Digni

Digni's Progress report to Norad 2023

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1. General

1.1 Name of grant recipient:	Digni
1.2 Norad's agreement number:	GLO-3726 QZA-23/0002
1.3 Norad's agreement title:	Together for Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Development 2023-2027
1.4 Total grant amount:	NOK 808 800 000
1.5 Agreement period:	01.05.2023 – 30.04.2027
1.6 Reporting period:	01.05.2023 – 12.12.2023
1.7 Countries of implementation 2023:	Ecuador, Burundi, Cameroon, DR Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Mongolia, Nepal, State of Palestine, Vietnam

2. Progress and results

2.1 Summary

This section provides an overview of progress and key results from ongoing and ā.nalised projects in 2023, the ā.rst year of the programme Together for Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Development 2023-2027. The overall goal is to see *empowered communities and individuals living in dignity*. In addition to strengthening civil society in strategic partnerships, Digni believes that the ā.ve long-term thematic goals related to good health, peaceful relations, environmental sustainability, quality education, and economic empowerment are essential aspects of human dignity. Reporting on strengthening civil society is mandatory for all projects. In addition, they report on indicators under one or several of the other thematic areas in Digni's Global Results Framework (GRF), depending on their thematic focus.

When a project ends, Digni assesses to what degree project results reported on strengthening civil society and the other thematic areas are on an output, outcome, or impact level. Medium outcome results show empowerment and changes on an individual and community level, whereas strong outcome and impact results have led to structural changes among communities and/or societal level reaching beyond the project participants. There are indications that projects that focus on one or few speciā.c thematic areas, alongside civil society, achieve higher results than those who address many thematic areas. However, in some cases it might be necessary to include supporting thematic areas to achieve desired result in the focus area. We also see that projects that have run for several periods, are more likely to be able to achieve strong results on a more structural and community/societal level.

Civil society

81 active projects reported on progress and results from efforts carried out to strengthen civil society engagement in 2023. The activities involved 495 977 project participants, of whom 11 395 had disabilities and 105 747 belonged to an ethnic minority or indigenous groups.

With 8 446 networks and groups solving local challenges, the target for 2023 was surpassed by more than four times. The high result can partly be attributed to the work of 4 602 groups in Vietnam on climate change resilience, 405 groups in Burundi on trauma healing and reconciliation, and 382 groups on child

development in China. Of the total number of networks and groups, 2 165 were established in 2023. During 2023, 18 223 project participants, 64% women, were trained in organisational skills.

Nearly 46 000 project participants were trained on advocacy and/or human rights. This exceeded the 2023 target by 30%. The effort resulted in 2 303 groups engaged in advocacy work, which was more than twice the target. Three projects contributed largely to these results. They focused on peace and reconciliation in communities in North-Eastern India, empowerment of vulnerable communities in Eastern India affected by cast mining and stone crushing, and protection of biodiversity and resources among communities surrounding the Mt Elgon National Park in Eastern Uganda.

Throughout 2023, 3 000 religious or faith-based leaders were engaged in social change, which is ten times higher than anticipated. The big increase is mainly due to the strategic support and training of leaders of local partners in Burundi and in 16 countries across sub-Saharan Africa working with HIV, trauma healing, reconciliation, and adult literacy. Also, the Use Your Talents institutional development project, which engages churches and congregations on asset-based development and diaconal initiatives in their local communities and the Tamar Campaign that use biblical texts to address Gender Based Violence contribute to the high result. In addition, 1 350 local churches, congregations and other religious groups participated in project activities and 716 church buildings or other religious buildings/houses of worship were used in projects. Th ese numbers show that faith-based local partners are important agents of change and are actively involved in the development of the communities they belong to.

The 15 projects that ended in 2023, achieved results at outcome or impact level on strengthening civil society. While one project in India had impact results on a societal level, ā.ve projects in other countries were assessed to have results on a strong outcome level, and 9 projects got results at outcome level, mostly related to individuals and communities. The project in India enabled 3 500 persons to access public services because of joint advocacy efforts and 2 300 participants to beneā.t from new health services. In addition, some of the established CBOs formed bigger federations impacting people beyond the local communities positively. They also work closely with district authorities in development projects and to maintain peace and harmony.

