



Evaluation of Norwegian Support to the Protection of Cultural Heritage

Evaluation Report 4/2009
Executive Summary

Submitted by Nordland Research Institute and Chr. Michelsen Institute



Front page photos:

Ethiopian-Norwegian cooperation is being announced outside the walls of King Fasiledes' bath.

Village children from the Lilongwe district in Malawi perform traditional children's dances, a knowledge project supported by the Malawian-Norwegian framework agreement on cultural heritage.

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Photos: Dag Jørund Lønning
Design: Agendum See Design
Print: Lobo Media AS, Oslo
ISBN: 978-82-7548-406-0

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This evaluation will address the experiences of Norwegian support to the protection of cultural heritage in developing countries. Norwegian support to this field of interest dates back to the 1980s, but the study focuses on the period 2000 - 2008. The main emphasis has been on institution- and capacity building for the preservation and protection of cultural heritage, with particular regard for UNESCO's Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972).

Since 2005, Norwegian support to the protection of cultural heritage has been directed by a Strategy for cultural and sports cooperation (2006 – 2015), where particular importance is attached to the promotion of cultural diversity, and where cultural heritage is seen as a resource for development. The strategy also covers Norwegian support to the 2003 UNESCO convention on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage resources (ratified by Norway in 2007). The current strategy thus covers a much wider field than cultural heritage protection. None the less the protection of cultural heritage remains an important component in a strategy that encourages the use of cultural heritage as a resource for sustainable development, promotes cultural expression as a basis for intercultural dialogue and the strengthening of civil society. The outlook of the 2005 strategy captures the developmental purpose and validation of cultural heritage protection efforts and corresponds in broad terms with the culture economic perspectives that underlie the present evaluation.

Norwegian support to the protection of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is organised in a multilateral programme, where Norway have provided extra-budgetary support to UNESCO through a series of two-year programme agreements, in addition to Norway's membership obligations and general support to UNESCO's normative functions. Additionally, support has been provided on a bilateral basis to a number of projects sponsored by Norwegian embassies in developing countries. Particular emphasis has been placed on cultural infrastructure and the development of institutional capacity.

The project portfolio for cultural cooperation is analysed in the study, indicating that Norway in the period 2000 – 2008 has supported 60 cultural heritage projects (mostly in Africa and Asia) with a budget contribution of close to NOK 275 million. 44 multilateral projects and 16 bilateral projects have been identified, including 6 networking programmes in Asia, 5 networking programmes in Africa and 7 international programmes. Over the period, 60% of Norwegian

funding to cultural heritage protection has been granted through multilateral support. Of the 16 bilateral projects, 12 can be found in Africa, while 60 % of the support to bilateral projects goes to Africa.

Norwegian support covers both tangible and intangible cultural heritage; 59% of the support to the protection of tangible cultural heritage has been allocated to projects in Africa, while 34% of the support for intangible cultural heritage is for projects in Asia. It follows that the largest proportion of site-specific investments (62%) has been in Africa. It is also interesting to note that 48% of the funds allocated to capacity building have been spent in Africa. Africa has received 54 % of the funds directed at economic development and 50 % of the funds allocated to the development of tourism.

A review of Norwegian stakeholders supporting cultural heritage protection shows clearly the central position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which assumed a main responsibility for this sector in 2004. MFA is now the main source of funds and policy guidance in this field. Norad's capacity for delivery within the field of culture has been scaled back since its peak in the 1990s and is now focused on technical advisory services. The Directorate for Cultural Heritage offers a range of valuable technical services related to the preservation and management of cultural heritage, but has yet to respond adequately to the challenges of institution-building for cultural heritage management, which is re-emphasised in the 2005 strategy as a major Norwegian policy objective. The Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Culture both have nominal responsibility for the UNESCO conventions on tangible and intangible cultural heritage respectively, while most of the financial support to UNESCO is actually extended through MFA. The Nordic World Heritage Foundation is supported by the Ministry of Environment to provide ancillary support to UNESCO's World Heritage activities but plays a less prominent role in Norwegian policy formulation and support.

