



POLICY

Sida's support to civil society

IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION



SIDA POLICY INFO

A Sida policy offers norms, guidance and support. Sida departments, Swedish embassies and development section cooperation offices are responsible for policy application and execution. Overall responsibility for Sida's policies rests with the Department for Policy and Development. Comments are welcome and should be sent to the policy owner.

POLICY NAME: Sida's support to civil society

ISSUE DATE: May 16 2007

POLICY OWNER: NGO Division at the Department for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations and Humanitarian Assistance & Conflict Management, SEKA .

VALIDITY: This policy replaces the Policy for the Civil Society from March 2004. This policy is valid until 31 of December 2012.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

This policy is supported by the following documents:

- Appendix: Proposed method for overall analysis of civil society, May 2007
- Guidelines for Grants from the Appropriation for Non-Governmental Organisations, March 2007
- Digging Deeper, Summary of Four Reports on Democratic Governance in International Development Cooperation, 2003

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Objective	4
2. Sida's view of civil society	4
Grey zones	5
3. The role of civil society in development cooperation	5
1 Empowering poor people	5
2 Promoting democracy	6
3 Promoting peace and security.....	7
4 Developing a global arena.....	7
4. Sida's support to civil society	7
Appendix:	
Proposed method for overall analysis of civil society..	11
Structure	11
Values	11
Impact.....	11
Environment.....	12

Sida shall aspire to promote the development of a vibrant and democratic civil society that improves the possibilities for poor people to improve their living conditions.

1. Objective

This policy has been adopted to specify the *grounds for*, the *objective of* and the *modalities for* Sida's cooperation with civil society, and to clarify Sida's view of civil society. The policy is based on a discussion about the importance of civil society for poverty reduction linked to democracy and peace. The policy formulates Sida's overall objective with the cooperation, and gives an overview of Sida's different forms of support.

The aim of the policy is to serve as a *guide* for everyone at Sida working with support to, and cooperation with, civil society. The ambition is to provide a consistent and coordinated regulatory framework for different forms of Sida support to civil society, regardless of appropriation item and operational area.

OBJECTIVE

In its operation Sida shall aspire to promote the development of a vibrant and democratic civil society that improves the possibilities for poor people to improve their living conditions.

Sida defines civil society as an arena, separate from the state, the market and the individual household, in which people organise themselves and act together in their common interests.

2. Sida's view of civil society

The objective of Swedish development cooperation – as stated in Sweden's Policy for Global Development, adopted by Parliament in 2003 – is to contribute to an environment supportive of poor people's own efforts to improve their quality of life. Two perspectives characterise this policy: a rights perspective and the perspective of poor people. The first gives prominence to poor women and men, girls and boys – as individuals and as rights holders. The second emphasises that it is the perspectives, needs, interests and circumstances of poor people that shall govern the work of development cooperation.

DEFINITION

Sida defines civil society as an arena, separate from the state, the market and the individual household, in which people organise themselves and act together in their common interests.

This *means*, for example, that civil society...

- ...exists in all countries and communities in varying forms of social groups, organisations and networks. These have developed as part of a historic process and can be regarded as an expression of the values, customs, needs and interests that can be found in that society.
- ...contains *formal* and *informal* groups of very different types that sometimes have conflicting interests.
- ...is *subject to change* since organisations come into existence, disappear or re-emerge in new organisational forms.
- ...is *neither good nor bad*, but largely reflects the competing interests, values and conflicts within society.
- ...contains both *democratic* and *undemocratic*, *legal* and *illegal* groups.
- ...is *multifaceted* and contains several levels and forms of collective organisation.
- ...consists of individuals who can belong to *traditional groups* with an ethnic or religious base and, at the same time, belong to *other organisational groups* such as women's groups, environmental movements or trade unions.

Grey zones

It can sometimes be difficult to determine whether an actor is a member of civil society. The media, political parties, cooperatives, universities and research institutions, as well as other associations and networks, can, depending on the circumstances, be part of civil society as well as part of the state or the market. The independence of organisations from the state, and the extent to which their activities are profit-making, can in these cases be determining factors.

Civil society is neither good nor bad, but largely reflects the competing interests, values and conflicts within society.

