

Report from the
capacity building project
Global Innovation

Partnership in new ways



Preface

In the momentous 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN stresses that we live in a time of *immense challenges to sustainable development*, but *also, however in a time of immense opportunity*. Our hope is that the Global Innovation project is a contribution to shed light on some of these challenges and opportunities for civil society to contribute to sustainable development.

Overall, this model of innovation summarizes the Global Innovation project:

Digni, Members and Partners

External drivers

- Demographic change
- Social change
- Technological change
- New politics
- Other

Sources

- Values
- Vision
- Creativity
- Dreams

Internal factors

- Leadership role
- Organizational structure
- Org. procedures
- Stakeholder engagement
- Clear mission
- Frictions or unity?
- Autonomy

Type of change or innovation

- New services/products
- New ways of working and partnering
- New forms of resourcing
- New forms of evaluation
- New forms of governance
- New forms of communicating
- Transformative change in the context

Classification of novelty

- Radical or incremental?
- New perspectives on old needs
- New practices for old needs
- New practices for new needs

To achieve the SDGs

Contextual fit? Improved quality? Sustainable?

The project has primarily concentrated on *external drivers* of innovation and change, but has also focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), our identity and values as faith-based civil society actors as sources for innovation.

The project group will encourage Digni, members and partners to work on the *internal organizational factors* influencing innovation and change. Based on these drivers and sources for change and innovation, Digni, members and partners can develop new services, new ways of working and partner together to achieve the SDGs in ways which are adapted to the context, improve the quality, and are sustainable.

Partnership in new ways have been highlighted as the most promising way forward. Partnerships requires increased transparency, accountability, participation, and interdependence. Deeper reflection on our identity and values may point to more mutual partnerships. The project has experienced the possibilities in technology as a means of bringing us together and making us more connected, the catalytic potential of experience sharing, and the importance of consultative processes.

The Global Innovation project enables Digni to make strategic choices that can increase our impact and lead to meaningful contributions towards achieving the SDGs. The Global Innovation project lays an important foundation for the work on a new strategy and how Digni will best carry out the mission of strengthening respect for human rights, reducing poverty, strengthening civil society, restoring dignity and leaving no one behind.

Oslo, January 2021
The Project Group



Summary

Our contexts are changing

We see a long-term trend of declining membership in religious communities in Norway and western Europe, while the churches in the global south and east is growing rapidly.

The importance of the SDGs

The SDGs help us to see that we are all in the same boat. The global church plays a key role in achieving the SDGs. There is an increasing understanding and commitment to the SDGs among members and partners.

South-North partnership and power dynamics is in change

The power dynamics between South and North must be more mutual. We need to see partnership in new ways. We see a necessity of increased interdependence, transparency, accountability, and participation.

The challenge of ongoing crises

Covid-19 has disrupted the work to achieve the SDGs and accelerated existing crises. This shows the importance of building resilience towards crises, not least *slow-motion crises* such as climate change.

Increased experience-sharing and consultation

The catalytic potential of experience-sharing and the importance of consultative processes.

The potential of digital interaction

Technology as a means of bringing us together and making us more connected. The positive potential in digital global meetings and exchange even across continents.

Main findings and insights from the project

The project has provided important input to trends and developments that will affect Digni, members and partners. Our contexts as faith-based civil society organizations are changing, both in Norway and in the Global South, but also in the world as a whole. Based on our identity and values, we must navigate through these changes together to achieve the SDGs.

a. Changing contexts

- The organizational landscape in Norway is changing and the voluntary engagement is shifting from member focus and efforts to shape the society based on common values, to offering services to members and advocacy for their rights and facilitate social participation.
- The long-term trend of declining membership in religious communities in Norway and western Europe, continues.
- A shift of gravity in the global church where South and East is growing.
- Growing diversity in the Global Church, including the increase in mega-churches and church networks in the diaspora. But there is also greater openness to dialogue between churches. The dividing lines are more based on ethics than on historical denominations.
- A weak and vulnerable church in need of contextualized theology and practice in face of challenges like secularism, prosperity gospel and relativism.



b. What characterizes the contexts Digni members and partners are operating in

- Strong urbanization in the world. According to the UN, 55 % of the population lives in cities in 2020 and is expected to grow to 68 % by 2050. 1 out of 5 is living in urban slums.
- Mass immigration due to conflicts and crises.
- An increase in authoritarian populist regimes with a nationalist focus.
- In many places we see an identity struggle between globalization and nationalism.
- Religion is often used as a national identity indicator.
- Increasing persecution and marginalization of religious and minority groups.