Projects emphasising the establishment and training of local community-based groups and/or associations such as village committees, municipal committees, development committees, etc seem to have more potential to achieve results at strong outcome and/or impact level than others, especially when they are connected to an overarching structure on district levels or similar. Still, organising people is not enough to achieve high-level results. The most successful initiatives combine organising with advocacy efforts and establishing linkages and cooperation with local authorities and relevant regional and/or national bodies. Furthermore, they have actively sought cooperation with a wider and relevant network of civil society organisations and have emphasised trainings in advocacy, and organisational and leadership skills. They have also succeeded in mobilising resources in the communities or/and contribution from local government or others. For church partners, it seems that the use of biblical texts is an effective way to engage church members and leaders in development work.

Good health

In 2023, a total of 27 projects reported progress and results towards enabling project participants and communities to address conditions regarding their own health and well-being. Due to project interventions, 77 397 persons have received health services, and 4 649 persons have received specialised mental health services. We see this as a clear result of an increased focus to address the large gap between needs and available resources within mental health in the global south within the Digni fellowship. A separate Joint Learning Project (no: Fagutviklingsprosjekt) some years back was crucial to this process, and we now see growing synergy effects and networking between both members and partner organisations engaged in this area. 1 129 persons with physical or mental illnesses or other disabilities reported reduced stigma in local communities. 10 350 persons have been trained on stigma related to physical/mental health or disabilities.

Four projects focusing on health interventions were ﬁnalised during 2023. Three of them had strong outcome results. One project in Afghanistan fostered new perspectives and behaviours on mental health disability among various stakeholders, including Shura and government officials. The project also witnessed community-level ownership, as participants and volunteers played a crucial role in raising awareness, referring people to health centres, and spreading the message to other places outside the project. The results showed that 70% of people with post-pandemic stress disorder (PPSDs) had improved mental health function, 83% reported better community and family inclusion, and 74% had decreased violence in their families. In Ethiopia, community groups and leaders have been engaged to promote maternal services. Building on knowledge and experience from past project periods, and in close cooperation with governmental actors, project interventions have led to improved health care and reduced neonatal and maternal mortality in the project context. In one project area in India, the number of people accessing governmental health care services in 100 Indian communities have doubled, due to project interventions.

The successful projects within the area of good health create fruitful conditions for sustainability of results by working systematically with both civil society engagement and engagement of authorities. In an ongoing project in Nepal, successful capacity-building, and organisation of people with disabilities have empowered them to advocate for their rights and maintain effective collaboration with the government at district, provincial, and national levels, resulting in, among others, local governmental budget allocation to inclusion activities.

Peaceful relations

In 2023, a total of 21 projects worked and reported on progress within the theme of peaceful relations. Project participants worked on a variety of subjects with activities such as trauma healing and reconciliation; addressing situation of violence in slums; mobilising leaders and community for conﬂict mediation and prevention; changing perceptions of freedom of religion and belief in the MENA region; and upholding land rights. 2 199 persons are reported to actively promote peaceful relations and reconciliation. 12 projects in 9 countries addressed gender-based violence (GBV) by increasing awareness of persons/leaders and communities to address issues such as domestic violence, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, teen pregnancy, and sexual abuse. More than 18 000 persons,

43% men, were trained on GBV related issues. In 2023, 745 GBV cases were identiﬁed and handled due to project activities. In the 16 projects that work on creating caring and safer environments for children, the results are above target and showing solid progress. Nearly 9 000 caregivers and parents who have received training on child upbringing and children's rights are demonstrating a positive change in attitude towards children. Of these, 30% were men.

There is documentation of structural changes taking place. For instance, four policies/legal frameworks were changed in Cambodia to ensure safeguarding of peasant's rights, land rights, social protection and subsidies for seeds and peasant productions. In Ethiopia, one has contributed to the adoption (2022) and enaction (2023) of a law enabling Mother Tongue Education for all three languages used in the project. In Mali, one project has contributed to the government signing two new laws prohibiting FGM and three on child marriage, as well as a total of 42 laws on children's rights. The Malian Regional Directorate for the Promotion of Women, Children, and Families has concluded that 13 villages out of 15 in the project areas are certiﬁed to have abandoned FGM and respecting the new laws. Two villages were not investigated due to the presence of armed groups.

