Voices To Be Heard

The living legacy of the Civic Engagement Programme 2016-2020

Dancing with Phassy Mbone

Hands off our karité!

Legitimate lobbying
Civic

‘Creating more civic space, especially for vulnerable groups, is what the Civic Engagement Alliance stands for. Too often, these groups are unseen and unheard, and they’ll remain so if we don’t make room for them in public spaces. This is difficult to accomplish in many countries, but we believe it can be done through what we call “the insider’s approach”. This approach uses dialogue, not confrontation. And it works. We strengthened the position of palm oil workers in Indonesia by establishing social dialogue with producers such as Wilmar. In Cambodia, CEA has demonstrated that land rights and labour rights go hand in hand. There, the owners of large plantations often take land from smaller farmers and then hire them as workers. It’s important to address both issues together in order to eliminate the problems in their entirety. That’s exactly what we did in Cambodia.’

Marit Maij, managing director of CNV Internationaal

Engagement

‘Engagement has three components for me. The first one is social, where you talk about the position of small producers in the food chain, for example. CEA helped them solve problems such as low yields and a lack of resources. It’s a pity that we couldn’t continue the programme, because this approach really paid off. The second is political engagement. We encouraged governments to improve the situation of groups such as small-scale farmers. One of our achievements was to help persuade the Ugandan government to appoint a thousand agricultural extension workers. The third component is ownership. The people you work for must own the lobbying efforts conducted for their interests. So you have to capacitate them. The training in lobbying and advocacy we provided contributed greatly to that.’

Ron Rijnbende, director of Edukans

Alliance

‘An alliance is a coalition with a common goal. In this case, not a financial goal but a better life for vulnerable groups. The alliance members all have their specific expertise. By bringing this expertise together and having a clear focus, you not only strengthen the alliance members but also the people you’re working for. In such cases, the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts. When alliance members have a wide range of backgrounds, you first have to invest a lot of energy in finding common values. In our case, this wasn’t necessary, because we shared the same background. Our shared values were also reflected in our way of working, emphasising the importance of dialogue, for example. Because of that, I think CEA doesn’t end here. This will remain a network of like-minded organisations.’

Sybren Attema, CEO of ICCO Cooperation

Columns, selfies and portraits on pages 9, 15, 16, 35, 39, 44, 57, 58 and 62

Cover: Phassy Mbone (see page 16).

The Civic Engagement Alliance

The Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA) was a joint collaboration between Dutch and southern civil society organisations that advocated for inclusive development. Starting in 2016 and ending in 2020, CEA operated in thirteen countries around the world. Its members were ICCO Cooperation, CNV Internationaal, Edukans, Kerk in Actie, Prisma, Wilde Ganzen Foundation and Woord en Daad. A short film on CEA can be found here.

Colophon

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CEA global indicators
2016 - 2019

Number of laws, policies and norms, implemented for sustainable and inclusive development

Number of laws, policies and norms / attitudes were blocked, adopted or improved for sustainable and inclusive development

Times civil society organisations succeeded in creating space for their demands and positions through agenda setting, influencing the debate and/or creating space to engage

Advocacy initiatives were carried out by civil society organisations, for, by or with their membership constituency

Civil society organisations increased their lobby and advocacy capacities

Civil society organisations participated in programs implemented by the Alliance and its partners
The CEA programme was quite complex, not only in its design but also in its execution. Was it a good design and did the results live up to expectations? It’s up to the evaluators to answer such questions. But it’s worth asking, can you evaluate a programme successfully during a pandemic?

Building a cathedral, that’s the metaphor programme manager Elly Urban uses to describe CEA. Hundreds of projects in thirteen countries, executed by six Dutch development organisations and dozens of partners, following four pathways: at first, this kind of a programme looks like a pile of bricks. But if all goes well, a cathedral emerges in the end.

What’s needed most to complete such an assignment successfully? ‘Mortar,’ Geert Phlix, director and senior consultant at ACE Europe, answers spontaneously. ‘Without it, your building will collapse.’ Together with Jet Proost of Jet Proost Communication Consultants, Geert belongs to the team of seven that evaluated the CEA programme. The two have evaluated alliances before, so they have grounds for comparison. Fortunately, they say, there was mortar available from the beginning. ‘Several alliance members and their partners had worked together before,’ says Geert. ‘And they’re all value driven, which glues them together.’ But having a history together can have its downside as well, adds Jet: ‘You have to do your best to escape from the ingrained patterns of past programmes.’

The evaluation of the CEA programme

Beautiful ceremonies in an unfinished cathedral

Four pathways

The CEA programme was based on a theory of change approach and consisted of four pathways of change. Each country had to choose at least two pathways, and pathway 1 had to always be included. The four pathways were:

1. Political space for civil society organisations
2. The right to adequate food
3. Small producer empowerment and inclusive markets
4. Towards a sustainable private sector

Let’s zoom in on four key elements of the evaluation:

Results and relevance

- The evaluators assessed the CEA programme as relevant for the local partners and target groups, and effective, with a focus on enhancing civic space, applying a smart mix of lobbying and advocacy strategies.
- CEA contributed to an increased understanding of lobbying and advocacy processes among civil society organisations and helped them to engage in lobbying and advocacy activities more effectively. Partners referred to an evolution from a confrontational approach towards a dialogue-based approach with government and private sector actors.
- CEA enabled civil society organisations to navigate under restrictive laws and to lobby for a more conducive environment for civic space. CEA promoted citizen-led and evidence-based advocacy.

Civic space

- One of the overall targets was to create (or strengthen) lobbying and advocacy networks. This worked out quite well. A lot of it involved ‘topping up’, as Geert calls it: lobbying and advocacy was added to existing programmes. Because of these linkages, she thinks the networks will prove sustainable.
- CEA’s strategy was to cooperate with partners who were experienced in lobbying and advocacy and to train less experienced grassroots organisations these skills. In some countries, such as Uganda and Kenya, this strategy focused on the district and county levels, in others on the national level.
- The constraints imposed by COVID-19 made it difficult for the evaluators to measure the results of capacity building on the organisational level.

Best practice: In Uganda four partner organisations reached a joint position and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, positioning their consortium as partner to the government for the dissemination of national policies at the district and local levels.

Small producers and a sustainable private sector

- CEA succeeded in improving service delivery to small-scale farmers, improving their skills and giving them better access to resources such as seeds and loans. Their needs and interests were put prominently in the spotlight in most countries.
Design and learning

- The evaluators found the overall theory of change (ToC, the description of the strategy of the programme) useful for defining collective ambitions but too generic for guiding the actual lobbying and advocacy processes. They also found that the pathways of change in the country programmes were not always coherent and not always clearly connected to the overall ToC.
- The focus on learning by doing proved a relevant strategy for implementing partners to familiarise themselves with the ToC approach. The evaluators appreciate the yearly learning workshops. The learning strategy for capacity development of CSOs could have been made more explicit and more different ways of learning could have been practised.
- Instruments such as stories of change (describing change and how this came about) and lobby-logbooks (containing the activities and results in a lobbying trajectory) were useful but could have been used better and more strategically. The evaluators recommend the use of progress markers, specifying the desired and achieved results.

Best practice: In Indonesia, a lobbying and advocacy campaign aiming at making the palm oil sector more sustainable was successfully backed by the use of lobby-logbooks.

To continue the analogy with the cathedral: beautiful ceremonies were carried out on the country and the programme levels. Maybe the mortar could have been a little bit stronger, in the form of a more focused theory of change. ‘It was only in the second part of the programme that they started working on that,’ comments Geert. But since the donor didn’t wish to fund a follow-up, big parts of the cathedral in the end remain unfinished.

A helpful crisis

In the summer of 2019, I was on a field visit in Assam, India. We went to visit small tea growers. It was raining a lot and the fields were very muddy. Traditionally, the tea plantations in Assam are big. They provide work to people originally from other parts of the country. The employers want them because they don’t go away easily. The inhabitants of communities near the plantations were mostly engaged in smallholder and subsistence farming. But recently they started small tea plantations as well. CEA and its partner SEWA (Socio-Educational Welfare Association) support these small tea growers. I think that’s good, because governments and CSOs tend to focus mainly on the big plantations. Of course, small tea growers aren’t automatically better growers or employers than the big ones. They often lack knowledge of sustainable production methods and markets, and don’t have the resources to ban child labour. They employ their own children during harvest time as well as the children of the day labourers. The small plantations try to sell as much as possible to the buyers, including the lower-quality leaves. This affects the quality of the tea and lowers the price. As a result, the tea sector in Assam is in a race to the bottom. When you buy tea in your supermarket, you don’t realise this. It’s a huge and complex problem. But a crisis often generates new solutions, so there is momentum to help the small tea growers out. CEA organised round tables in Kolkata, the main tea trading city in the country, with stakeholders like the Tea Board of India, tea traders, certifiers, large tea estates, small tea growers, civil society organisations and others to discuss the future of tea in India and its long term viability. A strong desire was expressed there to end the race to the bottom.’