c. South–North power dynamics is in change

- Changing power dynamics in the Global Church from the Global North to the Global South and East. Today there is 640 million Christians in Africa, 604 million in Asia og 544 million in Europe, according to figures from Agnes Abuom/WCC. The total amount of Christians will increase from 2 billion today, up to 3 billion in 2050.
- This shift of power changes the dynamics of the faith-based civil society in Norway. But still the economic power is in the North.
- Diakonia is central to the whole Global Church, but the numbers in need of diakonia is larger in the Global South and East.

d. The importance of the SDGs

- The SDGs are a global agenda and a common language for all.
- In light of the SDGs, all countries are developing countries striving to achieve the goals. We need to face this challenge together. The SDGs help us to see that we are all in the same boat.

- The SDGs are an important framework for the all policies and activities in the development cooperation sector.
- The term development assistance (*'bistand'* in Norwegian) is the language from yesterday. Now we speak of partnership for a more just and inclusive development.
- The Global Church plays a key role in achieving the SDGs.
- For the churches and faith-based organizations in the South, the SDG agenda is more incorporated than in the North.
- There is an increasing understanding and commitment among churches and mission agencies in Norway.
- The SDGs cannot be achieved without the joint efforts of the faith-based civil society. The added value as faith-based civil society is important in a context where the church is the center of the local community.

e. South–North partnership in new ways

- South-North partnership has not been mutual, since the economic power is in the North.
- Partners in the South wants the North to be less dominant. This dependency may lead partners in the South to listen more to NGOs in the North than to local stakeholders.
- Partnership builds on open communication, respect for diversity, willingness to learn from each other and consultative decision processes.
- The power dynamics between South and North must be more mutual.
- We must find ways to relate and minister across ethnic and cultural diversity in respect and unity and consider how we can promote an inclusive economy for everyone.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that no one is secure from crises. We must develop a South-North partnership based on mutuality instead of dependency, solidarity instead of one-way financial support.

f. The importance of faith-based civil society

- Faith-based civil society play a key role in development due to their extensive local networks and resources to reach out to vulnerable and marginalized people.
- For a long time, the partnership has been based on the North being donor and the South being recipient. Partners in the South wants a more mutual partnership where their agenda will set priorities, and a change from project focus to partnership focus with an aim of strengthening the local civil society.
- Partnership tends to focus on the *technical aspects* like shared purpose, measurable objectives, agreed strategy, clarity of roles, defined action plans and effective monitoring, accountability and evaluation. But for churches and faith-based organizations there are also deeper theological dimensions to partnership. We are one people with equal rights and value. Our oneness is the defining characteristic of our shared humanity.
- It challenges our expectations and understanding of partnership, and some of the most difficult challenges in partnership, including inequalities in power, working in a post-colonial context, and negotiating cultural differences.
- There is no time for withdrawal. We need to stay connected and demonstrate solidarity across borders, promote an inclusive economy for everyone, seek local solutions, and work for social justice and change.
- The SDGs mirror the long-standing efforts of churches and mission agencies in their quest to leave no one behind.

g. The challenge of ongoing crises

- Covid-19 is increasing extreme poverty, climate challenges, food and water insecurity, gender-based violence, and more.

- The Covid-19 crises has shown that no one is secure from crisis. The pandemic is a major setback and may lead to more people being left behind and excluded from a just and inclusive development.
- Covid-19 has disrupted the work to achieve the SDGs and accelerated existing crises. This shows the importance of building resilience towards crises and build back better.
- The fight to stop Covid-19 has been used to limit freedom for NGOs and to strengthen the trends known as the shrinking space for civil society.
- We do not respond well to low-intensive slow-motion crises like the climate change. We must change our focus from economic growth to a sustainable economy and production.

h. Increased experience-sharing and consultation and the potential of digital interaction

The digital Global Consultation Forum was a valuable meeting where members and partners could come together despite the ongoing pandemic. We could facilitate group discussion in break-out rooms and discussed our responsibility to contribute to achieve the SDGs, our identity as faith-based organizations, and the South-North partnership.

Findings and experiences from the forum:

- The catalytic potential of experience-sharing and the importance of consultative processes.
- Technology as a means of bringing us together and making us more connected.
- The positive potential in digital global meetings and exchange even across continents.

