application, ii) strengthened capacities of individual researchers, research partnerships and institutions, and iii) strengthened research networks and collaborations for learning and impact. These are described in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Results areas of Danish support to development research*

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
1 Production of new knowledge is applied in practice	1.1 Production of high quality outputs	Reflected in the ability to contribute to theory and/or practice by producing journal publications, PhD theses, conference papers, working papers, policy briefs, etc.
	1.2 Research products are prepared for use, influence and impact	Reflected in the ability to integrate potential users into the research process and develop engagement and dissemination strategies, including looking at timeliness and diversity of communication methods.
2 Strengthened capacity at individual-, partnership-, and institutional-level	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity	Reflected in the ability to deliver high quality research, research education, establish support functions, supply laboratories, libraries, internet services and other important infrastructure, recruit and retain researchers, mobilise and allocate resources, etc.
	2.2 Strengthened capacity at partnership level	Reflected in the capacity to collaborate in an equitable manner, have an open dialogue between partners, value mutual learning, share leadership, and produce joint outputs such as co-authored publications and PhD supervision across universities. Pays attention to North-South balance and gender balance of contributions, resources, and dissemination.
	2.3 Strengthened individual research capacity	Reflected in the ability of a researcher to produce, document and disseminate research (training in various research skills (writing, communicating, methods), training postdoctoral fellows, and education of PhDs).
3 Strengthened research networks and collaborative learning	3.1 Researchers network and collaborate	Reflected in the abilities of researchers to benefit from synergies with other research and different Danish research support modalities, and to collaborate and learn across South-South, South-South-North and South-North research networks.

## 5. MODALITIES

The strategy for translating the guiding principles into practice is implemented through three main modalities of support. The first modality, the so-called ‘FFU’ modality, aims to produce new knowledge, capacity and equitable development research collaborations between researchers in Denmark and in the Global South. The second modality, the Building Stronger Universities programme, focuses on supporting and strengthening institutional frameworks for development research at selected partner universities in the Global South. The third modality supports the international CGIAR research partnership with a focus on generating new knowledge and seeking innovative solutions for sustainable food systems transformation in the context of climate change.

### **5.1 Funding of individual research projects provided on competitive basis (the FFU modality)**

In the FFU modality, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in collaboration with the Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC) fund collaborative research projects through a competitive research project application process based on open calls. The assessment process entails two phases. Phase 1 includes the assessment of concept notes outlining research ideas and partnerships, while Phase 2 is an assessment including peer reviews of fully designed research proposals. Research grants are given for a duration of up to 5 years and a maximum budget of DKK 10 million. A central requirement of the modality is the collaboration between researchers at universities and research institutions in Denmark and in Denmark's partnership countries. Researchers in Danish universities apply on behalf of all researchers in the partnership.

Research proposals are assessed by the Consultative Committee for Development Research ('the FFU Committee') and selected based on established criteria, including scientific quality, relevance, potential effect, and feasibility. The annual budget amounts to approximately DKK 220 million and the main theme of support to research collaboration projects is climate change, with selected sub-themes from strategic sector collaboration projects in the selected targeted partnership countries. The budget thereby contributes to targets for development cooperation funding targeting climate, nature and the environment, including adaptation and mitigation initiatives.

The geographic focus of the FFU modality includes both countries where Denmark has expanded development cooperation and selected countries where Denmark engages in targeted development cooperation through strategic sector cooperation. There is a particular focus on Africa and low-income countries.

Research conducted in partnerships is considered an important means to strengthen research results and capacities, and support to PhD studies in the Global South is a key element of projects under the FFU modality. FFU funding is unique in terms of a) the focus on equal partnerships based on balanced contributions and budgets, joint research and joint publications between North and South partners in a project, b) its geographic focus on predominantly least developed countries or low-income countries, and c) the capacity development of PhD students is an integrated element of the projects and research strengthening and knowledge production thereby takes place in a strong research project environment.

### **5.2 The Building Stronger Universities programme Phase 4 (the BSU modality)**

Successive phases of the Building Stronger Universities (BSU) programme have aimed to address the more systemic and institutional challenges to building research capacity in the Global South through partnerships with universities and research institutions in Denmark. The programme has provided support for institutional capacity development and research exchanges with selected universities in the Global South.<sup>1</sup> Phase 4 (2023-2028) of the programme is focused on three smaller and younger regional universities in East Africa, namely Gulu University in Uganda, State University of Zanzibar in Tanzania, and University of Hargeisa in Somalia. Most Danish universities are involved in one or more of the partnerships. In phase 4, the lead universities in the South have identified needs and priorities for the work of the partnerships, including academic and administrative support elements, thematic focus

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<sup>1</sup> In former phases, other universities in Ghana, Nepal, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda have been part of the programme.

areas for pilot research as well as PhD training needs. The programme is led by the South universities (“South driven”), and there is a strong focus on South-South collaboration.

### 5.3 Core support to the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) partnership

Support is continued to the CGIAR research partnership (2023-2025) comprising 12 international centres, which conduct research in food and agriculture, nutrition and health, fisheries, water, land and natural ecosystems, targeting the Global South. The objective of Danish support for CGIAR research is to encourage and enable a transformation of green food systems in the context of climate change and generate high quality research which can inform and improve Danish development programmes, consistent with partner’s priorities and in conjunction with tackling climate change challenges.