Dicky de Morrée, lobby and policy advisor at ICCO
How to create better working conditions in a sector where few people are organised and producers ignore unions? Don’t fight but convince, proved to be the winning recipe in Benin. Although a little demonstration once in a while doesn’t hurt anyone…

‘Touches pas à mon karité’, says the banner carried by two men, hands off my shea! The banner covers the whole width of the street. About two hundred protestors, mainly women, march behind it. Their predominantly white clothes are contrasted by colourful headscarves. The sound of drums activates the protestors, who wave their bodies to the rhythm. Once in a while, they repeat the slogan on the banner, with such conviction you would think it concerned their own bodies: ‘Touches pas à mon karité!’
The protest signs they carry show pictures of chopped and burned trees. Red crosses on the pictures demonstrate that this is precisely what the protestors don’t want.

After crossing the centre of Djougou, the capital of the Donga department in north-western Benin, the protestors don’t slow down. They continue their march towards the outskirts of town where they’ll spend the night. They’re about to join their fellow protestors who have already arrived there. The plan is to lay siege to the factory in the hopes of convincing the owners to improve working conditions. The protestors will stay there as long as it takes. They will not give up until they achieve their goal.

The African shea tree (Vitellaria paradoxa) is widely spread in semi-arid regions in sub-Saharan Africa. It’s often called ‘the tree of life’ because of its special characteristics. The nuts it produces are used to extract a fat called shea butter. The butter serves a wide range of applications. It’s used in cosmetics like moisturisers, salves and lotions, as baking oil and as a medicine to heal wounds and cure colds, among other things.
Benin, the march stops in front of the prefecture. Everybody becomes silent as Adidjatou Tamou Saka, spokeswoman of the Femmes de l’Association Karité Benin, takes the floor. She emphasises the economic, ecological, medical and social value of shea and underlines that it’s the country’s third most important product, after cotton and cashew nuts. ‘Touches pas à mon karité!’ she says finally, raising her fist. Issaka Moussa Yaya, substitute of the prefect, dressed in a shiny purple tunic, affirms that it’s a noble struggle and that all mayors in the department should support it. While the palm trees in the background softly wave, the protestors return home in little groups. Their chatting echoes away on the warm streets of Djougou.

It’s no coincidence that the demonstrators were mostly women. The overwhelming majority of people who collect and process shea, or karité as it is locally known, are women. This is a labour-intensive and sometimes dangerous job. Shea is partly harvested in the wild, where there is always a risk of snake and scorpion bites and injuries. Processing it is time and energy consuming, especially when it comes to removing the shells. In Benin, about 500,000 women do this job, mostly in rural areas. They work both independently and in factories of agro-industrial businesses like FLUDOR, the largest shea and cashew processing company in Benin, and are weakly organised.

While demand is growing, especially in cosmetics, the supply is under threat as the shea tree is rapidly disappearing. This is due to climate change, illegal logging and the expansion of agro-industrial plantations. It’s estimated that up to half of Benin’s shea areal disappeared between 2005 and 2017.

New approach
For the Civic Engagement Alliance, this was reason to back the demonstration in Djougou, which took place in December 2018. The demonstration was part of a broad lobby and advocacy agenda covering both the local and the national levels and had two goals: protect the shea tree and improve working conditions in the sector. Together with local partners, CEA urged governments to protect the shea sector with legislation and sustainable park management. Shea butter producers were invited to provide safe working conditions and decent wages. Local partners organised caravans through all shea production regions with the active participation of local and national media. The emphasis in the campaign was on lobbying and advocating, not on fighting.

The campaign proved very successful. This is what it generated:

- CEA partner COSI (Confederation of Independent Trade Union Organisations) signed a memorandum of understanding with FLUDOR to improve the living and working conditions of 4,000 shea labourers. The memorandum is about education, protective equipment and health care, among other things. FLUDOR was initially reluctant to cooperate, as it had had a negative experience with a trade union who burned the company’s packaging manufacturing unit during a demonstration. But COSI showed the FLUDOR management that it can take advantage of well-trained and motivated workers. CNV Internationaal backed COSI in this process. CEA provided training on good practices within the private enterprise and enhanced workers’ awareness of the subsidised health-care system.

- As a result of an awareness-raising campaign by COSI, ten groups of producers of shea have
been formalised and 200 workers have registered for a mutual health insurance scheme. Dock workers working in very difficult conditions in the shea transport chain in the north of the country are being organised.
• COSI is working with the government to ratify the ILO Convention 129 on labour inspection in the agricultural sector.
• A public-private shea and cashew platform on the national level was established. It includes all parties and decision-makers involved. The platform meets quarterly to monitor progress and discuss new topics.
• An intended tax increase on shea nuts was suspended.

And the demonstrators in Djougou? They did not march in vain. Their protest prompted the prefect to create a platform for exchanges and dialogue, including the producers’ union AKB and all mayors in the shea districts.

‘We’re moving towards a unionism that uses lobby and advocacy strategies, which is much more suitable’

Ayicha Amoussa, president women’s committee of trade union COSI

Creating space

In Kakamega County, we have a group of women with HIV/AIDS. Before, their health wasn’t good. Because of the stigma that’s still attached to the disease, they felt ashamed and refused to take antiretroviral drugs. We talked a lot about nutrition with them. Healthy food can help them to feel better. Normally, they eat a lot of ugali (maize flour porridge, ed.). That fills your tummy, but your body needs more than that. Ugali causes a lot of hidden hunger in Kakamega. Soy is more nutritious but isn’t generally available there. We lobbied to include soy cultivation in the county development plan. Now the county and the Ministry of Health are supporting farmers to achieve this. We also raised awareness among women with HIV/AIDS about this. Together we developed recipes containing soy. They started baking cakes, among other things, and selling them in markets, earning some extra money this way. I saw them improve physically and mentally. They looked happier, sang, felt more confident and dared to present themselves. And rightly so, because HIV/AIDS is a disability of the blood, not of the person. The women now act as ambassadors of nutritious food. In fact, this was a bit outside the scope of CEA. The lesson for me is: you have to create space to listen to all groups that feel left out and let them air their views.’

Susan Githaiga,
Country manager of ICCO Kenya

Fighting fake seed

What’s even worse than having no seed to sow? Fake seed. Because then you’re paying but getting no results. That’s a problem farmers in Eastern Uganda regularly faced. The seeds they purchased at weekly markets often turned out to be fake. CEA member COU-TEDDO (Church of Uganda Teso Dioceses Planning and Development Office) decided to address this problem. His efforts facilitated a dialogue between farmers and local government departments and supported the establishment of twenty farmer groups. After being trained in advocacy, the groups demanded action from local governments. In meetings with sub-county and district leaders and input dealers, they learned to recognise fake seeds and how to access quality seeds. To maximise the yield of quality seeds, COU-TEDDO also supported farmers in improving planting practices, among other things.
Name: Phassy Mbone (60)
Profession: farmer
Lives in: Kakamega County, Kenya
Link with CEA: participates in the Kakamega County Nutrition Action Plan

As Phassy Mbone poses for a picture in her field, she has a hard time standing still: sometimes she just has to dance. ‘People call me Brenda Fassie,’ she says as she moves, ‘like the South African singer. Not only do we share the same name, but we are also like-minded in spirit.’

Phassy, a divorced mother of four, is a farmer in Kakamega County, Kenya. She’s participating in the Kakamega County Nutrition Action Plan. With this plan, which encourages farmers to diversify their crops, the county government hopes to stop malnutrition. The plan is supported by CEA. Phassy is well on track, as she demonstrates during a short tour of her 1.2 hectare farm.

‘On your right, you can see my goat shed, and behind it is my chicken run. On your left is my catfish pond. And back there you will see a big hole in the ground. That’s where the pond for the tilapias will be. They were here before, but one of the walls broke, so I lost all my fish.’