Norway is a major contributor to UNESCO, which is the only multilateral institution with a strong mandate to support cultural activities and protect cultural heritage. A distinction is made between Norway's membership obligations to UNESCO and the 'extra-budgetary' support offered to UNESCO's cultural heritage management activities. There is a tension between the normative functions of UNESCO as the custodian of the world heritage conventions and the more recent initiatives to support cultural heritage protection in a more holistic and developmental perspective. There is more or less full congruence between UNESCO's views and Norwegian policy positions on both counts; UNESCO's capacity to support practical cultural heritage protection activities, however, presents more challenges than the management of the heritage conventions.

Three cases were selected from the project portfolio for further study. This selection was guided by a suggestion in the Terms of Reference that at least one of two designated pilot countries for the new strategy should be studied, hence Malawi was selected. Ethiopia was selected as a country where Norway has supported both bilateral and multilateral efforts, and finally Nepal was selected as a country that has been involved in three Norwegian funded multilateral

networking programmes organised by UNESCO. The sample represents important issues in Norwegian support to the protection of cultural heritage, but cannot be said to be statistically representative of the project portfolio.

The **Ethiopia case** covers one bilateral project and two multilateral projects for site-specific restoration and protection of cultural heritage, in addition to one multilateral project directed at intangible heritage (music). The bilateral project has been curtailed due to implementation problems and political difficulties, but the works that had been carried out were firmly rooted in the local community and had contributed to capacity building and institutional development of the national institution charged with heritage protection. Locally, this project was viewed positively, in spite of obvious difficulties and shortcomings. The multilateral projects also experienced implementation delays, but were far less positively viewed by local stakeholders, whether in the local community or by the national counterpart institution. The multilateral projects were said to have shown less concern for local engagement, popular participation, national ownership and direction, although the experiences discussed were tied to only the first of two projects. These issues have been incorporated in the plans for the second project (where implementation has not yet started). The intangible heritage project was implemented by the regional UNESCO office in Nairobi but it proved impossible to obtain any information about it locally, where it was unknown, or by contacting the regional office, where requests were unanswered.

The **Malawi case** discusses a large programme agreement with the Malawi Department of Culture, organising Norwegian support to cultural heritage protection. It covers a range of activities including capacity- and institution-building interventions, site-specific rehabilitation and preservation activities, research and interventions to revive and document intangible cultural practices. Several of the technical restoration projects included in the schedule of the programme have been completed as planned; the major question raised by the review concerns the programme logic underlying the activities. The overall goal of the programme was defined as contributing to the Malawi national identity, with unity in diversity and economic development as important collateral objectives. Quite apart from the issue of how change along these dimension may be measured, the review put in doubt the logical connection between the restoration of colonial-era buildings and national identity. Other components of the programme, particularly those related to the preservation of intangible culture like popular songs and dances, currently represent a modest proportion of the programme, but could probably play a greater role in terms of contributing to the national identity. The review also discusses the Chongoni rock art site, which has been inscribed on the World Heritage List, with support for the required preparatory work from the Norwegian-funded programme. After the site was recognised, however, it has been largely forgotten, in terms of preservation and development of site management plans, or in terms of integrating the site in local level development plans.

The review recognizes the achievements of the Norwegian programme to date (mostly relating to concrete restoration of buildings, as well as some capacity

building in the national Department of Culture) but points out that the main shortcomings involve poorly substantiated assumptions about links between programme activities and over-ambitious programme goals, general neglect and inadequate prioritisation of intangible culture and finally, a centralised management structure for cultural heritage management that has proved inimical to local and civil society involvement and which is isolated from the national educational and research sector.

The **Nepal case** study examines, from the local point of view, the experiences from three UNESCO networking programmes that Nepal has taken part in, i.e. how programme goals and programme interventions have been translated into activities involving local stakeholders in Nepal. The review points out that the three networking programmes all worked with intangible cultural heritage, partly with a geographical focus on some of the most remote and isolated areas of Nepal. Two of the programmes were directed at reviving traditional decorative arts and building crafts in Buddhist temples on the one hand, and restoration and conservation of religious practices, structural and decorative aspects of (mostly Buddhist) temples in the Himalayas on the other. The third networking programme was directed at the development of eco-tourism in a remote region of the country. The funding of the projects was substantially lower than for the bilateral projects studied in Malawi and Ethiopia. This should be taken into account when the results are evaluated. Moreover, the projects were all implemented during a highly turbulent period in modern Nepali history, which may be partly the reason why they were implemented without involving national government counterpart institutions.