Three projects were ﬁnalised during 2023. All of them had results on a strong outcome level. In the conflict affected state of Assam in India, the project has successfully strengthened community mechanisms to prevent and handle conflicts. As a result of project activities, 18 peace mediation forums are now functioning with over 700 community leaders and 78 religious leaders promoting peace. The communities live in peace and have improved relationships, better understanding, and interaction between groups. The peace mediation forums are active and effective mechanisms to prevent potential conflicts to escalate and handle other social issues such as GBV related cases.

Several projects in the portfolio include Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) elements, but only three projects have reported on the FORB-indicators in the GRF in 2023. As FORB is one of Digni's prioritised areas for capacity building, we expect to see a gradual increase in projects being able to report on these activities in the years to come, seeing this already in 2024.

Environmental sustainability

In 2023, 20 projects worked and reported on progress towards environmental sustainability. There is an increased awareness of and willingness among Digni members and their partners to include and address climate and environmental issues in projects, both as the main intervention and as a supporting goal.

The projects have successfully contributed to make participants and their communities more resilient to negative livelihood conditions in 2023. 5 159 farmers adopted climate smart and environmentally friendly agriculture methods and 1 018 farmers reported increased yield from agriculture or livestock. 132 communities implemented plans to address deteriorating environmental conditions. The projects also led to participants and communities practicing responsible management of natural resources, e.g. with 1 797 groups engaged in natural resource management and 3 245 persons beneﬁtting from sustainable energy sources.

Six projects were ﬁnalised during 2023 with a majority leading to change for individuals and communities on an outcome level. One project only reached results on an output level and four on a

medium outcome level, for example a project that mobilised ministry leaders in 12 ecclesiastical districts (including 152 congregations and localities) in Northern Cameroon to position the church as a strategic partner to the government. One project in Mali has been assessed to have strong outcome results. This is largely due to the successful multiplication of the rehabilitation model of abandoned waste land in old goldmine areas beyond the originally targeted project area. The project has created a functioning structure of 12 natural resource management committees that monitor the environment, organise collective actions and voices concerns to authorities if goldmine activities damage the rehabilitated area. In addition, tree-planting, and maintenance of these have been systematised within the local communities.

Generally, we see that environmental sustainability is often included to support other thematic areas with higher levels of results. In addition, many climate and environment related activities are by nature focused on an individual/ household level, such as farmers using climate smart methods or increased household yields. There is a risk that projects might overlook to report on possible change at a structural level or changes among governmental actors, even if it might take place.

Quality education

In 2023, 31 projects reported on the thematic area of quality education. Through the projects, learners have increased access to quality education. 194 educational institutions documented improved student performances, which is almost four times target, and 3 015 adults completed functional literacy education in 2023.

207 796 learners (48% girls) were enrolled in educational institutions involved in the project, in addition the projects had 1 257 learners with disabilities. Four projects report on inclusion of children with disabilities, but two projects in Madagascar and Mongolia have a special focus on this, contributing strongly to the result. 28 educational institutions have made facilities disability friendly, and 1 220 teachers are trained in inclusive education. 1 321 participants have been employed or self-employed after completing vocational training, which is almost double the target. One project in India contributed to the majority of these.

Seven projects ﬁnalised their project periods in 2023 with overall good results at outcome level, one of them seeing strong outcome results at community/societal level. In India, one project has contributed to change the perception of education so that dropouts and children working in stone-mines now all attend school. The establishment of Kids Clubs, Bridge Schools and School Management Committees have played a crucial role, and girls are now more equally represented in school enrolment. In DR Congo, we see that 90% of students in the partner schools now pass exams, compared to 72% ﬁve years ago. In Ethiopia, a literacy project has succeeded in reaching almost 5 400 adults, which is twice as high as their original target for this ﬁrst project period.

