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*Civic Engagement Alliance is a joint collaboration between 6 Dutch non-governmental organizations in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.*
1. Introduction

Context and program
The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFa) and the Civic Engagement Alliance are involved in a Strategic Partnership ‘Dialogue and Dissent’ which aims to ensure that in and by this partnership civil society organizations (CSOs) and civil society at large, both in the ‘global south’ as well as in the overall global context, can contribute to decreasing inequality and injustice in societies and work towards inclusive development.

The Alliance, collaboration between Dutch and Southern CSOs, is made up of trade unions, education and development organizations that have a link to (Christian) organizations and constituencies in the Netherlands and other similar international networks. The Alliance’s members contribute their expertise in the fields of inclusive development, capacity development, labor rights, strengthening small-scale farmers, vocational training and working with the private sector, with a focus on the agri-food sector.

In October 2015, the Civic Engagement Alliance published the Convening and Convincing Program Document. In this program document, we concretized our Theory of Change (with its 4 thematic pathways of change) and we introduced our strategies on capacity development, lobby & advocacy (L&A), inclusivity and sustainability. We also listed the countries where the program is implemented.

In this annual report 2017 we pay attention to the context in the program countries and how changes in these contexts have influenced program implementation (chapter 2). In chapter 3 we describe program progress and some main results. We provide insight in our cooperation as an Alliance and cooperation with local partners and stakeholders in chapter 4. In chapter 5, we highlight how we address inequalities in our program and how we work towards inclusiveness. By the end of 2017, the country-specific Theories of Change have been discussed and reviewed; outcomes of this process are described in chapter 6.
2. Context and enabling environment for program implementation

In our program document (2015) we stated that the political space for CSOs and their freedom to unite, act, and access funding is severely threatened in many countries. Since 2015, this space continues to diminish around the world. During our global learning workshop, while reflecting on civic space, almost all our country program coordinators confirmed that in their countries political space for CSOs is not self-evident and in many countries space has become less over the year 2017. This is confirmed by CIVICUS data published in the monitor. At the other hand, it is not always easy to assess the exact civic space, since this space varies from issue to issue and can also be different for different (types of) organizations [such as community based organizations, faith based organizations, media, labor unions etcetera].

In several countries the political situation has affected our program implementation. In Cambodia the developments leading up to the elections in 2018 have had significant impact on the actual program implementation. In particular some partners and trade unions experienced limited freedom of movement and gathering. In Kenya the elections caused high levels of political uncertainty and partners had little room for dialogue and several planned activities had to be postponed. Guatemala suffered from political unrest, demonstrations and strikes, many organizations questioning the position of the president and demanding for political reforms.

In these countries, partner organizations had to change focus and strategies to cope with these changes and unrest in the context, leaving less room for planned L&A interventions.

Confronted with this situation, we have seen in our networks an ongoing interest and urge for addressing civic space, in both L&A activities as in concrete strategies to strengthen CSOs to play their roles. ACT Alliance and the World Council of Churches [WCC] as global ecumenical networks in which we participate and which we support in this, and ACT EU as Brussels centered L&A office continued to address civic space at all levels of activity [local, national, global]. In the Netherlands, we have been engaged in several networks [Partos civic space group and a working group of several Strategic Partners under the Dialogue and Dissent framework including CIVICUS], in which MOFA is also participating, to discuss our analysis and strategies. In this Partos network, we participated in the writing group that drafted a joint document ‘Shrinking civic space; some counter-narratives’ as common ground for cooperation in this area. We also follow with much interest the Assumptions research programme ‘New roles of CSOs for inclusive development’ to further inform our assumptions and strategies.

With regard to our thematic focuses [food and nutrition security, economic empowerment, responsible business] the context has not changed fundamentally and there was no need in 2017 to adjust our program strategies.
In this chapter we give a global overview of our progress in program implementation in 2017. We include some examples of results.

General program progress
The Civic Engagement Alliance program started with the inception phase in 2016. During this first year, in all countries Theories of Change (as a baseline situation) have been developed (within the global framework of our overall ‘Convening and Convincing’ program document). In all 13 countries, program coalitions were formed of Alliance members and local partners and networks and, based on the country-specific context analysis and ToC, action plans were defined. By the end of 2016 country coalitions started the implementation of the program.

In 2017 much energy has been given to capacity development for L&A. In addition to trainings and coaching, program coalitions also engaged in evidence collection. To be able to lobby for specific and concrete issues and changes, it is important to have locally collected, recent and relevant evidence (data, examples, stories and specific research) to inform decision makers and stakeholders and to define the change that is needed. We also observed that, when local partners are involved in research and data collection, this also contributes to capacity development of local CSOs and community groups (such as producer organizations and self help groups). Lobby takes time and needs endurance. This means that it is quite early, after 1 year of implementation, to expect L&A results in terms of changes in the enabling environment for CSOs and in terms of policy changes and/or changes in policy implementation, for example with regard to food security or responsible business. However, when we organized our learning workshops early 2018, to look back and reflect on the program in 2017, we were able to collect stories of change from all countries and at different result levels already. These stories are encouraging for all parties involved and they convince us of the importance and relevance of this L&A program.