The review points out that in one of the projects, lack of communication between the local implementing organization and UNESCO meant that considerable time and energy was spent on planning activities that there was no budget to carry out. In the view of the local organization, their priorities were not taken into account. The sustainability of the projects has been limited, partly because of lack of resources and capacity among the organisations to replicate the activities, partly as a result of lack of interest from the government. The review reports a surprising lack of coordination between the three UNESCO projects and defective communications with central government. The eco-tourism project seems to be the most successful of the three in terms of how well it was integrated in local conditions and with local stakeholders, but even here, the support received from UNESCO was limited. The review points out that the large-scale networking approach, managed from a regional centre, is a quite expensive model for programme implementation, particularly given the modest level of programme activities on the ground.

The lessons and conclusions to be drawn from this evaluation are of course closely related to the case studies presented, and even if these are not statistically representative, they point to some issues that are important to the Norwegian effort. One is the current balance between multilateral and bilateral channels of assistance and their relative usefulness in terms of achieving Norwegian policy objectives. In view of the strong focus on institution- and capacity-building

in the Norwegian policy documents, there may be an argument for a more direct bilateral involvement with cultural heritage authorities in a select number of countries. But this does not seem feasible before two major weaknesses in the management of bilateral assistance have been revised, viz. the dependence of Norwegian support to cultural heritage protection on a small number of institutions in Norway (almost exclusively the Directorate of Cultural Heritage) and dependence upon the personal initiative of interested officers at Norwegian embassies to carry cultural heritage protection projects forward. Both issues render cultural heritage protection vulnerable.

These three case studies are the basis for the success criteria that have been formulated for cultural heritage protection projects, viz.:

- Tangible and intangible cultural heritage can be important components of economic innovation and for local development
- Local involvement and local ownership is a precondition for a successful project
- Successful projects should be based on local definitions and local perceptions of cultural heritage
- Successful projects require broad partnerships of different kinds of knowledge and expertise
- The research and education sector should be recognised as a central stakeholder in capacity building and sectoral development projects for cultural heritage

The evaluation summarises the experiences with reference to standard evaluation criteria, after a review of some important cross-cutting themes that have presented themselves. These particularly concern the poor level of coordination between projects in the cultural heritage sector as a whole (in the countries reviewed), as well as between donors. A large and complex organisation like UNESCO is particularly prone to criticism on this count. The issue of coordination, however, is tied in with the issue of institution-building; this evaluation supports the view that coordination is primarily the responsibility of national authorities. The Norwegian strategy for cultural cooperation has recognised the importance of institution-building, indicating that NOK 50 million annually, or some 65% of the Norwegian global vote for culture, should be earmarked for institution-building. This evaluation has not been able to identify adequate and workable models for institution-building within the material reviewed in this sector. There are some successes resulting from capacity building within tightly circumscribed technical fields, but viable and effective institutions involve far more than technical skills. In view of the undisputed importance of properly functioning institutions for cultural heritage, this remains an urgent priority.

The final section offers some recommendations at the policy, strategy and project level respectively. It is important to actually operationalise and implement the policy initiatives announced in the 2005 strategy if the policy objectives are to be achieved. At the strategic level the report points out that large parts of the Norwegian effort is channelled through multilateral institutions, with a limited involvement of Norwegian institutions, limited scope for country-level

coordination of the Norwegian effort and limited opportunity for oversight and results monitoring. Norwegian bilateral institution- and capacity-building initiatives can benefit from mobilising and coordinating additional professional resources in Norway, partly through already established funding mechanisms for research and training, thus expanding the Norwegian resource base.