3. The role of civil society in development cooperation

Sida shall aspire to promote a vibrant and democratic civil society because civil society actors have good potential to promote development in several ways:

1 EMPOWERING POOR PEOPLE

If poor people are to influence their own living conditions and break out of poverty, their right to organise around issues of immediate concern or overarching social challenges – such as improving gender

If poor people are to influence their own living conditions and break out of poverty, their right to organise must be protected.

equality, or achieving socially equitable and environmentally sustainable development – must be protected. Sida upholds people's entitlement to these rights, particularly in cases where the state either will not acknowledge or cannot protect them. By meeting in networks and groups, people working within civil society can develop social *capital*, which comprises trust, norms and confidence. This benefits economic development and the private sector by facilitating entrepreneurship, business activity and transactions.

By meeting in networks and groups, people working within civil society can develop social capital, which comprises trust, norms and confidence.

Democracy has an institutional, a cultural and a substantive dimension. Civil society can play an important role in all three dimensions.

2 PROMOTING DEMOCRACY

Democracy has an institutional, a cultural and a substantive dimension. Civil society can play an important role in all three, shaping *whether* and *how* democracy is introduced and developed in a country.

- The *institutional dimension* includes the constitutional prerequisites that determine the functions and mandates of the various political institutions, the organisation of electoral systems, as well as other legislation on participation, accountability and transparency at different levels in public administration.
- The *cultural dimension* is harder to define but includes aspects such as tolerance, pluralism, social capital and trust, as well as respect for the opinions and desires of others.
- The *substantive dimension* concerns the actual outcomes delivered by the political system, for example, implementation of development policies, application of the rule of law, opportunity for genuine participation, and respect for human rights.

Under an *authoritarian regime*, donor support to civil society is an effective method for supporting democratisation. In relatively new, formally democratic states, civil society can *spread knowledge* of how the democratic process functions and can serve as a channel for people's political interest and commitment, and offers an *arena* for participation by those who are not represented by traditional political parties. Organisations in the civil society with the will and capacity to work in constructive dialogue with the state can also function as counterweights, or as partners in a more democratic state. In addition, they can also contribute to accountability, offer support for and validation of policies, and in certain cases, contribute to their implementation.

3 PROMOTING PEACE AND SECURITY

Conflicts of interest exist and new conflicts arise continuously in all societies, and these are also reflected in civil society. In fragile states with weak democratic structures and insufficient communication among different groups, conflicts have the greatest risk of a violent outcome, not least when people are mobilised against each other in the name of collective ethnic or religious identities. The organisations and networks that uphold standards and attitudes for peaceful co-existence, and that have the potential or real capacity to exert a peaceful influence, can play a central and constructive role. At early stages they can detect dangerous trends and this can make it possible to intervene in time to prevent violence. Such organisations can also contribute positively in post-conflict situations, such as aiding reconciliation through mediation and dialogue or assisting in the reconstruction process.

Organisations in the civil society can contribute positively in post-conflict situations, such as aiding reconciliation through mediation and dialogue or assisting in the reconstruction process.

4 DEVELOPING A GLOBAL ARENA

There are clear signs that a global civil society has started to develop, partly at the invitation of various political institutions, but principally driven by its own inner logic, whereby people and organisations, at local, regional and national levels, seek cross-border cooperation. More and more organisations are working within international networks, united by common interests and a determination to exert an influence where power is held, and are increasingly setting the agenda for global dialogue. For many of these organisations, this international networking is also essential for influencing national development in their home countries. Today, most inter-governmental bodies welcome dialogue with these organisations.

4. Sida's support to civil society

Civil society plays an important role, both in achieving concrete results in poverty reduction and for increasing aid efficiency. As the implementation of the Paris Declaration proceeds, governments in partner countries are taking on greater and more specific responsibility for development cooperation. Partner countries' own poverty reduction strategies are put in focus, and the capacity to implement these plans is therefore crucial. This focus on national strategies in turn means that civil society is playing an increasingly important role as independent advocate, watchdog and implementer. How can this heightened role be achieved?

Harmonisation among donors about the objectives and modalities for strengthening a pluralistic civil society is of strategic importance in order to achieve demonstrable development results.

Support to actors in civil society shall be given within the framework of a coherent and coordinated contribution system.

When developing or implementing a cooperation strategy, there must be a sufficiently clear picture of the civil society's structure, values, impact and social context.

Harmonisation among donors about the *objectives* and *modalities* for strengthening a pluralistic civil society is of strategic importance in order to achieve demonstrable development results. Sida wants to increase the coherence among different actors and development modalities. Organisations in civil society within development cooperation have great responsibility for strengthening local ownership, increasing coordination, and improving coordination with government and public authorities.