About the project

The goal of the Global Innovation project was to facilitate an updated and joint understanding of the global and local contexts in which Digni and its members operate, including development trends and opportunities moving forward.

The project provided valuable forums, resources, and information to members and partners as some seek to develop their own organizational and development strategies in the coming years. In this way it has been innovative in bringing Digni members and partners together on equal terms to share perspectives and experiences on our efforts to achieve the SDGs.

To achieve these goals several workshops for Digni staff, members and partners were conducted. Due to the Covid-19 situation, the workshops were conducted digitally or in a combination of digital and physical meetings. In the end of the project, Digni arranged the Global Consultation, a digital forum with 90 participants from 25 countries.

To undertake the project Digni hired a project manager and appointed a project group to oversee the activities and secure the link and communication with member organizations and the strategy process in Digni.

The project group:

- **Hjalmar Bø**, General Secretary of Digni, chair of the project group
- **Dag-Håkon Eriksen**, PhD Fellow, Center for Value-based Leadership and Innovation at VID Specialized University, project manager
- **Agnes Lid**, Director of Wycliffe Norway
- **Solveig Irene Seland**, Regional Director, Mission Alliance (up till Sept. 2020)
- **Trine Grønberg Christensen**, Regional Director, Mission Alliance (from Sept. 2020)

- Reverend **Beatrice Nekesa Johansson**, Pastor in the Methodist Church
- **Amos Ounsoubo**, Use Your Talents Coordinator for French-speaking Africa
- **Dag A. Fedøy**, Senior Advisor in Politics and Communication. Project manager of Strategy development 2030, Digni
- **Maria Aarsland**, Advisor, Digni, secretary of the project group



Participatory process

Workshop May 13: Development features, opportunities and challenges ahead to implement the SDGs, seen from Norway

The purpose was to understand more of the global context/situation in terms of trends and developments as well as opportunities and threats relevant for achieving the SDGs from a Norwegian perspective. We also focused on the situation for the Digni members in Norway. Member organizations shared experiences relevant for strategy processes and Henrik Sivesind from The Centre for Research on Civil Society and Voluntary Sector and Inge Herman Rydland from Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs shared their insights.

Workshop August 26: What role can Norwegian faith-based development organizations play in a changing world, and how can we best collaborate with partners in the Global South.

The purpose was to get a deeper knowledge of the possible role of Norwegian mission agencies in a changing global environment and share experiences on how to partner with the organizations and churches in the Global South. Under the headline partnership in a new context, we discussed new ways of partnering to achieve the SDGs. Member organizations shared experiences relevant for strategy processes, and Paul Bendor-Samuel from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and Angelika Veddelar from United Evangelical Mission, shared their insights.

Global digital consultation November 9–11

The purpose was to get a better understanding of the global situation and how we can partner to achieve the SDGs. This gathering was an opportunity to create a safe *third space* for leaders to come together from our different places to share insights and build mutual understanding on critical issues for our ministry. Dr. Agnes Abuom, moderator for



World Council of Churches, and Dag Inge Ulstein, Norwegian Minister for International Development, shared their insights. Member and partner organizations shared perspectives and experiences. 90 participants representing Digni members and partners from 25 countries participated in the consultation.

Report from Digni's Global Innovation Project

The capacity building project Global Innovation has led to a major report* which was submitted to Digni in December 2020, and of which this report is a short version. The report is a situation description that will guide Digni in the development of a new overarching strategy document and the preparation of a new 5-year strategic plan. To develop a strategy, it is important to first reach a joint understanding among Digni stakeholders of the global context and situation in which Digni operates, including present trends and potential developments. This has been the aim of the Global Innovation project.

* If you want to read the major report, please contact Digni.

Epilogue

Digni's Global Innovation project has brought important insight to Digni, the member organizations and partners. It is crucial that we as faith-based civil society organizations understand the context in which we work, that we are able to adapt to changing conditions, and that we contribute to achieving the global SDG agenda. This project is part of the strategy process in Digni and provides an updated and common understanding of the global and local context in which Digni and our members and partners operate, development trends and opportunities ahead. We hope the project also contributes to member organizations and their partners' strategic processes in the future and provides important insight and understanding of our common challenges in the years to come.

The world is constantly changing, and we must change to contribute to change in people's lives, seek justice for all and reduce inequalities in the world. Our goals are the same - to help people live dignified lives and leave no one behind.

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”

Mother Teresa



Digni
+47 24 11 11 50
post@digni.no
www.digni.no

**Digni
2021**