EVALUATION REPORTS

1.96	NORAD's Support of the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) in Botswana	7.01	Africa Reconciliation Among Young People in the Balkans An Evaluation of the Post Pessimist Network
2.96	Norwegian Development Aid Experiences. A Review of Evaluation Studies 1986-92	1.02	Evaluation of the Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights (NORDEM)
3.96	The Norwegian People's Aid Mine Clearance Project in Cambodia	2.02	Evaluation of the International Humanitarian Assistance of the Norwegian Red Cross
4.96	Democratic Global Civil Governance Report of the 1995 Benchmark Survey of NGOs	3.02	Evaluation of ACOPAM An ILO program for "Cooperative and Organizational Support to Grassroots Initiatives" in Western Africa 1978-1999
5.96	Evaluation of the Yearbook "Human Rights in Developing Countries"	3A.02	Évaluation du programme ACOPAM Un programme du BIT sur l'« Appui associatif et coopératif aux Initiatives de Développement à la Base » en Afrique de l'Ouest de 1978 à 1999
1.97	Evaluation of Norwegian Assistance to Prevent and Control HIV/AIDS	4.02	Legal Aid Against the Odds Evaluation of the Civil Rights Project (CRP) of the Norwegian Refugee Council in former Yugoslavia
2.97	«Kultursjokk og Korrektiv» – Evaluering av UD/NORADs Studiereiser for Lærere	1.03	Evaluation of the Norwegian Investment Fund for Developing Countries (Norfund)
3.97	Evaluation of Decentralisation and Development	2.03	Evaluation of the Norwegian Education Trust Fund for Africa in the World Bank
4.97	Evaluation of Norwegian Assistance to Peace, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation in Mozambique	3.03	Evaluering av Bistandstorgets Evalueringsnettverk
5.97	Aid to Basic Education in Africa – Opportunities and Constraints	1.04	Towards Strategic Framework for Peace-building: Getting Their Act Together. Overview Report of the Joint Utstein Study of the Peace-building.
6.97	Norwegian Church Aid's Humanitarian and Peace-Making Work in Mali	2.04	Norwegian Peace-building policies: Lessons Learnt and Challenges Ahead
7.97	Aid as a Tool for Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy: What can Norway do?	3.04	Evaluation of CESAR's activities in the Middle East Funded by Norway
8.97	Evaluation of the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala	4.04	Evaluering av ordningen med støtte gjennom paraplyorganisasjoner. Eksemplifisert ved støtte til Norsk Misjons Bistandsnemda og Atlas-alliansen
9.97	Evaluation of Norwegian Assistance to Worldview International Foundation	5.04	Study of the impact of the work of FORUT in Sri Lanka: Building Civil Society
10.97	Review of Norwegian Assistance to IPS	6.04	Study of the impact of the work of Save the Children Norway in Ethiopia: Building Civil Society
11.97	Evaluation of Norwegian Humanitarian Assistance to the Sudan	1.05	Study: Study of the impact of the work of FORUT in Sri Lanka and Save the Children Norway in Ethiopia: Building Civil Society
12.97	Cooperation for Health Development WHO's Support to Programmes at Country Level	1.05	Evaluation: Evaluation of the Norad Fellowship Programme
1.98	"Twinning for Development". Institutional Cooperation between Public Institutions in Norway and the South	2.05	Evaluation: Women Can Do It – an evaluation of the WCDI programme in the Western Balkans
2.98	Institutional Cooperation between Sokoine and Norwegian Agricultural Universities	3.05	Gender and Development – a review of evaluation report 1997-2004
3.98	Development through Institutions? Institutional Development Promoted by Norwegian Private Companies and Consulting Firms	4.05	Evaluation of the Framework Agreement between the Government of Norway and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
4.98	Development through Institutions? Institutional Development Promoted by Norwegian Non-Governmental Organisations	5.05	Evaluation of the "Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)"
5.98	Development through Institutions? Institutional Development in Norwegian Bilateral Assistance. Synthesis Report	1.06	Inter-Ministerial Cooperation. An Effective Model for Capacity Development?
6.98	Managing Good Fortune – Macroeconomic Management and the Role of Aid in Botswana	2.06	Evaluation of Fredskorpset
7.98	The World Bank and Poverty in Africa	1.06	Synthesis Report: Lessons from Evaluations of Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation
8.98	Evaluation of the Norwegian Program for Indigenous Peoples	1.07	Evaluation of the Norwegian Petroleum-Related Assistance