The projects used various strategies, such as awareness raising, teacher and principal training, school construction, school counselling, and student-catered pedagogy, to improve the enrolment, retention, and performance of students, especially those from marginalised groups and with disabilities. To see

results on a higher level, the projects need to increase advocacy efforts and engagement with authorities. Several of the projects are in their first period and high outcome and impact results take time.

Economic empowerment

In 2023, 21 projects worked on this thematic area. In 2023, there were 5 166 active savings and loans groups. 9 451 project participants reported increased income compared to when they joined the project. While this is 26% higher than target, there are still projects working on savings and loans groups who have not yet documented increase in income of the members. As narrative reports show that savings and loans groups are successful in improving livelihood and income of their members, we expect to see the numbers increase as a result. More than 2 200 persons were trained in entrepreneurship and small business development and 1 749 new businesses/enterprises were started in 2023. This is above target.

Three projects reporting on the theme of economic empowerment were finalised in 2023, with two projects in India achieving results on a high outcome level. In these projects participants mobilised local resources and gained knowledge through training in income generating activities. Increased agency is shown by business development, increased income, and increased yields, with effects reaching the individual, household, and communal level. Both projects reported that strengthened community-based organisations resulted in people claiming their rights and accessing governmental welfare schemes that they are entitled to. In addition, one of these projects was successful in securing equal salaries for men and women in stone mines and stone crushing, as well as secure titular rights to land for 29% of project participants compared to 0% at project start. One project in Sierra Leone had low activity level and scope, compared to project plans, and achieved results mostly at output level.

2.2 Significant deviations from the latest approved application and/or plan

Two projects have been finalised in 2023, before completing their full term, followed by termination of partnerships with the two project partners in question. Furthermore, during 2023, Digni and its member organisation UIO have reached the conclusion that it is not viable to continue the project to educate female teachers in Afghanistan in the current situation.

Projects ended before completing full term

BKN-Substance Use Prevention for Children and Youth in Uganda was supposed to promote mental health and protect children and youth in Uganda from harms caused by alcohol and drugs. The originally five-year project started in January 2023, but due to financial mismanagement, the project funds from Digni were frozen in March. The project was permanently ended the same year. The severity of the case led to an end of the cooperation between the Norwegian Digni member organisation, Blå Kors Norge, and the partner organisation in Uganda.

MA – Community Empowerment toward Life with Dignity was terminated at the end of 2023, after four years instead of five. The reason was a leadership crisis at head office level in the local partner organisation in Cambodia, leading to the termination of partnerships by several donors, including Mission Alliance. The project has nevertheless implemented a high degree of planned outcomes and even showed results at structural and impact level, among other through the mobilisation and strengthening of around 150 various groups/community-based organisations, and joint action to address local

challenges and carry out advocacy towards duty-bearers on land issues, land law, and human rights across 14 provinces.

Downscaling in Afghanistan

UIO-Female Teacher Education Program worked towards the overall goal to empower women to play a vital role in the development of their rural communities in Afghanistan. The project successfully trained 45 professional teachers and 42 of them taught as teachers in their village schools till end of 2022. Due to the nationwide closure of high schools for girls, the establishment of barriers and limitations for women in the work ﬁeld, the activity plans for 2023 was drastically changed. This together with the government's insistence on stopping international organisations' involvement in the education sector, made it impossible for the project to continue for a third project cycle as originally planned. By this Digni's portfolio in Afghanistan is reduced by half.

Examples of unintended results

There are several signs of unexpected and unintended impact within the projects that compose the Digni programme. In the following we present three examples of this.

In Bangladesh, Normisjon's project implementing International Child Development Program (ICDP) has experienced impact outside the project's expected reach. After networking with the Norwegian Embassy in January 2023, the partner has signed an agreement with UNICEF to train 400 ICDP facilitators across the whole country over two periods.

One of HimalPartner's project partners **in Nepal**, ECEC, is growing into a national and regional knowledge hub on ICDP in Asia, training a wide range of strategic civil society actors in Nepal and facilitating the start-up of ICDP in other countries.

SAT-7, a project partner **based in Egypt**, has managed to spread the movie *Toxic*, reaching audiences way outside the expected reach of the project, through the in-ﬂight streaming platforms of Qatar Airways, Emirates Airlines, Turkish Airlines and Saudi Airlines. The movie portrays the journeys of four individuals, from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds, who have survived violence and cruelty of various kinds. The movie aims to foster empathy, understanding, and compassion across ethnic and social background in the Middle East.