It’s clear: Phassy Mbone doesn’t put all her eggs in one basket. ‘If my crops fail or my goats die because of a disease, I will still have other ways of earning my daily bread,’ she proudly says. ‘I even have some land that I lease from someone who lives in town. That’s where I grow my soya beans. Before, I just had sugar cane on my field, like so many others. But if the going gets tough and there is no business, one cannot eat just sugar cane.’

Whenever Phassy needs help to work on her farm, she deliberately hires people who are HIV positive. She also advocates for their needs, together with the Western Organisation for People Living with HIV/AIDS (WOPLAH). WOPLAH members were trained by the Anglican Development Services, a member of the Civic Engagement Alliance, on how to engage in dialogue to get their voices to be heard. Successfully, according to Phassy: ‘We are now fully heard by the government.’

What’s her hope for the future? ‘I genuinely hope that farmers in Kakamega will become more self-reliant,’ she says. ‘That’s only possible if the government provides good seeds and the right fertilizer. But I’m optimistic. Our voice is getting stronger and more effective in influencing the government. This is extremely important, because farmers are the backbone of the nation.’ And then the Kenyan Brenda Fassie starts moving again.
Fighting child labour in times of COVID-19

The death toll of the COVID-19 pandemic might not be high in Kenya compared to other countries across the world, but the child labour toll is. In Kisumu County, near Lake Victoria, many people have lost their jobs. They urge their children to leave school and start working. The Kapuonja Child Labour Free Zone, supported by the Civic Engagement Alliance, is trying to stop this by making children aware of their rights.

1. Children from the Kapuonja Child Labour Free Zone during a sensitisation meeting

2. Community resource centre in Kapuonja, where community members can report cases of child labour

3. Susan Githaiga, Country Manager of ICCO Kenya, speaks to community members and local leaders

4. Roseline [24], who was rescued from child labour, now acts as a role model

5. Children develop messages to condemn child labour and child abuse
Is the corporate sector reluctant to conduct responsible business? Would legislation in the production countries be better than legislation here? Those were two of the questions we submitted to a Dutch parliamentarian, an Indonesian researcher, a Dutch expert and an entrepreneur.

CEA has been striving for a Dutch covenant on food. And it has paid off: a covenant on international responsible business conduct was concluded in May 2018. Yet since then, a growing number of people believe that covenants alone are not enough to get companies to practice due diligence. This includes Sigrid Kaag, the Dutch minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. In a policy document released last October, she proposed a mix of voluntary and mandatory measures, among them a due diligence obligation, preferably at the European level. CEA magazine organised a round table to jointly investigate the best way to ensure a world in which businesses behave responsibly and sustainably. We asked the four participants, Amalia Falah Alam, Joël Voordewind, Wietse Vroom and Manon Wolfkamp, to comment on five propositions.

Manon starts the discussion by underlining the relevance of international responsible business conduct (IRBC) at the moment. ‘In sixteen years of development cooperation, I have never experienced so much energy and momentum around a subject. It’s a hot topic, like a moving train. The only question is how and when it’s going to stop.’

Amalia Falah Alam is an Indonesian sociologist who does research and publishes on sustainability, with a special focus on the palm oil industry. She is country representative of CNV Internationaal and the Fair Wear Foundation in Indonesia.

Joël Voordewind is a member of the Dutch parliament on behalf of the ChristenUnie (Christian Union). He is author of a policy document that proposes national legislation on international responsible business conduct, obliging companies to practice due diligence.

Wietse Vroom is CEO of FairFruit, a fruit importer based in Belgium. His company signed the Sustainability Initiative Fruit and Vegetables (SIFAV), a covenant with over forty partners (retailers, brands, traders, and civil society organisations) in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

Manon Wolfkamp is a public affairs and sustainability expert. She has worked sixteen years in development cooperation, among others at ICCO, where she laid the foundations of the later CEA. She represents the MVO-platform (Platform on Corporate Social Responsibility), a network of Dutch civil society organisations and trade unions.

Proposition 1: Until now, the Dutch IRBC covenants have had little impact on people in the production countries.

Joël: ‘That’s a fact, not an opinion. Evaluation research has shown this. There have been a few documented effects, one of which is a project that was a result of the gold covenant, which addressed child labour in a Ugandan gold mine. In time, we may see more results like this, as the covenants haven’t been in force very long yet. I’m convinced that a due diligence law would improve the way covenants function. That’s why I’m about to introduce such a law.’

Manon: ‘Some covenants do have some impact on policymaking, risk assessment and communication, but until now they’ve had little impact on the ground.’

Amalia: ‘In an ongoing pilot project on palm oil in West Kalimantan, which is part of the
banking covenant, we discuss collective bargaining, social dialogue, labour rights and gender equality with local governments, trade unions, business associations, companies and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. So far, the effects are limited to capacity building and awareness raising. But indeed, there has been little impact on people on the ground. The impact of the covenants is indirect. What’s needed are intermediary tools such as company commitment, audits and due diligence.

**Wietse:** ‘For me, the glass is half full. I see importers paying attention to it and producers starting to reflect on issues such as child labour. But while we want to help them with social certification, for example, it’s often perceived as a burden. That’s ironic and needs to be fixed by the chain by looking beyond compliance and creating incentives for better production conditions. If you don’t do that, covenants will remain a checkbox exercise.’

**Manon:** ‘The problem with covenants like SIFAV, which are based on certification, is that they move the costs to the bottom of the chain, to the producers. The due diligence approach is more comprehensive and covers the entire chain. Certification can be part of it but can’t replace it. The big problem is: how do we get the majority of the corporate world to participate?’

**Joël:** ‘I’m not convinced the corporate sector is all that aware of what IRBC really means and entails. There may be companies that are reluctant, but I’m sure many more companies would be willing to apply IRBC standards if they had a clear idea what’s expected of them. In fact, this is one of the reasons why many companies welcome due diligence legislation.’

**Wietse:** ‘It’s not just reluctance, but it’s not ignorance either. IRBC is not rocket science. I think it’s a combination of ambiguity about what’s really needed to make supply chains more sustainable, and not being sufficiently focused. Most company directors are very busy.’

**Manon:** ‘I think it’s not high on their priority list. But I have to admit that integrating IRBC into the entire value chain can be complicated. I know an electronics company that has 12,000 suppliers. To them I would say: prioritise. Start with the gold, not with the printing paper.’

**Amalia:** ‘The fact that they’re not moving fast is because it’s voluntary, not mandatory, and because there are no rewards for the implementer.’

**Proposition 3. European regulation is the best pathway for ensuring a mandatory minimum level on IRBC.**

**Joël:** ‘Ultimately we need European regulation to ensure greater impact and a level playing field. But the surest and fastest way to get to European regulation is to have good national initiatives. If more European member states implement due diligence laws, the sooner and more likely it will be that these will also be implemented at the European level.’

**Manon:** ‘In the end, you need European regulations and a UN treaty. I see a national law as the best step towards European regulation. Everybody is looking at France now, which assigned the compliance to the courts. But that’s not in keeping with Dutch culture. In the Netherlands, we need an independent supervisory body and dynamic standards that are developed and discussed together.’

**Wietse:** ‘I agree. IRBC shouldn’t stop at the border, but as a strategy it’s good to start in the Netherlands.’

**Amalia:** ‘I agree too. But you have to amplify it to the production countries. You need tools such as trade agreements, multi-stakeholder initiatives and supplier audits.’

**Opponents of IRBC also advocate a European pathway…**

**Manon:** ‘Yes, as a delaying tactic. Five years ago, the employers said: IRBC, no way! A few years later they changed to: it’s up to the UN! And now they say Europe has to do it! It’s difficult not to get cynical about it. But the Dutch employers are more progressive with respect to this than their umbrella organisation in Brussels. And the latter can’t stop this train either.’

**‘I’m convinced that a due diligence law would improve the way covenants function’**
Proposition 4. Legislation in the production countries is more important for the people there than legislation and regulations in Europe.

Amalia: ‘Yes, of course. Companies in Indonesia will follow the national regulation. They will only follow international compliance standards if buyers are asking for it.’

Joël: ‘For me the same logic applies as in the previous statement: yes, legislation in production countries is important and is a goal we should strive for. But introducing legislation here is the best way to make sure legislation in production countries will follow one day. It sets standards for industries there. It will be in the interest of production countries to raise standards in order to facilitate doing business with European countries.’

Wietse: ‘The problem at the moment is that often national laws aren't good enough. Ethiopia doesn't have a minimum wage. A sister company of ours established a farm there. With the help of benchmarks they came up with a living wage themselves.’