Figure 1: Modalities of support to development research

	Management by Danida Fellowship Centre		
	‘FFU’ projects	Building Stronger Universities phase 4	CGIAR
<b>Budget</b>	220 mio DKK per year	70 mio DKK	90 mio DKK
<b>Period</b>	Yearly application round with grants to approx. 20 projects	2023-2028	2023-2025
	Collaborative research projects between Danish and South universities	Development program with selected universities in fragile contexts <sup>2</sup>	Core support to CGIAR as an international organisation
	Climate change as the overall theme since 2020, with selected strategic sector themes included	Climate change, governance, health and gender	Agriculture, food systems and climate change adaptation
<b>Approval process</b>	FFU <sup>1</sup> and Innovation Fund Denmark	Approval proces for development projects and programs (MFA programme committee, the Council for Development Policy and the Ministers final approval)	Approval proces for development projects and programs (MFA programme committee, the Council for Development Policy and the Ministers final approval)

Notes: 1 – FFU=The Consultative Committee for Development Research; 2 – University of Hargeisa (Somalia), Gulu University (Uganda), State University of Zanzibar (Tanzania)

## 6. MANAGEMENT

**The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)** is responsible for ensuring that the support to development research is implemented in accordance with Denmark’s strategy for development cooperation ‘The World We Share’ (2021-2025). Within the MFA, the department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (LÆRING) is responsible for the appropriation of funds for development research. For the FFU and BSU modalities, this happens in close collaboration with Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC). While LÆRING ensures that grants to development research align with the political responsibilities, the strategic considerations regarding the FFU and BSU modalities is a joint responsibility of LÆRING and DFC. Other departments and Danish embassies may participate in consultations associated with research grants to the extent appropriate. Funding for the BSU and CGIAR modalities follows the internal procedures of the MFA for approval of projects and grants. For the FFU modality, Innovation

Fund Denmark<sup>2</sup> has the overall responsibility for approving the allocation procedure in the annual call for applications, the proposed selection of projects to receive grants, and the composition of the FFU Committee. LÆRING is responsible for the support to the CGIAR partnership.

**Danida Fellowship Centre manages** the funds for development research based on a set of administrative guidelines for the administration of funds from MFA. DFC is responsible for the administration of the competitive calls for research applications, and the ongoing research project grants, as well as management of the BSU programme. DFC implements supporting activities, including the Danida science engagement initiative to: 1) strengthen researchers' communication and engagement skills and to engage with and reach the users of research results, and 2) offer in-person opportunities and platforms for science engagement, knowledge exchange, co-learning and networking.

**The FFU Committee** provides scientific expertise and advice for the selection of research projects and provides scientific quality assurance of ongoing research grants. There are a maximum of nine members of the committee, including the head of LÆRING. The members serve for three-year periods and includes both Danish and overseas members.

## 7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring of results and progress takes place through reporting and dialogue with key partners according to the respective grant agreements. The following sections provide a brief overview of the monitoring frequency across the three modalities. MFA also periodically carries out organisational and financial reviews of partner organisations as well as evaluations of the support to development research.

### 7.1 Monitoring of FFU and BSU modalities

DFC monitors progress and results of research projects of the FFU modality and the BSU programme based on the narrative and financial reporting of the grant holders and monitoring visits to selected projects. The monitoring of the FFU projects is conducted in collaboration with members of the FFU Committee. While LÆRING is responsible for monitoring the research funds to DFC, other departments and embassies may participate in the follow up of approved research projects and the capacity development initiatives.

DFC receives annual reporting from FFU projects and the partners in the BSU programme and compiles aggregated reports to LÆRING on an annual basis. DFC's annual report compiles results according to the agreed results framework and a narrative description of achievements during the year. This includes information on the results of the application round of the previous year, results of research projects closed during the year, science engagement activities and lessons learned across research projects, e.g. studies in selected thematic areas covering several research projects.

DFC and the LÆRING hold annual strategic meetings as well as quarterly coordination meetings to discuss results, progress and plans across the FFU and BSU funding modalities. Furthermore, the head of LÆRING participates as an observer in DFC's Board meetings.

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<sup>2</sup> Innovation Fund Denmark is an independent body within the state administration which must approve the allocation procedure of government research grants held by other ministries which are not linked to a specific institution.

## **7.2 Monitoring of the CGIAR modality**

Monitoring of results and progress of the support to the CGAR partnership takes place through annual reporting by the CGIAR and through the annual financial statements. Furthermore, the CGIAR has developed a comprehensive set of dashboards, including results dashboards, which are important tracking tools. LÆRING participates in the decision-making processes guiding One CGIAR reforms, selection of research priorities, etc. in close collaboration with other funders through the System Council. The 2023-25 multi-year contribution entitles Denmark to a voting seat in the Council.

## **8. PERSPECTIVES**

In the years to come, it is the ambition to further strengthening the following elements in the support to development research:

- Based on the experience with the Building Stronger Universities programme, it is considered to establish a new Strategic University Partnership programme for universities in Africa with the capacity to enter into partnerships with Danish universities and research institutions in areas such as a) exchange of visiting scholars, b) summer schools for master students, 3) seed money for joint workshops, seminars or conferences with the aim of developing joint research agendas and project ideas, including applications for EU funds and d) dissemination activities to strengthen the use of research results.
- Continuing to support equal partnerships, including by (re-)introducing possibilities for South-driven FFU research collaboration projects based on applications from researchers in African countries.
- Continuing to provide incentives for female-led FFU projects and encourage research to engage in gender perspectives.
- Continuing to put focus on security dimensions of conducting research in fragile contexts.
- Increasing impact of research production by improving relations between FFU research collaboration projects and private companies, political decision-makers, embassies, and other users of research results and by enhancing the focus on communication of research to non-academic audiences.