2.3 Risks

Overall risk management

The goal of Digni's risk management system, tools and routines is to create a good decision basis for management and ensure that the identiﬁcation, analysis, and management of risk is incorporated into the overall governance of the organisations that constitute the Digni-chain. We have developed different tools and routines for identifying, analysing, and managing risks in the Digni secretariat, in the member organisations, in the partner organisations, and ﬁnally, in the projects.

A risk analysis is a mandatory component for all **projects** that receive funding from Digni, and it is updated and reported on every year.

At the **partner** level, our most important tool to map the risks and needs for capacity development, is our Partner Assessment Tool, that were in place at the start of the current agreement period with Norad. Members report that this is a very useful tool and that follow-up plans are actively used to monitor and reduce risk in partner organisations. By the end of 2023, partners overall report a decrease in risk (higher score) on all risk categories, with a total increase in score from 4.17 to 4.26. The greatest improvement is increase from 3.6 to 3.9 (maximum 5) on Anti-Corruption (9.2 %) and from 3.9 to 4.2 on Logistics & Procurement (7.1 %). The increase in scores implies that members and partners have used the Partner Assessment follow-up plan as a risk monitoring tool to manage identiﬁed risks and follow up on action points.

In 2023, Digni initiated the process of developing a Member Assessment Tool, which will be ﬁnalised in 2024. All Digni's **member organisations** will be assessed using the Member Assessment tool by 2026.

Major changes in the risk picture in 2023

The world is going through wars and geopolitical tensions. The Russian invasion of Ukraine led to series of consequences, not only for the Ukrainian people, but a large part of the world's population. Prices of wheat, corn and oil have soared, thus affecting the food security of many people in Digni's partner countries. Conﬂicts in the Middle East, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Mali, and Myanmar, amongst others, are likely to affect the operations of our partners and the lives of people. A weak Norwegian currency results in risk for relative and nominal cuts in the project budgets and downscaling of project activities. Despite this, 88% of the projects have progressed according to plans or better, indicating that the mitigating measure in place are effective.

Potential negative effects on cross-cutting issues

The cross-cutting issues are analysed at all levels of the Digni chain and potential negative effects have been addressed in the following ways:

Women's rights and gender equality: In Uganda, the passing of new legislation criminalising and threatening the lives of LGBT+ people was a case of major concern and follow-up with partners. The living conditions of many sexual minorities has become increasingly difficult in the past years, as some of them are facing exclusion and difficult living conditions, severe discrimination, imprisonment and even death penalty. The inclusion and non-discrimination of LGBT+ in Digni's projects was hence discussed with the general secretaries in member organisations and the leaders of our partner organisations in network meetings held in Kenya and Nepal. Digni also developed a *Position Paper on SOGIE rights* (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expressions), to clarify our position and expectations regarding this issue.

The situation for women was, in many contexts, deteriorated during the pandemic, as we saw an increase of domestic violence. Lately, we have seen more projects focusing on Gender Based Violence. As a preventive measure, women's rights and gender equality are also raised in module two on Ethical standards[1] in Digni's online onboarding course for members and partners.

[1] Requires a free account on Digni's online learning platform, Fabo.

Climate and environment: There is a need for us to develop knowledge to ensure that our climate and environment projects work as intended, without discriminating against minority groups or causing unintended negative consequences. A learning review on the role of religious actors in climate and environment was conducted together with our sister organisation CKU in Denmark. Several Digni members and their partners work on a joint learning project focusing on climate smart agriculture. Resilience, disaster preparedness and food security are all important aspects of these efforts.

Human Rights: Projects with a Human Rights/FORB components in the Digni portfolio are operating in difficult contexts with shrinking space and increasing tensions. We need to make sure we don't increase tensions by failing to balance the rights such as HR, SOGIE rights and the Freedom of Religion or Belief. As a mitigation in these settings, we have focused on awareness raising and dialogue, due to the sensitivity of the topic.