Sida can support civil society in four different ways. Three contribute *directly* to supporting civil society and one contributes *indirectly*.

Sida provides:

- support to an organisation selected on the basis of its competence as an *implementing agency* to carry out an assignment of importance to Sida within the framework of the current cooperation strategy. Here, the activities are in focus.
- support to an organisation with the aim of strengthening its capacity as a democratic *actor* in civil society. Here, the focus is on the organisation and its development regarding decision-making structures and systems, its internal and external communication, and its actual performance.
- support to organisations and networks to strengthen the role of civil society as an *arena* for citizens' engagement, and to promote transparency, cooperation and networking among organisations.
- support for the development of an *enabling social environment* to strengthen the structures that create conditions for civil society to take action, an indirect form of support. In dialogue with the governments in partner countries, Sida shall promote opportunities for civil society organisations to influence the design and implementation of poverty reduction measures.

In all these cases, support shall be designed in such a way that civil society is strengthened, without risk of undermining legitimate state and democratic institutions. This caveat applies particularly when an organisation has assumed the role of implementer on behalf of, or as a complement to, the state and public authorities.

The delineation between procurement and contribution can sometimes be difficult to make, but such an assessment should be based on the criteria of ownership, commercial interest, type of actor and division of costs. If a civil society organisation owns the initiative and the programme, the support shall be given within the framework of a *contribution system*. Problems may arise when the same actor is both a

commissioned agency and a grant recipient. Therefore it is preferable that support to actors in civil society is given within the framework of a coherent and coordinated contribution system.

When developing or implementing a cooperation strategy, there must be a sufficiently clear picture of the civil society's *structure, values, impact* and *environment* (see *Appendix*). In all Sida's development cooperation, the point of departure for the analysis shall be the relevance, feasibility and sustainability of the operations, as well as the capacity and determination to achieve change shown by the organisation and its partners. A risk assessment shall be made of the organisational, legal and financial status of the cooperation partner.

Proposed method for overall analysis of civil society

In cooperation strategy processes, in preparation and assessment of major contributions involving civil society, and in sectoral or budget support, at least *some* of the following key aspects should be taken into consideration.

Structure

In an analysis of a country's civil society, it is important first to get a picture of the types of organisations making up civil society, as well as the groups they represent.

Often, there are different types of organisations in a country, with varying degrees of support and importance among their members or target groups. Traditional structures such as village communities or religious and ethnic affiliations often form the basis of the citizens' social identity, and can have a major influence on their behaviour. Other types of organisation, such as trade unions and women's, environmental or human rights organisations, have a different type of support among their members and society as a whole.

In selecting a partner organisation it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the development objectives of the cooperation, and what is needed to achieve them. Other key aspects are the *legitimacy* that the organisation has in society, as well as its degree of *representativity* and support from the groups it represents.

Values

It is also important to investigate the values and internal structures of civil society. If one of the aims of development cooperation is to promote democratic development and peace, it is also important that organisations of civil society have democratic values and structures, and are characterised by tolerance for other groups and interests.

Impact

Finally, an analysis of civil society should also contain a review of its impact in terms of influence and results achieved. The analysis should identify successful initiatives, micro or macro, in which the interests of

poor people have been promoted. These good examples can be found at both micro and macro levels.

Environment

One fundamental precept is that civil society does not exist in a vacuum but is dependent on the structures that surround it. The role that civil society can play in a specific country is therefore largely dependent on the social, economic and political climate. In many countries, only activities that do not threaten existing power structures are permitted, while organisations and groups that demand change are prevented from acting.

The lack of financial resources coupled with political, cultural and social differences (based, for example, on gender, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability) can make it difficult for people to organise on the basis of common interests. However, at the local level, it is not unusual for some organisations to have greater resources than government authorities do, which can contribute to an imbalance between the state and civil society.

The method forming the basis of this analysis is called the Civil Society Index (CSI), which is owned by the international organisation Civicus: World Alliance for Citizens Participation. CSI analyses already exist in many of Sida's partner countries, and can be useful in the analysis work.

PRINTED BY EDITA, 2007

ISBN 91-586-8088-8

ART. NO.: SIDA37855EN

ILLUSTRATION: JESPER WALDERSTEN

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION AGENCY

SE-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden
Phone: +46 (0)8 698 50 00
Fax: +46 (0)8 20 88 64
sida@sida.se, www.sida.se