Capacity development
The Change the Game Academy trainings, developed by our Alliance member Wilde Ganzen, have been organized in 8 program countries: India, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Mali, Benin and Central America. Around 300 local organizations have been trained in Mobilising Support [LGA]. In addition, 14 organizations in 2 countries [India, Central America] have been trained in Local Fundraising, strengthening their local support base. The e-learning course Local Fundraising has been translated into French and Spanish and is now available to all CSOs worldwide in 4 languages. The e-learning course Mobilizing Support has been further developed and will be launched in 2018. In some countries, as a first step trainers were trained in Train the Trainer courses, in other countries local trainers had already been trained prior to the start of the program. In all countries, the training materials have been adapted to the local context and to the thematic focus of the Civic Engagement Alliance program and where necessary translated into local language. After the trainings, partners were coached while starting their lobby activities. In all 8 countries, the trainers were trained in inclusive facilitation of trainings [joint effort of Alliance members Wilde Ganzen and Light for the World], with the aim to make the trainings accessible for people with a disability.

We have developed a methodology for monitoring and evaluation of the trainings, and 9 months after each training the results are assessed. This means that at this moment, the results have not been collected yet [will be done in 2018]. First feedback, however, received shortly after the trainings, indicated that in all countries the training have been very valuable in starting off the lobby activities of local organizations and in creating common ground among the implementing partners on how to approach lobby.

Also in other countries, where the Change the Game Academy is not used, partners have been trained and coached by Alliance members [ICCO, CNV Internationaal, Edukans] in L&A and in thematic issues related to L&A, such as gaining insight in specific policies. Within the ACT Alliance we contributed to the development of the ACT Advocacy Academy, a global advocacy capacity building initiative. The Academy consists of a website, and an online advocacy training program including webinars, assignments and personal coaching. In addition to general advocacy training, the Academy offers advocacy training in thematic areas, such as climate justice, gender advocacy, business & human rights, and civic space. The ACT Advocacy Academy is complementary to the Change the Game Academy in terms of target group [catering more advanced levels] and thematic issues.
Lobby and advocacy for thematic goals

In our lobby for political space for CSOs (pathway 1) the main focus has been on capacity development (see above). In some countries we have been involved in L&A with regard to implementation of NGO legislation and supporting CSOs to comply to these rules and regulations. At international level and in the Netherlands the important of civic space for CSOs has been high on our agenda (see also chapter 2). We have defined research questions to collect more information and evidence on the role FBOs play in civil society and the lobby for civic space [research to be done in 2018].

In pathway 2 we have been further developing methodologies to collect (grassroot and household level) data on access to nutritious food. These data are valuable for dialogue with local communities and government to assess the actual situation and obstacles, to identify specific groups that have less access to food and to lobby for concrete improvements for these groups. Awareness rising to inform consumers on healthy and nutritious food has also been part of our L&A strategies in 2017 in different countries.

In pathway 3 we have contributed to L&A to improve the context and market conditions for smallholder farmers in specific sub sectors in the agri-food sector, such as mung beans, vegetables, spices, potatoes, shea nuts, and peanuts. We did several assessments of the level of access of smallholder farmers [women, youth and people with disabilities in particular] to services such as access to financial services, to quality seeds and to extension services and skills training. Based on the outcomes our L&A strategies have become more targeted and we have collected some stories already in which targeted L&A interventions have led to concrete successes for local groups of smallholder farmers.

In pathway 4 several studies have been done to investigate labor rights and children’s rights in agri-food sectors (palm oil, tea, shea for example). Based on the outcomes and within the broader framework of the UN Guiding Principles on responsible business, we engaged in dialogue with companies and governments to respect these rights and work towards better labor conditions.

Linking our L&A interventions and results to the global SDG agenda we can conclude that we have contributed mainly to SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) characterizes our way of working.
Our Alliance consists of six organizations at global level. At country level the number of Alliance members involved differs, as well as the number of local partners and other stakeholders. In 2016, joint country programs have been defined. In some countries, different Alliance members already had a history of cooperation, in other countries cooperation within this Alliance was relatively new. Time and energy has been spent in 2017 to build local alliances and to discover how the added value of the members could become visible. This has resulted in some changes in country alliances. Edukans has decided to hand over their work in India and Bangladesh to the other Alliance members, to be able to focus on less countries. In Bangladesh we had to conclude that the local partners working on land and labor rights (partners of CNV Internationaal) were not able to implement L&A activities as foreseen and we have adjusted our ToC. In most countries, however, cooperation within the Alliance has well developed. Joint activities such as Change the Game trainings, learning workshops and field visits have been valuable in this growing cooperation. In the Netherlands, we have worked in one Alliance Lobby Team, in which all Alliance members participated, for L&A in the Netherlands and at international level.