Anti-corruption: The corruption risk is always present in our projects, and we work constantly on mitigating the risks of ﬁnancial mismanagement, corruption and SEAH. Digni therefore launched a separate module on ﬁnancial integrity[2] in our online onboarding course, a revision of the Digni grassroots training on anti-corruption, promoted the toolkit for prevention and handling of SEAH and launched an online whistleblowing channel on digni.no.

3. Evaluation/review

3.1 Evaluations and reviews

Up to the end of 2023, all Digni projects have conducted external ﬁnal evaluations, as a standard procedure. In 2023, 16 decentralised project evaluations were conducted to consolidate learnings at project level, to prepare new and improved project designs, to verify results obtained in the projects and to measure the effectiveness of the project design and its implementation. As per the agreement, these evaluations are not forwarded to Norad for 2023.

Although these evaluations may provide valuable insight at project-level, Digni sees the need to revise our systems to secure aggregated learnings from the projects that beneﬁt the overall programme/portfolio. From 2024, the requirement to conduct external decentralised evaluations for all projects is abandoned and we have started an internal process to revise and/or establish new project knowledge management systems to ensure that useful and relevant learnings from project interventions inform planning of new projects/programmes and is shared across the portfolio. This process continues in 2024.

4. Financial report and audit

4.1 Significant deviations from the latest approved budget

Digni's Grant Agreement with Norad requires a written explanation of variance of more than 20% of a budget line, deﬁned as total yearly amount per member organisation, unless the variance constitute less

[2] Requires a free account on Digni's online learning platform, Fabo. The same goes for the toolkit to prevent and handle SEAH.

than 1% of the yearly allocation. The explanation for the variance for the budget line Frelsesarmeen (FA) is provided in Annex A: Digni Audited Financial Reports 2023, as shown below.

DIRECT PROJECT COST BY MEMBER ORGANISATION	Revised Budget 2023	Accounts 2023	Variance	Variance	Comment
	Amt NOK	Amt NOK	Amt NOK	%	
Frelsesarmeen (FA)	10,797,078	6,680,298	- 4,116,780	-38%	Project expenses of NOK 2,364,497, budgeted to be covered by other donors have been extracted from the financial accounts to Digni, so that Accounts 2023 only includes project expenses to be covered by the grant from Norad. In addition, Frelsesarmeen's own contribution has been reduced from 30.47% to 10%.

5. Other reporting requirements

5.1 Results achievement the Civil Society Support

Country	Type of CSOs	Number of CSOs reached	Number of CSOs strengthened
Afghanistan	NGO	1	1
Bangladesh	NGOs, organised community groups	10	2
Burundi	NGO, organised community groups	32	1
Cambodia	NGOs, organised community groups	13	8
Cameroon	Church	1	1
China	NGO, association, organised community groups	17	2
Congo	Church	1	1
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Church	1	1
Ecuador	NGO, organised community groups	10	1
Egypt	NGOs	2	2
Eswatini	Church, organised community groups	9	1
Ethiopia	NGOs, churches, organised community groups	23	6
India	NGOs, organised community groups	3	2
Indonesia	NGO	1	1
Kenya	NGOs, church	3	3
Lebanon	Foundation	1	1
Liberia	NGO, church, organised community groups	58	2
Madagascar	Church	1	1
Mali	NGOs, organised community groups	90	2
Mongolia	NGO	2	1
Mozambique	Church	3	1
Nepal	NGOs, organised community groups	37	3
Sierra Leone	Church	3	1
Somalia	NGO	2	1
State of Palestine	NGO	2	1
Uganda	NGO	2	2
Viet Nam	NGO	3	1
Zimbabwe	Church	1	1
Africa Regional	NGO, association, organised community groups	19	3
Global	Organised community groups	5	
Total		**356**	**54**

The number of civil society actors reached are NGOs, many of them faith-based, churches, foundations, and associations, as well as organised community groups that are connected to the project through sub-agreements/MOUs. The number of civil society organisations strengthened, refers to the project partners that Digni's member organisations collaborate with. All these have been assessed utilising Digni's Partner Assessment Tool and are followed up with capacity building and support according to their identiﬁed needs.