Manon: ‘Watch out for cultural relativism! We’ve agreed on human rights worldwide. A local law might say that children can work from the age of twelve, but the ILO leaves no doubt: the minimum is fourteen. We need laws and voluntary instruments here and good laws and a vital civil society there. Multinationals can speed up the process. I once heard a Coca Cola representative say that they prefer laws over repeatedly convincing parties in the value chain.’

Why not just apply the severest national law as a company?

Wietse: Morally, you’re okay then. But you’re just one of the buyers. Businesses there can easily switch to another buyer. So you have to do this together.’

Proposition 5. There should be different rules for big enterprises (> 250 employees) than for small ones.

Amalia: ‘I agree, the rules for big enterprises should be more severe, because they have more capacity to comply. But the definition of big, medium and small varies across countries and sectors. The criteria shouldn’t be based only on the number of employees but also on the amount of capital, market coverage and so on.’

Manon: ‘A two-man operation can import vanilla from Madagascar: that’s a risky product and a risky sector. The same law should count for everybody. But in executing it, you can take into account a company’s size, nature and its place in the chain. I would leave that to a supervisory board.’

Wietse: ‘In principle I agree, but watch out that you don’t create paper walls. Before you know it, you’ll have raised trade barriers for small enterprises, also in low-risk sectors. I’m trying to work out this problem myself in a SIFAV working group.’

Joël: ‘The law that we’re working on right now would make due diligence mandatory, in principle for all companies. But we will be asking more from large companies, say from 250 employees or more. They will be required to go through the six steps of the due diligence process according to the OECD guidelines.’

‘If you don’t create incentives for better production conditions, covenants will stay a checkbox exercise’

‘You also need tools such as trade agreements, multi-stakeholder initiatives and supplier audits’
How to access the market and get a fair price for your crops? By organising yourselves and acting proactively. The Change the Game Academy taught small producers in Ethiopia how to do that.

What’s the link between a glass of Dutch beer and an Ethiopian farmer? The answer is barley. The Dutch beer brewer Heineken purchases barley from Ethiopian farmers. One of these farmers is Tura Tasheete. With his tanned skin, goatee and scarf draped around his head, he looks a bit like Bob Marley. Standing on his land, he tells about the two big problems he faced. One was the old-fashioned farming methods he practiced. ‘We used to work like our forefathers,’ Tasheete says. The second problem was that he didn’t get the right price for his barley. ‘The buyers offered half the value. The farmers were not benefiting. We were working more but earning less.’

That’s where CEA came in. On behalf of the alliance, 40 farmer cooperatives and 50 associations of (female) self-help groups were trained in Ethiopia. In accordance with CEA practice, Ethiopia could choose between different kinds of training activities, offered by the individual alliance members. Ethiopia opted for the Change the Game Academy (CtGA) from Wilde Ganzen (see box), combined with the disability inclusion training from Light for the World. During the course of the programme, the groups were also trained on Life Skills for Lobbying, a training programme developed by Edukans.
Change the Game Academy

Change the Game Academy (CtGA) is a blended-learning programme for civil society actors in low- and middle-income countries. Its aim is to make civic groups drivers of change by building local constituencies, making their voices heard and holding governments accountable. Lobbying and advocacy, and local fundraising are the two main ingredients. The training activities are a mix of practical exercises, sharing of experiences, debate, take-home assignments, brainstorming sessions and coaching. They are backed by an online platform which offers e-learning in four languages free of charge. During the training, an action plan is developed, based on a so-called problem tree analysis. Participants learn how to do this themselves for the future. The courses were co-created by Wilde Ganzen, KCDF (Kenya), Smile Foundation (India) and CESE (Brazil). For CEA, the trainers were trained on disability inclusion by Light for the World. This training was given by people who live with a disability themselves. The training activities were completed by a hands-on training on underlying skills that people need to be effective lobbyists: Life Skills for Lobbying, developed by Edukans.

The start wasn’t exactly easy, says Berhanu Demisse, executive director of the Development Expertise Centre [DEC], CtGA’s partner in Ethiopia, who was involved in training farmer groups under CEA. The first problem was the political context. ‘It was a confusing time in 2016 (under the authoritarian government of Hailemariam Desalegn Bashe, ed.). Resources were limited and foreign funding reduced. Change the Game is about lobbying and advocacy, and the regime didn’t accept that. So we had to call it “mobilising support.”’

Second, there was an execution problem. Most of the groups to be trained lived in remote areas without an internet connection and consisted partly of illiterate people. Berhanu: ‘Normally, we use PowerPoints and an online platform, but that wasn’t possible here. We decided to take their own reality as a starting point. We invited role models from the target group and let them tell their stories. We also invited the participants to play roles based on their own history. They liked that very much.’ The focus was on learning by doing. The groups, consisting of 15 to 20 participants, had to identify their challenges and present their own cases. The trainers made use of cascading: advanced participants who train others in their turn. One of the most frequently raised problems was access to the market and to finance. The farmers learned how to organise groups and negotiate the amount of credit and interest. Berhanu: ‘At first, they always looked to us, as if we would solve everything. But we showed them that there are hundreds of people behind them and they have collective strength.’

More inclusive

Part of the training was to stimulate the farmers to save some money. ‘Then we asked them to decide about the next step,’ says Bikila Ambaw, programme officer at DEC Ethiopia. ‘Are you going to apply for microcredit or do you go to a bank? They had to negotiate the interest themselves. Some succeeded in lowering it by two per cent.’ One out of six in the target group has a disability. They were trained together with the non-disabled. As a result, the cooperatives of farmers became more inclusive. 72 people with a disability, 30 of them women, joined cooperatives. At the same time, the people with a disability were encouraged to organise themselves separately. They established two cooperatives as well as an association of groups of disabled people. People with a disability also managed to secure land from the government. This is considered a real breakthrough, since they are heavily stigmatised in Ethiopia. Over time, the participants began acting more proactively. Various groups started a dialogue with the government and managed to gain access to fertilizers and better seed. Sometimes the farmers chose very practical ways to get in touch with the authorities. On one occasion, a group of potato growers was posted along the road when the regional president of Oromia drove by. They waved him down and asked for his attention. He stepped out of the car and talked to them. As a result, he linked them to potato merchants and a university.

Kindergarten

Stimulating local fundraising is one of the skills taught by the Change the Game Academy. Some groups made use of it. One group started to sell tea to tourists and managed to earn 100,000 birr, 2,200 euros this way. A self-help group which needed a kindergarten but lacked money, organised a fundraising event a year after the training. They managed to collect more than 300,000 birr, about 6,600 euros. And what about the price of the barley? The training programme inspired Tura Tasheete and his colleagues to enter into a dialogue with the government and Heineken. Bikila: ‘The government sets the barley price, but it admitted the farmers in the price setting committee. They succeeded in raising the price by 20 to 50 per cent.’

‘The buyers offered us half the value; we were not benefiting’
Indigenous communities in Cambodia resist land grabbing

No to the new road

L and grabbing is a major problem in Cambodia, for example in the rural province of Ratanakiri. Trained by CEA partners, indigenous communities here started to register their land borders, collect evidence of land grabbing and file official complaints. ‘It has made them more confident.’

A rooster crows loud and proud in the centre of the village. A small pig trudges slowly through the streets of dark red soil. Children pass by on their bicycles, laughing while they struggle to keep their balance. We are in Ta Ngach, in north-eastern Cambodia.

Sitting in the shadow of his wooden house, Cha Ai Trahen has just returned from a visit to the forest where he collected leaves for traditional medicines. Like most of his neighbours, Trahen has lived in Ta Ngach since he was born. The 57-year-old, a retired doctor who is part of the Kreung ethnic minority, wouldn’t want to live anywhere else. ‘But I’m worried about our forest. I’m afraid we will lose more land,’ he says.

Official complaint

Trahen’s concerns are directly related to one of Cambodia’s biggest social problems: land conflicts. Over the past two to three decades, land conflicts have arisen everywhere in this

Ratanakiri

Ratanakiri lies in north-eastern Cambodia. Bordering Laos and Vietnam, it’s one of Cambodia’s most rural and mountainous provinces. The highland villages of Ratanakiri are home to several ethnic minority groups, such as the Kreung, Jarai and Tampuan. Many people in Ratanakiri depend on agriculture. Because boundaries are unclear and the area is rich with natural resources, land conflicts occur regularly.
country. In most cases, it’s the poor who lose their land to the rich and powerful, who in return often promise compensation that is rarely adequate. Intimidation and threats are common in land conflicts, and sometimes they result in violence.