During these processes of Alliance building in 2017 we have learned to define the specific added value of Alliance members and focus more on our strengths in program implementation. In the broad area of civic space, for example, we have more clearly defined [in our country ToCs] our relationships with FBOs [specific added value of Kerk in Actie and Prisma members], labor unions [specific network of CNV Internationaal] and community based organizations [networks of Kerk in Actie, ICCO in some countries, Prisma members, Wilde Ganzen]. Strengthening community based organizations and self help groups, and supporting them in engaging in dialogue with local governments and with networks and actors at other levels, and strengthening their local support base by local fundraising, contributes to the legitimacy and local rootedness of L&A. In the thematic pathways we focus on the agri-food sector [expertise of ICCO, Woord en Daad] and we have collected specific evidence on skills development [Edukans] and labor rights [CNV Internationaal] in these sectors in several countries. Wilde Ganzen has organized Change the Game Academy trainings in program countries where partner organizations of all Alliance members were invited to participate.

Alliance building has been an investment of time and energy but by the end of 2017 we can see good results in useful cooperation in many countries.

In all countries, we cooperate with a variety of local partners: CSOs, FBOs, trade unions, community based organizations at grassroots level, networks, knowledge institutions and researchers, and private sector partners. The interesting challenge of this Strategic Partnership is to build partnership relationships that are different from the more classic ‘aid chain’ cooperation, the relationship between donors and implementing partners. The ‘Dialogue and Dissent’ framework asks for other types of relationships, in which different stakeholders collaborate for common goals in policy influencing. More flexible, less funding involved, more equal relationships.

In some countries and with some local partners, we have been struggling in 2017 to discover the way forward. A few local partners decided to not further participate in this program because of the small amounts of funding; in other cases
it took a lot of time for partners to really engage in local networks, being more used to implement own projects. We, ourselves, have been struggling to find our roles and define our own role in the country programs (coordination and monitoring but also being engaged in lobby and advocacy and capacity development). At the end of 2017, it was interesting to see that new partnerships have been developing indeed. Sometimes with private sector actors and trade unions, working on responsible business issues, sometimes with local actors and community groups that are actively engaging in dialogue with local governments, sometimes with national networks that influence policies and to which we can link local actors to provide grassroots evidence. Partnerships that are promising for the coming years.

In our Civic Engagement Alliance programs we aim to connect our L&A goals to broader programs (funded from other sources). Our Alliance members are not (and will not be) only engaged in lobby and policy influencing work. Linking L&A interventions with the implementation of broader programs has the positive effects that through the broader programs we gain evidence (on local realities) for L&A, commitment of local organizations and therefore more legitimacy. We have seen in 2017 that in those countries where these linkages between programs were strong the Civic Engagement Alliance programs also have been developing faster and becoming more concrete.

In 2017 we have seen good and fruitful relationships with MOFA, in particular the DSO-MO and IGG departments. We discussed program progress and specific thematic issues such as the role of faith based organizations, civic space strategies and the position of smallholder farmers in food and nutrition security. We value this partnership and it opens up new possibilities for policy discussion and influencing.

In the different countries, relationships with Netherlands Embassies exist but in 2017 in most cases we don’t evaluate them yet as very strategic. Embassies have invited (once a year) all strategic partners for an annual exchange meeting. Embassies have not played strategic roles in our program implementation, and our Alliance and local partners have not played strategic roles in the Embassy programs, with a few exceptions. Maybe it was too early, and all our agendas are charged. But in the midterm evaluations of the Dialogue and Dissent partnerships this should be an issue of evaluation and discussion.
5. Inequality and inclusiveness

In our Theory of Change, we have defined smallholder farmers and workers in the agri-food sector as our main beneficiaries. Within this broader group, we focus in particular on inclusion of women, people living with disabilities and (more and more) children and youth. In our L&A strategies the level of inclusiveness of policies and policy implementation and the specific obstacles certain marginalized groups face are central issues. We are advocating for inclusive policies and we contribute to inclusive advocacy processes as well. Capacity building is important for marginalized groups so support them in raising their voices; at the same time it is important to convince decision makers to include a diversity of voices and groups in decision making processes.

Gender
In our lobby for labor rights we have focused in 2017 on women’s rights, such as equal wages and a safe environment to work in. Partners and labor unions we cooperate with have given specific attention to female leadership. Within the agri-food sector we focus on sub sectors in which many women work. In Benin, for example, we work in the shea value chain, a sector in which the majority of the collectors and workers are female. Improving working conditions, access to markets and even land issues, services and skills is fundamental for these workers and can have enormous impact on family income. In Bolivia female producers are supported in product innovation (and value addition) for their peanut crops.

