

A Democracy and Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation

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A democracy and human rights approach to development co-operation adopted by UD-Sida's council on democracy and human rights in development co-operation, 27th March 2001.

1. Why choose a democracy and human rights approach to development co-operation?

The object of raising poor people's standard of living can more easily be achieved through working with a democracy and human rights approach. This approach conveys particular values to development co-operation by setting the individual person in the centre. The approach can also make co-operation more efficient through contributing to the identification of the people who are discriminated against and the power structures in society that affect poor people's lives. Through this approach, we can achieve a better and more detailed understanding of poor people's living conditions and of a partner country's development.

A democracy and human rights approach contributes the following to development co-operation:

- A *shared pool of values* based on the international conventions on human rights,
- A clear *division of responsibility* based in principle on the state's obligations and the individual's human rights,
- A *process* in which participation is a fundamental principle, and
- A *holistic view* of the individual person's problems and potential, as well as of society's power relationships and power structures, which form the framework within which individuals act, alone or in a group,
- An *analytical tool* which facilitates and contributes to the identification of target groups, problem areas, power relations and structures, and thereby leads to more efficient collaboration with co-operation partners and countries,
- A *measuring instrument and indicator* that facilitates a clearer scrutiny of which gains have been made.

2. What do we mean by a democracy approach to development co-operation?

A democracy approach clarifies power structures and power relationships on all levels in society. It aims to strengthen poor people's role in the exercise of power and foster their influence in society.

A democracy approach clarifies society's organisation and division of power both horizontally and vertically, i.e.

- The division of power between the executive, legislative and judicial powers, and also other actors like the media, trade and industry, civil society and donors,
- The degree of centralisation or decentralisation, i.e. the division of power between local, regional and central structures,
- Key conditions like transparency, accountability, legitimacy, participation, representivity and similarity before the law,
- Genuine democracy assumes the existence of a democratic culture, i.e. pluralism, participation, dialogue, tolerance, the provision of minority rights and respect for others' opinions and desires.

3. What are the effects of a democracy approach on development co-operation?

The aim of integrating a democracy approach to all parts of Swedish development co-operation is to contribute to democratisation at all levels of society. In a democratic system, power is a resource that is shared by several parties in society.

The integration of a democracy approach within development co-operation reveals the power structures and power relationships at all levels that affect the poor person's opportunities to participate in decisions and regulate conflicts of interest that affect his/her situation in life. A democracy approach also means that within all parts of development co-operation we take account of democracy's central institutions like the constitution, division of power, the public sector and the principles on which these rest.

When development co-operation is largely based on democracy and human rights, it leads to more extensive consultations with the individuals and communities, which are affected by the inputs. The collaborating partners then acquire greater representation in and influence over planning, implementation and follow-up of development co-operation. This can be expected to lead to an increase in quality and achievement of the goals of Swedish development co-operation and indirectly to strengthen democratic attitudes in the partner country.

4. What do we mean by a human rights approach to development co-operation?

A human rights approach means that consideration is taken of people's economic, cultural, civil, political and social rights in all parts of the development process. The aim is to foster the provision of human rights, and to improve development co-operation and make it more efficient. It not only makes individual rights a clear focus, but also points out that

it is the national responsibility of every state to respect these rights. The starting point is that governments, which have ratified international conventions, should also assume responsibility for observing them.

A human rights approach is based on the principle of the equal rights and value of all people, and entails that the individual – the poor woman, man, girl and boy – becomes visible and once again becomes the focus of development co-operation.

The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international and regional human rights conventions¹ provide common and fundamental values and thus become normative expressions of what we want to achieve through development co-operation.

Human rights thus provide guidelines for what ought to be done in a society to achieve the goal of a dignified life for all. Human rights also have a progressive aspect, as they reveal the objective of how different conditions in society can be improved.

5. What are the effects of a human rights approach on development co-operation?

Through the integration of human rights with development co-operation, Sweden is working for the respect, protection, promotion and provision of human rights in partner countries. Human rights provide both standards for the substance and a way of working, where the development, implementation and evaluation of Swedish development co-operation are concerned.

Development co-operation with a human rights approach reveals the existence of discrimination that is dependent on factors like gender, age, ethnic affiliation and functional handicaps, and thereby contributes to counteracting them.

Through development co-operation Sweden contributes to spreading knowledge and understanding of the significance of and respect for the maintenance of the human rights. This requires increased knowledge among actors in Swedish development co-operation about the international conventions that partner countries have adopted and thus also about their reports on these conventions.

¹ Among these conventions one should note the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Human rights furthermore have a common frame of reference, which facilitates the follow-up of development co-operation.

6. The link between human rights and democracy

Key prerequisites for participation in making decisions and resolving conflicts of interest are: freedom of expression or the right to freely express one's ideas and opinions, both as an individual and within political fora, e.g. in national legislative assemblies, elected councils at district level and village councils at the local level, as well as freedom of association, i.e. to be able to freely meet and organise.

A cornerstone in the concept of democracy is that all people have equal value, manifested in principle in the slogan "one person, one vote". Well-functioning rule of law in a state and good governance are also preconditions for participation and observation of rights, particularly for poor people. These rights and functions are best guaranteed through democratic governance.

Common and universal basic values in the work of guaranteeing these rights are found in the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that establishes rights like freedom of expression, opinion and association, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to vote and to be elected during periodic and free and fair elections. Democracy is the structural equivalent of the norms that are expressed in the human rights conventions and provides the format for how to organise a society based on human rights.

In future, the need remains to examine and further develop methodology around and understanding of the links between combating poverty and furthering democracy and human rights.

Translated by *Madi Gray*.

Selected References:

Sida's Action Programme for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights, 1998

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The Government Communication on Human Rights in Swedish Foreign Policy (SKR 1997/98:89)

The Rights of the Child in Swedish Development Co-operation, Sida, 2000

Country Strategy Development: Guide for Country Analysis from a Democratic Governance and Human Rights Perspective – appended to the guide on democratic governance which in its turn is appended to the guidelines for the country strategy process (Riktlinjerna för landstrategier) – available through Sida's intranet and distributed as a yellow DESO document, 2001.



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