In Ratanakiri, land grabs aren’t unusual either. In the villages Ta Ngach, Krey, Koy, Kancheung and Mas, the biggest threat is a group of powerful business people who are looking to take 400 hectares of land, which they reportedly want to build plantations on. ‘They promised that in return they will build a new road, a bridge and a school, but it’s impacting our community land and forest, so we don’t want it,’ Trahen says.

Moving quickly, the former doctor gets up from his seat, walks into his home and returns with a handful of documents. Among them is an official complaint that several villagers in Ta Ngach and in the neighbouring village Mas signed to raise their concerns about the speculator’s plan. ‘Over the years we sent several complaints to the authorities, the last time in October of this year. But sometimes the government doesn’t even respond to our concerns.’

Illegal activities

Several CEA partners (see box) help the villagers to strengthen their position. During the different training activities offered by these NGOs, which so far have drawn over 500 participants, villagers learned how to register their land borders with GPS, for example, collect evidence of land grabbing and file an official complaint. ‘It’s thanks to these training activities that we know about the forest law, and that we learned how to solve a conflict without getting a court involved,’ says farmer Tang Hem. He lives in Kreh, another rural village in Ratanakiri, where it sometimes feels as if modern times haven’t arrived yet. There is limited electricity, no cars, and almost the entire village depends on rice and cashew nut farming.

Saing Ory (42)

‘As a Kreung minority, I have lived in the same village for my entire life. My family depends on farming and on natural resources from the forest, like mushrooms and wild bananas. I have just followed a two-day training course where I learned more about patrolling the forest, how to use GPS and how to read a map. This is very important for us, because there are a lot of illegal activities in the forest and if we know how to use a map and how to pin a location with GPS it’s easier to document a forest crime like illegal logging.’

Saing Ory says that thanks to the NGO training it has gotten easier to mobilise the community to ensure that all villagers are on the same side and have the same information. Others say they now actively use GPS to know exactly where the borders of their land are, and to pin a location when they see illegal activities in the forest.

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They come with a lot of money, and they have good connections with the authorities.

**Trees everywhere**

In the nearby village of Koy, a group of people has gathered to chat, drink and smoke. 72-year-old Sal Barnuy is among them. Despite her age, Barnuy still moves around quite easily. ‘When I was young, there were trees everywhere. The forest provided us with all we need,’ she says. ‘But much of it is gone already. If we lose more forest, life is going to be even more difficult. That’s why we need to protect it.’

‘**Sometimes the government doesn’t even respond to our concerns**’

Leng Sarorn
development watch program manager at Equitable Cambodia

‘EC has been providing training activities in Ratanakiri since 2018 with support from ICCO. Our training, which takes place in twelve different villages, teaches the local affected indigenous population negotiation and communication skills. We see, as a result, that they’re able to organise meetings and have the ability to engage with different stakeholders, such as the government and companies that want to use their land unlawfully. It takes a long time to resolve land conflicts. But the workshops boost the community representatives’ confidence. In the past, they were often very shy. Now they’re much more capable of drawing attention to their case. Companies that want their land now recognise them and realise they need to talk with them.

We work closely together with the Non-Timber Forest Products organisation (NTFPI), the Cambodian Indigenous Peoples Organisation (CIPO) and the Community Legal Education Center (CLEC). Although we conduct our workshops separately, we communicate with each other and cooperate with regard to advocacy goals.’

**Selfie**

‘**We managed to place human rights on the agendas of big companies working in Indonesia’s palm oil and spice sector. These companies initially considered human rights as an additional cost, but after our lobby interventions they started to understand that these rights are part of their competitive advantage. I’m not claiming that all companies in Indonesia, especially those working in the palm oil sector, are now human rights defenders. That would be a big dream. But still, we’ve made great progress, particularly in the spice sector. We specifically focused on banning child labour. A lot of people in Indonesia say this is “children helping their parents”, not child labour. We therefore introduced a zero-tolerance policy, saying: don’t bring your children to the fields to carry out economic activities and receive a salary. We convinced big companies, like Verstegen, to agree on third-party monitoring to avoid child labour. Monitoring also depends on community awareness, so we recently established a sustainable spice initiative, where outsiders will do the social monitoring for their local suppliers. So the third party is not us, it’s not ICCO, it’s not CEA’s partners, but the public who can keep an eye on supplier practices, the reality in the fields and on the farms. This has never happened before in Indonesia, so I consider this a major milestone.**’

Kiswara Prihandini,
Country manager of ICCO Indonesia

‘**Sustainable spices**’
The other side: Wilmar

‘Our intentions are aligned’

Improving working conditions on Indonesian palm oil plantations was one of the alliance’s goals. Member CNV Internationaal and its Indonesian partner Hukatan therefore started a dialogue with Wilmar, one of the world’s largest palm oil producers. How did Perpetua George, general manager of Group Sustainability at Wilmar, experience that?

Ms George, do you remember how your dialogue with CNV Internationaal and Hukatan started?

‘In June 2017, CNV Internationaal published its report ‘Palming Off Responsibility’ (about labour rights violations in the Indonesian palm oil sector, ed.). That was around the European Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, which I was attending. Accompanied by Ms Daphne Hameeteman, Wilmar’s sustainability lead for Europe, we scheduled a meeting with CNV at their office in Utrecht while I was in the region.’

What did you expect from that?

‘We were not necessarily expecting CNV to want to meet us, as some organisations prefer not to directly engage with oil palm companies. However, CNV agreed to do so, together with the researchers of the report, which was a clear sign to me that CNV wanted to engage constructively on the issues raised in their report.’

And how did you engage with Hukatan?

‘We did not previously have direct engagements with Hukatan. We were able to initiate one through the local CNV representative in Indonesia, following our meeting with CNV. Subsequently, we were able to help Hukatan establish local chapters in our operations in Riau and West Kalimantan. We’ve even collaborated with them in developing a standard Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) template, which we have now rolled out in our operations.’

Did it feel like being the target of a lobbying campaign?

‘Wilmar is highly experienced in being the target of campaigns, as we’re considered to be a “trigger company”, a company that can trigger further action in the wider industry. But we never really get used to being targeted, because often it creates a dreadful sense of frustration. Most campaigners aren’t interested in constructive engagements nor in finding solutions. It was, however, a different experience with CNV, who put lots of effort in identifying and developing solutions to move forward.’

What is the dialogue with CNV Internationaal and Hukatan accomplishing?

‘Being a union confederation, CNV is familiar with the fact that workers’ issues rely on strong industrial relations. In countries where we operate, industrial relations have yet to reach the same levels as in developed countries, where unions first emerged during the industrial revolution. We understand that unions and worker representatives need time to grow and mature, which is why we recognise the key role played by both CNV and Hukatan. I’m confident that in a few years’ time, the unions in Indonesia will be as experienced and mature as they are in Europe, ushering in a new chapter in industrial relations and collective bargaining.’

What do you consider the greatest added value of your contacts?

‘That it helps to reduce or address potential concerns, such as workers’ strikes, which can be rather costly to operations. The CBA template has also been beneficial in establishing the standard starting point for when CBAs are up for review. This reduces the time to develop a new CBA, as the template is pre-negotiated and covers major areas of concern for workers and their unions.’
‘We never really get used to being targeted, because often it creates frustration’

You shared your positive experiences with CNV and Hukatan with third-party suppliers, by inviting speakers of Hukatan in capacity building sessions. Are you doing this more often now?

I must say that this wasn’t something we had done prior to 2017. It boils down to trust, which we’ve built up with the unions. Since then, we’ve included union representatives regularly in our sessions with suppliers. We invited them to provide their perspectives on labour rights and child protection within estates.’

‘Collective action is the only way to go for sustainability and change’, you have said. How do you define collective action?

‘There is a concept in Indonesia and Malaysia known as Gotong-Royong. That’s about a collective responsibility towards a community. Members of the community come together to clean their surroundings, for example. In the same spirit, unions, NGOs and government representatives need to come together to engage in a constructive manner. This is how it should be if we want to have a sustainable approach to improving workers’ rights and sustainability.’

On a scale of zero to ten, from enemy to close friend, how did you perceive CNV and Hukatan at the beginning and how do you perceive them now?

