



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

HUNGARY ENGAGES WITH LOCAL FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Key messages

In conflict and fragile contexts, Hungary directly funds local faith-based organisations, who can reach some of the most vulnerable populations. Starting with small amounts and carefully assessing proposals and vetting partners allows Hungary to manage risks and increase support over time. The partnerships also provide opportunities to support peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance among diverse communities.

Keywords

Civil society | Crises, fragility and humanitarian assistance

Key partner

Hungary

Challenge

Delivering humanitarian and development assistance quickly and to the right people, especially in remote, fragile and conflict-affected areas, is always a challenge. But it is even more so for a Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member like Hungary, which does not have a large network of development staff on the ground. When the [Hungary Helps Program](#) was created in 2017, it decided to get round this problem by testing a new approach to delivering its assistance: partnering directly with local faith-based organisations. While the government had worked with international and Hungarian faith-based organisations, partnering with local ones was a new experience and required an adapted approach.

Approach

To enable its partnerships with local organisations, the Hungary Helps Agency has adjusted its processes:

- **Relying on partners and research to identify local organisations:** To start with, Hungary reached out to the Holy See to receive recommendations of trusted local partners. Now, local civil society organisations (CSOs) are aware of the programme and contact Hungarian embassies directly. Embassies

perform background checks and organise meetings where necessary. Partners at the Holy See provide information on local churches.

- **Testing project robustness through short but substantiated proposals:** To allow the Hungary Helps Agency to carefully assess the soundness of a project proposal, CSO partners must submit a short project description with a detailed budget, information on partners and sub-contractors. Where projects involve construction, the Agency also requests information on land ownership and plans. Embassies assess the proposed budget against local standards.
- **Starting small and building up based on results:** When engaging with new local partners, Hungary starts with small budgets, e.g., below USD 25 000. When partners prove reliable, the agency increases funding over time, often up to USD 300 000. In some instances, Hungary has provided more than USD 1 million per year.
- **Simplifying monitoring requirements:** The agency tracks project progress and results but does not require spending documentation to be submitted. Results monitoring mainly relies on local embassies and satellite imagery, which can track construction remotely. Experts from headquarters only travel to the site if a project requires more complex adjustments. On completion, the Hungary Helps Agency requires partners to send a qualitative results report. Experts from headquarters assess the completion of larger (construction) projects in person.

Results

Roughly half of the Hungary Helps Agency's partners are local faith-based organisations, and most projects are successful. To date there has been no major failure, although budget over-runs are often a challenge. Key results of the approach include:

- **Assisting displaced and local communities.** In Iraq, a project to support the building of the Meltho Syriac Orthodox School in Erbil received USD 4.8 million from Hungary Helps over 2019-2021. This newly constructed primary school will provide education for both local and internally displaced Christian as well as Muslim children. The school and the new jobs it has created are expected to encourage displaced families to settle.
- **Supporting a multi-pronged development programme.** In Northeast Ghana, the Education and Health Infrastructure project supported a Catholic development organisation near the border with Burkina Faso with USD 278 000 for one year (2021-2022). The [Catholic Diocesan Development Organization](#) (NABOCADO) developed outpatient health centres to provide medical care to some 190 000 people, equipped 20 schools and trained 1 500 rural women, providing entrepreneurial skills, start-up capital and scholarships.
- **Promoting peaceful coexistence.** As part of a project that enhances access to education by renovating rural schools, Hungary supported peace councils in the Oromia region of Ethiopia to strengthen the dialogue between different ethnic and religious groups.

Lessons learnt

- **Local faith-based organisations possess intimate knowledge** of the social and cultural dynamics of a given area and can reach some of the most vulnerable segments of the population. They possess strong community building skills and can be a “partner of last resort” when other organisations have left.
- **Risk can be managed and ownership built** through close attention to cost effectiveness, progressively increasing budgets and requiring local partners to co-finance projects. While co-financing is often not feasible for humanitarian assistance, this approach works well for development projects.
- **Having a strategy to deal with budget over-runs is key** to ensure results can be achieved on time. Giving clear guidance to partners on how to restructure projects has proven essential.
- **Monitoring capacity is a key criterion to consider when selecting projects**, as the cost of in-person monitoring in a remote and conflict area can be extremely high.
- **Context sensitivity and assessments of vulnerability and protection needs are important** to ensure interventions are as needs-based as possible and apply the do no harm-principle.
- **Collaboration with local faith-based organisations provides a good basis for building “infrastructure for peace”**. Platforms which contribute to social coherence and dialogue can complement physical assets and make projects with faith-based groups more sustainable, notably in conflict-affected settings where multiple religious groups are present.
- **Including capacity strengthening of local CSO partners in project budgets could be a valuable investment**. Organisations often need ad hoc guidance and can improve their project management capacity. Identifying such needs and foreseeing this type of support as part of the project can help build the basis for longer-term engagement.

Further information

Hungary Helps Program, <https://hungaryhelps.gov.hu/hungary-helps-program-main-page>.

International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, <https://www.partner-religion-development.org>.

OECD resources

OECD (2023), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Hungary 2023*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ec7d67f1-en>.

OECD, *Civil society engagement in development co-operation*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/civil-society-engagement-in-development-co-operation.htm>.

OECD, “Civil society partnerships”, *Development Co-operation Fundamentals* (forthcoming).

OECD, *Conflict, fragility and resilience*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience>.

OECD, “Engaging in fragile contexts”, *Development Co-operation Fundamentals*, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1154_1154188-e83x8ymqam&title=Engaging-in-fragile-contexts.

To learn more about Hungary’s development co-operation, see:

OECD, “Hungary”, in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a80b014d-en>.

See more *In Practice* examples from Hungary here: <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/tag-key+partner=hungary&submodel=in+practice#search>.

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