9.98	Evaluering av Informasjons støtten til RORGene	1.07	Synteserapport: Humanitær innsats ved naturkatastrofer: En syntese av evalueringsfunn
10.98	Strategy for Assistance to Children in Norwegian Development Cooperation	1.07	Study: The Norwegian International Effort against Female Genital Mutilation
11.98	Norwegian Assistance to Countries in Conflict	2.07	Evaluation of Norwegian Power-related Assistance
12.98	Evaluation of the Development Cooperation between Norway and Nicaragua	2.07	Study Development Cooperation through Norwegian NGOs in South America
13.98	UNICEF-komiteen i Norge	3.07	Evaluation of the Effects of the using M-621 Cargo Trucks in Humanitarian Transport Operations
14.98	Relief Work in Complex Emergencies	4.07	Evaluation of Norwegian Development Support to Zambia (1991-2005)
1.99	WID/Gender Units and the Experience of Gender Mainstreaming in Multilateral Organisations	5.07	Evaluation of the Development Cooperation to Norwegian NGOs in Guatemala
2.99	International Planned Parenthood Federation – Policy and Effectiveness at Country and Regional Levels	1.08	Evaluation: Evaluation of the Norwegian Emergency Preparedness System (NOREPS)
3.99	Evaluation of Norwegian Support to Psycho-Social Projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Caucasus	1.08	Study: The challenge of Assessing Aid Impact: A review of Norwegian Evaluation Practise
4.99	Evaluation of the Tanzania-Norway Development Cooperation 1994-1997	1.08	Synthesis Study: On Best Practise and Innovative Approaches to Capacity Development in Low Income African Countries
5.99	Building African Consulting Capacity	2.08	Evaluation: Joint Evaluation of the Trust Fund for Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (TFESSD)
6.99	Aid and Conditionality	2.08	Synthesis Study: Cash Transfers Contributing to Social Protection: A Synthesis of Evaluation Findings
7.99	Policies and Strategies for Poverty Reduction in Norwegian Development Aid	2.08	Study: Anti-Corruption Approaches. A Literature Review
8.99	Aid Coordination and Aid Effectiveness	3.08	Evaluation: Mid-term Evaluation the EEA Grants
9.99	Evaluation of the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)	4.08	Evaluation: Evaluation of Norwegian HIV/AIDS Responses
10.99	Evaluation of AWEPA, The Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa, and AEI, The African European Institute	5.08	Evaluation: Evaluation of the Norwegian Research and Development Activities in Conflict Prevention and Peace-building
1.00	Review of Norwegian Health-related Development Cooperation 1988-1997	6.08	Evaluation: Evaluation of Norwegian Development Cooperation in the Fisheries Sector
2.00	Norwegian Support to the Education Sector. Overview of Policies and Trends 1988-1998	1.09	Evaluation: Joint Evaluation of Nepal's Education for All 2004-2009 Sector Programme
3.00	The Project "Training for Peace in Southern Africa"	1.09	Study: Global Aid Architecture and the Health Millennium Development
4.00	En kartlegging av erfaringer med norsk bistand gjennom frivillige organisasjoner 1987-1999	2.09	Evaluation: Mid-Term Evaluation of the Joint Donor Team in Juba, Sudan
5.00	Evaluation of the NUFU programme	3.09	Evaluation of Norwegian Development Cooperation through Norwegian Non-Governmental Organisations in Northern Uganda (2003-2007)
6.00	Making Government Smaller and More Efficient. The Botswana Case		
7.00	Evaluation of the Norwegian Plan of Action for Nuclear Safety Priorities, Organisation, Implementation		
8.00	Evaluation of the Norwegian Mixed Credits Programme		
9.00	"Norwegians? Who needs Norwegians?" Explaining the Oslo Back Channel: Norway's Political Past in the Middle East		
10.00	Taken for Granted? An Evaluation of Norway's Special Grant for the Environment		
1.01	Evaluation of the Norwegian Human Rights Fund		
2.01	Economic Impacts on the Least Developed Countries of the Elimination of Import Tariffs on their Products		
3.01	Evaluation of the Public Support to the Norwegian NGOs Working in Nicaragua 1994-1999		
3A.01	Evaluación del Apoyo Público a las ONGs Noruegas que Trabajan en Nicaragua 1994-1999		
4.01	The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Cooperation on Poverty Reduction		
5.01	Evaluation of Development Co-operation between Bangladesh and Norway, 1995-2000		
6.01	Can democratisation prevent conflicts? Lessons from sub-Saharan		

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