‘Ooh, that’s a tough one. When the report first came out, maybe it was a 1 – mainly because we didn’t know each other, and we felt attacked. After the meeting in Utrecht, it was a 3, and after that it became a 5 because CNV wanted to help make actual changes on the ground. Since developing the CBA template, I think it’s a solid 7. To be honest, it’s not a good thing to be best friends either. Where we are now is a good place to be. We respect each other as organisations and as professionals, and we can raise issues with each other. While things can get a bit heated around the negotiating table, we all know and recognise that our intentions are actually aligned.’

‘Behind us, there is nothing’

‘Only a few people visit us here. We are the furthest away. Behind our thatched-roof houses, there is nothing.’ In late February 2020, I met farmer Moses Engesu and his wives on their land, a fifth of a hectare in size, in Soroti county, Uganda, while their innumerable children started to surround me. That’s when I realised I had entered a place that can easily be overlooked by (county) government officials and development practitioners.

Over the last four years, the Civic Engagement Alliance’s work focused on strengthening the position of excluded groups, such as Mr Engesu’s farmers group, in more than twelve countries worldwide. I took over the job as CEA’s point of contact at the ‘Inclusive Green Growth’ department at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in late 2019. I was fortunate to be able to interact with CEA’s local partners FAPAD (Facilitation for Peace and Development) and TEDDO (Teso Dioceses Planning and Development Office) in Uganda just before the Covid-19 pandemic started. During my visit, Mr Engesu explained how CEA partners had taught him and his farming neighbors good agricultural practices, and helped them to engage with community leaders on matters of priority to the farmers.

My visit and interactions with CEA colleagues made me realise three things. One is the importance of teaming up with the right partners that have the mandate and the substance to press the necessary buttons to achieve more inclusive development. Another is the importance of focus. Long-term change is often hard to achieve, so you have to decide what you can do, and what you can’t do. And the third is the importance of exchanging information on different levels, including with the Dutch Ministry. During an unpredictable shock, such as the Covid-19 crisis, we need information before we can act. We’ve benefited from information coming via our CEA colleagues, who were still the eyes and ears on the ground, and who helped us to understand the impact of Covid-19 on food and nutrition security worldwide.

Ida Rademaker
Policy officer Food & Nutrition Security at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Improving the position of small-scale farmers. The military regime neglected the interests of the agricultural sector for a long time. Being the world’s second producer (after India) of beans and pulses, Myanmar has good export opportunities. But until recently, exports were limited to neighbouring countries. To be able to connect to the global market, better regulations on food safety, quality and sustainable agricultural practices were needed. CEA helped brand new farmers’ organisations as advocates of these regulations and more government support for small-scale farmers. CEA partners entered into dialogue with the government, which was new for all parties. It led to more and better consultation with and more technical support for the farmers. Small-scale farmers managed to comply with Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) standards which enabled them to export to the European Union. They also were able to get a better price for their beans and build up a better position towards the traders.

Developing disability-inclusive training activities and a toolkit. CEA helped its partners the Network Activities Group (NAG) and Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS) to adopt disability-inclusive development training modules. NAG incorporated them into their monthly New Graduate training sessions, which they provide to recent university graduates interested in working in the development sector. KMSS decided to make its human resources policies and practices (such as hiring for new positions) more inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities. CEA also developed a Disability-Inclusion Toolkit. It helps mainstream organisations include people with disabilities and increase women’s participation. The toolkit contains practical tools for use throughout project cycles, from situational analysis and data collection to final evaluation. It’s useful for any organisation that wishes to design and implement inclusive projects and policies.
The power of a poster

In the Indian state of Assam, CEA supported women’s groups that advocated for Anganwadi centres, rural child-care centres. These centres provide care for young children and pregnant and lactating mothers. The CEA team decided to make a poster as part of an awareness campaign. Indian artist Ms Pooja Dhingra designed it, using gonad tribal art. The CEA team presented the poster to decision makers, among others, in order to provide equitable access to nutrition by pregnant and lactating mothers and their children. The poster also served as an internal guideline. The campaign paid off: the women’s groups managed to establish thirty kitchen gardens at the Anganwadi centres, kitchen gardens were included in government policy and the campaign received an Innovation Challenge Award from UN World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Feeding India and 1-Gen.
Tohidul Islam lives in the far north of Bangladesh. With his wife, son and daughter-in-law - his daughter has already left the house - he occupies a house in the village of Keshabpur. It is a simple house, built of brick and it has a tin roof. There is electricity but no running water. In his courtyard and beside the kitchen, Tohidul and his wife grow beans and gourd.

Apart from this garden of about 0.04 hectares, Tohidul has no land. Working as a sharecropper, his livelihood is insecure. His situation is similar to that of many farmers and agricultural workers in this poor and predominantly agricultural region. That's why Tohidul was eager to follow a lobbying and advocacy training course offered by CEA partner Nijera Kori in 2019. The five-day training was meant to help landless people get access to state-owned land, so-called khas land, preferably with access to water needed for irrigation. During the training, Tohidul learned about land laws, application procedures and communication with governments, among other things.

The training helped Tohidul gain access to 0.04 hectares of khas land. Together with his wife, he started cultivating rice and vegetables there. Soon, their monthly income increased from 2,500 taka (25 euros) to 3,000 taka (30 euros).

The training also changed Tohidul's life in another way. He became chairman of a group of landless people called Bhumihin Samity (Landless Association). In his region, about 400 landless people (190 female and 212 male) are organised this way. 'We represent the marginalised,' says Tohidul. 'We're the voice of injustice in society.' Other members of the association also got access to khas land. 'They have built homes there, and cultivate seasonal vegetables and rice. Their income has increased as well.'

When asked what makes him happy, Tohidul mentions the songs created and sung by the landless farmers about their lives and struggles. He often dreams of their future, which he is more optimistic about now. Tohidul has his own dreams as well. 'I want to work till my last breath so I don't need support from others. But I would also like to travel to different places. I don't have enough time or money to do that, but I always dream about it.'
Religion is back on track

Religion has made a comeback in development cooperation. In the past years, it has turned from something negligible into something that really has to be reckoned with. This has put faith-based organisations back in the game.

With over 80% of the world’s population adhering to religious convictions, faith-based organisations (FBOs) represent a large constituency, including some of the most marginalised groups and inhabitants of remote areas. This large constituency gives them credibility when they talk ‘in the name of’. They are also able to give a voice to the voiceless. The space for FBOs to advocate for the improvement of marginalised groups’ social-economic situation may therefore be larger than that of most secular NGOs. It’s not surprising that FBOs have made a come-

back as important stakeholders in the fight against poverty and marginalisation in recent years. Even the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises their importance.

Most FBOs aren’t merely relevant because of their sizeable constituency. They don’t ‘fly in, do their thing and leave again’. FBOs build long-standing relationships with local communities, working in a participative way and responding to deeper layers of conviction. Thus, they can considerably increase secular NGOs’ space by backing their campaigns.

Unexpected allies

Religious people speak the language of common people. Religious actors, FBOs, Christian churches and faith organisations with other religious backgrounds are able to translate
Faith-based organisations

Faith-based organisations are CSOs that work with a mission and vision inspired by religion. Religion mostly refers to recognised world religions such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. However, there is also a broad diversity of indigenous religions with whom FBOs may connect and who may fight for recognition. Religious inspiration is evident in FBOs’ governance, objectives, activities, networks and constituencies.

Added value

The added value of FBOs is well reflected in conflict mitigation, among other things. But such a role requires recognition. Take Ethiopia. In the repressive climate that existed there before Prime Minister Abiy took office, churches of different denominations came together with former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe to discuss their need for a policy for FBOs. Simon Haile, commissioner of the development wing of the Evangelical Kale Heywat Church, said at the time: ‘We know that you need us, as a church, for every aspect, for example for conflict resolution and health issues. If you need us, allow us! And make us independent so that we can play our roles.’

Administration, which doesn’t allow indigenous religions. FBOs are thus enhancing the space for civil society and indigenous people throughout Indonesia.

Special envoy

CEA initiated different studies related to the role and position of FBOs. They’re available on the website (see bottom of this article). Forthcoming is a publication called Moral leadership in times of crisis. Inspirational interviews with faith actors. It aims to inspire duty bearers with people’s stories from around the globe. The interviews show the close link between their individual life journeys and vital aspects of civic space in their societies.