In our L&A for food and nutrition security, we have been asking attention in particular for the position of women and young children, for example in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Mali. In capacity development we trained CSOs, including many women’s groups and female participants, adding to their empowerment and agency to voice out specific issues for their situation.

Disability inclusion
Alliance members Light for the World and Leprazending have contributed to awareness raising and capacity development in inclusive L&A strategies. In several countries [Myanmar, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Uganda], disability advisors supported the program teams with knowledge and skills in disability inclusion. In the South and Central Asian region, Light for the World developed tools and provided support to program teams and partners to increase inclusiveness of program design and implementation. Field visits were organized to deepen understanding of the living conditions of people with disabilities and levels of discrimination. In Ethiopia, specific data were collected on access to food for people with disabilities, providing clear evidence that they are relatively more food insecure compared to other community members. This information can be used in dialogue with local government officials. For capacity development, the Change the Game Academy has been made as inclusive as possible for people with disabilities and trainers have been trained in inclusive facilitation [joint initiative of Wilde Ganzen and Light for the World]. Focus was on inclusion of people with disabilities but we have seen the result that participants became aware of exclusion and inclusion mechanisms in general. In Mali for example participants decided also to do an assessment of the most marginalized groups in their regions in terms of access to food.

Children and Youth
In several countries, we have been lobbying for children’s rights and the prevention of child labor, as part of the broader lobby for responsible business. In quantitative terms child labour is most present in the agricultural sectors. In promoting responsible business and respect for UNGP we pay specific attention to children’s rights. In Indonesia, for example, we have contributed to the development of a toolkit on children’s rights and business principles for the palm oil sector and engaging private companies in the prevention of child labor (see annex 2, story of change for Indonesia). Alliance member Kerk in Actie is member of the Stop Child Labour Coalition in the Netherlands, which has developed valuable experience in creating Child Labour Free Zones. Respecting children’s and youth rights also implies that we have been lobbying for access of young people to skills training and for youth employment. In Bolivia, for example, we have contributed to lobbying for including technical training on the agenda of the Global Campaign for Education. In Central America, lobby for youth rights and youth participation has been at the core of our program in 2017. In Uganda and Kenya we have been lobbying for accessibility of agricultural extension services to young people. And also in the Netherlands we have advocated for government support to youth employability in the global south.
To look back over the year 2017, we have organized learning workshops in all program countries [only in Cambodia we had to postpone this workshop due to the instabilities in the context]. During these learning workshops the consortium members and their partners collectively reflected on the past year to assess the main developments in the country program and to capture lessons and results of the capacity development for L&A and the implementation of the L&A itself. The workshop outline has been designed in such a way (modular with templates, focused on learning and with the possibility for country specific adaptation) that it could be re-used annually. Important bycatch for the workshops was to ‘re-introduce’ the instruments in use (lobby logbook, stories of change) and demonstrate how these can facilitate learning, both on results and on CEAs contribution

While working through the 5 workshop modules [on program development, capacity development for L&A, L&A, ToC review and learning 4 planning] indeed a good insight could be got in the status of the program and it provided a real basis for joint learning and ownership of the program. The participants have judged their ToCs and its assumptions [made changes or not] and shared stories of change based on their logbook information; they also updated their planning for 2018 with the necessary information of the assessment and learning.

General conclusion of the country workshops has been that the original Theories of Changes and assumptions are still valid and it was not necessary to make fundamental changes in the ToCs. In the first implementation year, moreover, insight in local realities and lobby opportunities has been growing. This resulted in a process of making ToCs more focused and more concrete, reformulating certain interventions and results and in some cases reviewing the intervention logic. Synergy between different pathways of change has been growing, this was one of the main outcomes in many countries. In some countries, pathways 3 and 4 are implemented hand in hand, in other countries pathways 2 and 3, and in all cases pathway 1, civic space and capacity development, has become a more integrated part of the ToC. In our aim to increase civic space for CSOs, we are focusing more on the specific types of CSOs where we have experience and networks, such as trade unions, faith based organizations and local community based organizations. For our ToC for the Netherlands/international

6. Theories of Change, monitoring and learning

we have decided to fully integrate pathways 2 and 3, since the results and interventions are interrelated.

In April 2018 we have invited the program coordinators of all program countries, together with the Alliance members, to participate in a face-to-face week in the Netherlands. During this week we discussed the outcomes of the country workshops and certain thematic issues such as civic space and the role of FBOs, needs for continuing capacity development, data collection for food security, and how to strengthen connections in L&A between southern countries and northern L&A [the Netherlands, EU level]. We will use the outcomes and learnings of all these workshop in our midterm evaluation, to be done mid-2018.