CEA did direct its lobbying efforts towards the Dutch government as well, influencing the debates and narratives in civil society development circles, and contributing input and knowledge to knowledge centres. Together with ACT Alliance, CEA supports the Chair on Religion and Development at the Free University (Vrije Universiteit) in Amsterdam. This Chair has strongly facilitated FBOs’ ability to develop scientific knowledge in their enduring work to build peaceful, just, sustainable and resilient societies.

For the Civic Engagement Alliance, working with FBOs goes without saying. The alliance initially concentrated on convincing stakeholders that FBOs are not old-fashioned, outdated agencies that can be ignored as development partners. Over the years, CEA has moved from this defensive type of lobbying to a more proactive, positive and inviting strategy, based on the conviction that secular CSOs and duty bearers and planners are really missing out on a vital ally if they decline to work with FBOs.

Civic space is shrinking worldwide. FBOs are uniquely positioned to address the needs of this era. CEA has contributed to a new debate on civil society actors, challenging CSOs to identify ‘unexpected allies’ and reconsider old ways of thinking and evaluating. This era needs new strategies. CEA believes in dialogue, not in confrontation. And it’s paying off. That’s evident from developments in Indonesia where, thanks to a joint statement by the four main faith-based networks, the government was willing to discuss ways to review the criticised Law on Civil Administration of Religious Worship, which had effectively given the church a veto power on religious matters.

Hailemariam agreed and asked the churches to submit a formal appeal. But when it came to implementation, he resigned. Under the Abiy regime, which amplified civic space, the churches have decided to wait a while before continuing their lobby for special FBO status.

The crux of Simon Haile’s cry for help is: when you recognise the importance of FBOs, it means that you need them. This implies that you have to enter into dialogue with them and give them room to operate. It does NOT mean: instrumentalise them in such a way that they fit exactly into your frameworks and working methods. Then you’re not doing them justice. That’s what civic space is really about: also allowing organisations that don’t say what you want to hear.

Further reading

- If You Need Us, Allow Us!, 2018, Annette Jansen, https://civicengagementalliance.org/content/6-resources/if-you-need-us-allow-us.pdf
- Religious Literacy in Development Cooperation, https://civicengagementalliance.org/content/6-resources/religious-literacy-in-development-cooperation.pdf
Legitimacy is at the soul of lobbying programmes. It means being transparent, proving your points and making it clear in whose name you speak, among other things. How did CEA achieve this?

For CEA, legitimacy in lobbying means having the right and justification to speak on behalf of others, thereby exercising their voice. This is not an automatic right: you have to earn it and reconfirm it. Otherwise your lobbying targets simply won’t believe you and you will lose your constituency. It also implies creating space for people to have a voice in and over processes and decisions that affect their lives.

What gave CEA’s lobbying activities legitimacy? There are two main factors:

- the lobbying was evidence-based
- the constituency was actively involved

This relates strongly to the identity of the CEA members and was expressed in the programme’s theories of change. The two - gathering evidence and involving the constituency - go hand in hand. Indeed, CEA defines ‘evidence-based’ as being ‘built on evidence from the field’. The partners and their constituencies produce the evidence to substantiate the lobbies for CEA’s four pathways (civic space, the right to adequate food, small producer empowerment and creating a sustainable private sector).

To strengthen lobbying capacities on the local, regional and national levels, CEA focused strongly on capacity development. This enabled partners and their constituencies to start lobbying activities themselves or to be actively involved in them. CEA also helped to strengthen partner organisations and their constituencies for this reason. This included supporting them in organising local funding and working with like-minded parties or in multi-stakeholder platforms.

Sense of ownership

How did CEA exercise legitimate lobbying in practice? This was basically defined by two elements: the local context and the nature of the lobbying goal. For example, in economic projects such as making tea production in India more inclusive and rights-based, CEA considered working through a multi-stakeholder platform to be the best option. When you deal with a value chain, consisting of parties with different interests, it’s good to have them all at the table. It helps to make them aware of both common and diverging interests, work together on these shared interests vis-à-vis third parties and create a sphere of trust.

But when it comes to conquering civic space, such as better youth participation in Guatemala, CEA preferred working with like-minded parties, such as youth organisations and CSOs working with youth and children. Then the issue isn’t overcoming different interests but making each other stronger, in order to better lobby and advocate for the common goal.

Did working this way pay off? CEA requested research institutes to look into the legitimacy of its lobbying. They answered questions such as: are assumptions on legitimate lobbying explicitly expressed in the theory of change, and implicitly present in the style of working of the organisations, and have the underlying assumptions proven to be correct? A study by INTRAC, an international research centre based in Oxford, underlined the importance of local fundraising, one of the main ingredients of the Change the Game training programme. ‘If CSOs can mobilise more support locally, then their legitimacy in the eyes of local populations, duty-bearers and power-holders will be increased,’ according to the INTRAC study. ‘They will therefore be better placed to advocate on behalf of citizens and to hold accountable those with power. This should have a positive effect on civic space.’

Strong feature

The INTRAC study stresses that local fundraising can stimulate downward accountability, social capacity, trust and a sense of ownership among
community members. It can also lead to other, improved relationships with the state and the private sector, and create new spaces and platforms for collective action. Political actors are more receptive to CSOs that show local support, according to the study. But INTRAC also warns that local fundraising could lead to new forms of dependency for CSOs, for example when they’re backed by local companies. An important warning, because the most important capital of CSOs is not their budget but their credibility.

The external end evaluation of the CEA programme also contains positive remarks on lobbying and legitimacy, beginning with the membership composition of CEA and its cooperation with faith-based partners. ‘The legitimacy of CEA’s lobbying and advocacy work is anchored in these partner networks and their constituencies.’ According to the evaluators, evidence-based advocacy was a strong feature in all country programmes and their constituencies. ‘According to the evaluators, evidence-based advocacy was a strong feature in all country programmes and their constituencies.’ The multi-stakeholder approach, for example practiced in the palm oil sector in Indonesia, helped ‘to maximise the results of its lobbying and advocacy actions.’

Gathering evidence and involving your constituency are indispensable for legitimacy. Local fundraising adds to this, just like working with like-minded parties or in multi-stakeholders settings. It’s a fine art, lobbying, and each time again you have to define the best ways and means to be successful. But in the end, it’s all about legitimacy.

Further reading
Analysing the relationship between domestic resource mobilisation and civic space: Results of a scoping study, April 2019, Emmanuel Kumi and Rachel Hayman, INTRAC for civil society. https://tinyurl.com/y68ne42v

Legitimacy is not automatic: you have to earn and reconfirm it

Civic action for inclusion, economic value chains, equal access, distribution of income, production gains. Men and women more empowered, and disabled show their strengths, voices marginalized, louder now claim justice in the end.

Bottom up and based on practice, ‘t gives our work legitimacy, grassroots sprouting into action, harvest: solidarity.

Messages in name of many, multi-stakeholder support, constituencies engendered extra power; mark our words!

Proud to be part of this process, lobby and advocacy, stepping stones for equal progress: rights and human dignity. And our earth bit more sustain’ble, valuing variety, small steps that we helped enable towards strong societies.

Not the end of our engagement, although CEA ceases to be. Lessons learned still guide our actions, people escape poverty, having voice in and voice over processes and policies that affect their fate and future. That’s our living legacy!

Text: Piet Posthuma. Melody: Alle Menschen werden Brüder
Manq’a in Bolivia teaches youngsters how to cook and live

Changing the world through food

If you find your way in gastronomy, you will find your way in life. That, in a nutshell, is the philosophy of the Bolivian social enterprise Manq’a. Thousands of youngsters have been trained in cooking, entrepreneurship and lobbying. They now act as ambassadors of fine and healthy dining - and of Manq’a itself.

It was a dream come true. In five months, I learned to cook with Bolivian recipes and products. Now I know that eating isn’t the same as feeding. I’ve managed to get my family to eat nutritious foods that we didn’t know before.’ Rosmery Maquera, a young Bolivian, talks enthusiastically about her Manq’a training. She wears a grey-brown headscarf and apron with five coloured cubes on it, Manq’a’s corporate identity. Manq’a, Aymara for food, is the name of the Bolivian CEA partner that helps youngsters find their way working in a restaurant or in catering, or to become entrepreneurs. Well, that’s the formal goal; in fact, gastronomy is more of a means than an end in this case. Manq’a uses the gastronomic training to raise the self-esteem of vulnerable youngsters and to provide them with opportunities, with the support of a comprehensive training model. And that’s necessary, because 40 per cent of the Bolivian population is between 10 and 29 years old, and unemployment rates among youth reach 10 to 15 percent – figures that are on the rise because of COVID-19.

Manq’a has high aspirations: ‘We think it’s possible to change the world through food’

Five courses

Another of Manq’a’s goals is to promote sustainable agriculture and make the population aware of its importance. Manq’a students act as ambassadors for this goal, by creating recipes with Bolivian ingredients and promoting their use. Successfully so, according to former student Gabriel Raul Quispe. ‘I learned to appreciate how the campesinos take care of their crops. They let us taste fresh food without any chemicals, coming directly from the fields. It was great fun eating something so natural.’

Fresh, healthy food is indispensable in Bolivia, where according to data from the Ministry of Health, 63 per cent of the population has bad nutritional habits. This causes widespread preventable diseases such as obesity and diabetes.

Manq’a was established in 2014 in El Alto. It was an initiative of ICCO and the Bolivian foundation The Melting Pot and kick-started by the Dutch Postcode lottery. El Alto (at an elevation of 4,150 metres) is a cold suburb of the capital La Paz, one of the highest cities in the world. It’s a magnet for migrants coming from the countryside. Many youngsters grow up in El Alto without a decent education, work or food. Manq’a not only teaches them how to cook but also helps them develop their personality and find their way in society, strengthening their network, for example.

Wildfire

When Manq’a partnered with CEA, the idea was to focus more on lobbying and advocacy, and have these efforts also target the government, business life and the population, in addition to youngsters. Since then, the Manq’a concept has spread like wildfire. Following are a selection of its campaigns and initiatives:

> The Manq’a Youth Collective started its own radio programme, Don’t tell me! on Bolivian radio station Erbol. The youngsters write and record the programme themselves. They aim to make young people aware of the possibilities education, employment and healthy eating.
In March 2020, during our last live meeting, something happened that really made me happy. With a group of youngsters, we were discussing the national youth policy and the steps needed to get a youth law approved. During an outside activity in the evening, we told each other about our struggles, not only organisational but also personal ones. There was a question round, in which everybody explained what motivated him or her. A candle was passed around as a talking stick. A young woman told us that she was one of the survivors of the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción tragedy (an orphanage in which 41 girls died in a fire in 2017, ed.). She still had nightmares and found it very difficult to take part in daily life. But she said the space for dialogue we offered helped her. Not since the tragedy had she been this close to a fire as now, holding a candle in her hand. But she saw it with different eyes now: like a light in a dark night. That was a very valuable moment for me. I realised that each step you take, no matter how small, can have a great impact on others. I won’t forget that.

Thanks to the space given to us by institutions like SODEJU, we can grow, not only academically but also humanly.

Mirna Patricia Pú Guerrero,
teacher and youth leader in Guatemala
Leadership’s in the blood

Name: Sara Omi Casama (34)
Profession: lawyer, president of the General Emberá Congress of Alto Bayano
Lives in: Ipetí Emberá, Panama
Link with CEA: Coordinator of the Gender Commission of CEA partner Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (MAPF)

‘I’ll show you around the house,’ says Sara when asked how she lives. Filming with her smartphone, she shows the big traditional wooden house on piles. It has a thatched roof and is open at the sides. Three generations live here together, among them her mother and grandfathers: a total of 25 people. They wave and say hello when they see the camera.

The interview had to be postponed because hurricane Iota hit the region. Many villages of the Emberá, the indigenous people Sara belongs to, were damaged. ‘Houses, a health-care centre, a school, crops, they were all flooded,’ Sara says. ‘The water has been contaminated and there is a shortage of food.’ As a leader of her community, she is helping with the recovery effort.

The story of Sara’s leadership started some decades ago. When her mother was nine, her family had to leave their village because of the construction of a hydroelectric power plant. This injustice motivated Sara’s mother to become the first female cacique (chief) of the Emberá. ‘Because of that, I already felt a leader when I was still in my mother’s belly,’ Sara smiles. As a child, she wanted to become a lawyer, to defend the rights of her people. Not being Catholic, she had to become a nun to be able to study law in a private Catholic university. ‘It was the first time I ever left my village,’ she says. ‘I had to learn western habits, like not bathing in the river and not telling stories about rabbits and tigers during dinner.’

Living in Panama City made her increasingly aware of the strength of her roots. Her placenta and navel cord are buried under the stairs of her house, underlining her ties with her birthplace. Although the Emberá live in protected areas and have communal rights, they still suffer from invaders, wanting to occupy their territories for farming. ‘They’re not only making us lose our territory, but also our identity.’

Sara says she has a ‘double preoccupation’, one to defend the rights of the community and one to defend the rights of women. She can easily merge the two, demanding respect for indigenous territories and women’s rights at the same time. Exchanging experiences with other indigenous leaders in the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests helps her a lot.

In March, a new cacique will be elected. Sara will paint her face then with the blue-black juice of the jagua fruit, which gives power and drives away evil spirits. But she won’t be a bystander: she’s a candidate. ‘I really want to become the second female cacique after my mother,’ she says with fighting spirit. Then she sways the camera through the house again, allowing her relatives to wave goodbye.
The right to be young

In Guatemala, over half of the population is younger than 24. But young people’s voices are barely being heard. CEA aimed to increase youth participation, with a special focus on youth from indigenous communities, who are often excluded and marginalised. Young people claimed a place in public policy with campaigns such as Ser Joven es un Derecho (Being Young is a Right).

1. Change the Game training in 2019

2. Youth organisations SODEJU, FNJ and the Youth Committee of trade union PSI meet with the youth commission of the Congress

3. Teacher and youth leader Mirna Patricia Pú Guerrero leads a workshop with youth on Guatemala’s south coast

4. March of youngsters in Guatemala City, part of the campaign Ser Joven es un Derecho

5. The training activities aimed at mobilising support and local fundraising
One of my first CEA programme visits was in Ethiopia in 2016. The board of the Ethiopian self-help groups welcomed us, a delegation of Dutch CEA and Ministry of Foreign Affairs representatives, with Ethiopian coffee and lively songs. One year later, we were welcomed in Mali, in a totally different setting, discussing the goals of the CEA programme in a panel with three national ministers. But the words of welcome and the expectations were the same.

Being welcomed is good and heart-warming, but at the same time it feels embarrassing somehow, to be welcomed as a donor, expected to bring change. What I love about the CEA programme is that we challenge power relations. Change is not brought about by a donor, by an alliance of Dutch organisations. Change comes from all these farmers, women and youth, these community groups and trade unions, that have the courage to engage in dialogue. To create the changes that are relevant for them, for their children, for their future. The people that have the courage to speak truth to power, to take decisions that are just, right, inclusive and empowering.

Eily Urban
programme manager Civic Engagement Alliance

Last week, I felt grateful when I welcomed colleagues and partners in our CEA Stories of Change Festival. Around 85 people, from all over the world, inspired, hopeful, professional and visionary. I’m proud of the stories of self-help groups sitting at the table with their local government, being respected, being heard. Proud of stories of farmer groups, clearly expressing to a minister what they need. Our CEA programme is coming to an end, but civic engagement will not end here. Thank you, all of you who engaged in dialogue, in advocacy, in change, as part of our CEA programme. You are welcome.

Overview CEA countries / themes plus partners

Bangladesh: Nijera Kori, Helvetas
Bangladesh, TLMB, CSA for Sun, and RF Bangladesh.

Benin: DEDRAS, AKB, PASCIB, and COSI

Bolivia: Manqu’s, IPDRS, CERDET and CBDE

Cambodia: GRET, EC, CLEC, NTFP, CLC, CAWF, CIPO, LFTW, and FAPD.

Central America SODEJU, Frente Nacional de Juventud (FNJ), AMPB, MTC Nicaragua:

Ethiopia: EKHC-DC, WKHC-TDA, EUCORD, FC (Facilitator for Change), HUNDEE, OSRA, and AFP

India: VANI, VHAI, SRIJAN, Save the Children

Indonesia: NGO Kounsils, Penabula, PKPA, HUKATAN, KPSHK, SPKS, Koalisi Rakyat untuk Kedaulatan Pangan (KRKP)

Kenya: KDCF, AYT, KAAACR, ACCAID and ADS-W

Mali: AMASSA, OMAES, CAEB

Myanmar: NAG, CESD, KNMS Yangoon, Rattana Metta Organization (RMO), Ratan Ayar Development Association (RDA)

Uganda: COU-TEDDO, FAPAD, SAO, PAG-Soroti, ADP, NGO Forum, Advance Africa (AA)
